



UCLG
Committee

Social Inclusion
Participatory Democracy
and Human Rights

**Inclusive Cities
Observatory**

« ZERO POVERTY STRATEGY »

Concepción, Philippines

Period of implementation: 1999 (launch) | Study case written in 2007

In the Philippines, the sectors of social welfare and health have been fully devolved to local governments since 1992. In 1999, the Municipality of Concepcion, in Iloilo, adopted a vision of eliminating poverty completely by the year 2020 and forged, accordingly, multi-sectorial programmes and related actions where the cross-cutting themes were population, health, and environment. However, the first step in this direction was to renovate the government machinery from inside, reinforcing the commitment of the executive personnel to become promptly responsive to local inhabitants' needs. The initiatives sought to arrest dramatic health problems as well as environmental degradation, with a range of positive results: population growth was controlled, the environment was given more time to catch-up and restore an ecological balance, the nutrition status of children was improved, well-managed coastal resources contributed to greater food security, better overall population health was observed, family incomes increased, and communities became more empowered.



The **Inclusive Cities Observatory** was launched in 2008 by the UCLG Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights with the aim of creating a space for analysis and reflection on local social inclusion policies. The initiative was developed with the scientific support of Professor Yves Cabannes (University College of London) and the Centre for Social Studies (CES) from the University of Coimbra. At present, the Observatory contains more than sixty study cases mostly developed between 2008 and 2010. Even though many of these cases refer to policies that have already come to an end, they still have much to offer: from capitalizing on the learning acquired by other local authorities to discovering suggestive and alternative means to address social inclusion challenges from a local perspective.

Context

City context

The Municipality of Concepcion, a coastal town located in Iloilo Province, is composed of 25 *barangays*, 11 of which are island barangays that are difficult to reach and 14 of which are on the mainland (Panay Island). It is bounded in the north by the municipality of San Dionisio, in the south by the municipality of Ajuy, in the west by the municipality of Sara, and in the east by the Visayan Sea. It has a total land area of 9,702.04 hectares. Residents largely depend on farming and fishing for their livelihood. Among the major agricultural and marine resources of the municipality are rice, corn, fish, and vegetables.

Decentralization context

The 1987 Philippine Constitution has strong decentralist features. In Article II, Section 25, it is declared a state policy that “The State shall ensure the autonomy of local governments.” This provision is further taken up in Article X where the rights and responsibilities of local governments are expounded. These constitutional provisions were later articulated in the Local Government Code of 1991 (RA 7160). Among the functions, powers, and responsibilities devolved from the national government to local governments under the Code were those concerning the provision and financing of health and education services.

Since this time, however, the Philippines has restored its traditional system of governance known as *barangays*, integrating it into the formal system of local government. Each municipality or city in Philippines is composed of a number of villages or barangays. The state guarantees and promotes the autonomy of cities and barangays to ensure their fullest development as self-reliant communities. One of the gains from decentralization has been greater experimentation and innovation in the provision of local public services. Indeed, there have been several innovative practices documented since the devolution of health and welfare functions in 1992. Some of these innovations are intended to enhance access to health services in remote barangays by constructing satellite clinics, strategically deploying health personnel, and tapping the private sector and individual volunteers. Other innovations have tried to augment or secure additional funds for health from both internal and external sources.

Social context

The poor and the main excluded groups of the city of Concepcion comprised 87% of the population in 2001, 68% in 2002, and 47.5% in 2005.¹ The drop was due in large part to the policies described in this case. The socio-economic context of the city is characterized by a poor quality of education, high population growth, depleted coastal and marine resources, high poverty incidence, and poor delivery of social services.

Policy development

The overall policy entitled “Zero Poverty 2020” was started in 1999 by the Municipality of Concepcion, Iloilo, with the aim of eradicating poverty completely by 2020. This goal was pursued through an internal reform of the local administration so to be more responsive in addressing its mandate, and the generation of two programmes: Zero Poverty 2020, and the Harnessing Synergy in Integrated Population, Health and Environment (PHE) Programme.

¹ These proportions were provided in the original case, but were not defined.

Together the programmes halved the incidence of poverty in the area within only four years, increased income, and reduced infant mortality.

Background

The programmes were launched in 1999 by the Mayor of the City of Concepcion, R. Banias. The local municipality adopted an integrated planning approach to eliminate poverty and to create a more sustainable balance between population and environment development initiatives that addressed issues of health, coastal management, education, and income generation.

Policy goals

The Zero Poverty 2020 program began from efforts to create a highly competent and dynamic local government that would act as an agent of change in partnership with civil society. To do so, the municipality had to reengineer its local bureaucracy so that civil servants would be more responsive to citizen requests, would decentralize and share management, and would seek strategic partnerships with institutions and strategic networks for resource mobilization. In addition to this internal reform, Zero Poverty 2020 comprises several initiatives in complementary sectors:

- Human-resource development;
- Socio-economic initiatives – micro-enterprise development, livelihood enhancement, and housing and shelter improvement;
- Resource management – people and environment coexistence (PESCODEV), Bantay Dagat or Coastal Security, agrarian reform, community development, and community-based eco-tourism;
- Health initiatives – social health insurance, rural health unit upgrade, and Project COPE (Integrated Reproductive Health Program);
- Education – early childhood development and Project RAUL (Reform in Accelerated and Unified Learning); and
- Infrastructure development (Kalahi-CIDSS).

The strategic framework for these projects is constituted by linking *population, health, and environment* (PHE) and realized through three key actions:

- Community mobilization that targeted marginalized groups around the theme of PHE;
- Experience-based advocacy which used evidence from community experiences to influence decision-making on PHE; and
- Behaviour-centered programming which identified key family planning and coastal resource management behaviours and developed communication materials.

Chronological development and implementation

The Zero Poverty 2020 vision was launched by the local government in 1999 and was implemented with the support of institutional actors, international agencies, donors, NGOs, and civil society. In the following years, through successive pilot projects and development programmes, the approach was adopted by the adjacent municipalities of Iloilo Province. In 2006, it was cited by the UNDP as one of 10 local governments for its local implementation of one of the Millennium Development Goals.

Stakeholders, beneficiaries and participatory methodologies

Partners in the implementation of the policy are: Save the Children U.S.A., World Bank, Asian Development Bank, Ford Foundation U.S.A., Philippines Canada Development Fund, Singapore International Foundation, German Technical Cooperation, Canadian International Development Agency, Gerry Roxas Foundation, Department of Health, Department of Social Welfare and Development, Department of Labor and Employment, Department of Education, Department of Tourism, Department of Agrarian Reform, Department of Agriculture, Department of Public Works and Highways, Department of Interior and Local Government, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Department of Trade and Industry, Food and Agriculture Organization, Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, Local Government Support Program, University of the Philippines, Iloilo Caucus of Development NGOs, Green Forum Western Visayas, Provincial Government of Iloilo, Alliance of Northern Iloilo for Health Development, Northern Iloilo Alliance for Coastal Development, and Couples For Christ/Gawad Kalinga.

The beneficiaries of the programmes are small fishermen/women, marginal farmers, rural women, unemployed people, those in the informal sectors, micro-business entrepreneurs, and public school children – overall, about 60% of the total population of the Municipality of Concepcion.

The participation of both local communities and institutional actors is present in every stage of the projects — from assessment, to enforcement of policies, to monitoring — using indigenous and scientific approaches. Local officials and functionaries are in regular consultation with people through both formal and informal means. Information relevant to planning and decision-making on poverty alleviation is readily available: two-way radio systems and texting technology have facilitated information sharing among stakeholders. This development is particularly significant to communities in the remote island barangays.

Moreover, Family Planning Action Sessions were organized where couples participated and trained 40 adolescent Reproductive and Sexual Health peer facilitators. In terms of the environment, fishermen/women, children (involved as fish wardens), local policy decision-makers, family planning volunteers, and municipal health and environment officers have been trained for coastal-resource management, which has generated increased support for mangrove reforestation and facilitated community action plans in the establishment of marine protected areas. The organization of seven barangays and municipal Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Management Councils has led to coastal cleanup drives and coastal law enforcement.

Institutionalization and financing

A year after the mayor and the municipal executive crafted the vision of eradicating poverty completely in the city of Concepcion by 2020, Save the Children received a grant from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation to implement the multi-sectoral programmes. From that moment on, the municipality of Concepcion involved the barangays councils in all stages of the process – from assessment and planning, to implementation, and later to monitoring and evaluation – through successive municipal resolutions:

- Municipal Resolution No. 45 Series 2003: “Resolution adopting the Population Health and Environment (PHE) program of the Save the Children – USA PESCO Dev Project.”
- Municipal Resolution No. 061 Series 2003: “Resolution allocating funds for the implementation of the Adolescent and Youth Health Care Program.”

- Municipal Resolution No. 095 Series 2003: “Resolution adopting the Marine Protected Area management Plan.”

Further, the programmes’ components were institutionalized beyond the term of the implementing administration and project funding.

Outcomes and reflections

Key results and achievements

The main results achieved from both programmes – Zero Poverty 2020 and Harnessing Synergy in Integrated Population, Health and Environment – were the improvement of the quality of life in different sectors and the reduction of the population living at or below the poverty level from 87% in 2000 to 47% in 2004.

Beyond these results, the policy has resulted in a transformed bureaucracy that is more responsive to constituents’ needs, especially in delivering social services to eradicate poverty. In its first year of implementation, 55% of the 98 households in the Poverty Free Zone were provided with a sustainable alternative livelihood that added 35% to their income; 499 households accessed micro-finance for micro-enterprises, which resulted in a 25% increase in income; 59 households accessed micro-finance to improve their shelters; and 175 beneficiaries mobilized their savings and built up capital.

Regarding population health, statistics indicate that morbidity decreased from 14.6% in 2002 to 10.7% in 2003; mortality decreased from 3.53 per 1,000 population in 2002 to 3.43 per 1,000 population in 2003; maternal mortality declined from 240 in 2001 to 128 in 2002 and to 0 in 2003; and water-borne diseases decreased from 5.34% in 2002 to 3.92% in 2003. Further, family-planning acceptors increased from 28% to 38%, and social health insurance was distributed to 1,233 beneficiaries.

In education, 750 preschool children benefited from the construction of 20 daycare centers during the past six years; eight elementary and primary schools were constructed during the past three years; and 3,111 pupils were provided with workbooks and textbooks. The result was a 15% increase in reading proficiency. Moreover, through the establishment of *Gulayan sa Eskwelahan* (Vegetable Farm in the School) in 34 schools, additional fresh food was provided. The construction of 23 infrastructure projects benefited more than 16,000 residents or 60% of the population in 22 barangays in the municipality. The construction of a modern children’s playground, a reading center, and a training center in barangay Loong benefited more than 2,000 residents there.

In terms of the environment, community-led coastal resource management was promoted, which improved the fish catch of marginal fishers; local farmers in three barangays adopted alternative farming technologies designed for sustainable agriculture; and forms of community-based tourism were promoted through festivals in four island barangays, providing additional economic opportunities to residents while emphasizing the protection and enhancement of natural resources (the Tampisaw Festival, for instance, benefited a total of 5,710 residents).

The establishment of seven Marine Protected Areas, designed to regulate fish catch and replenish marine and fishery resources in six barangays in five islands, resulted in small fishermen/women reporting an increase of five kilos in their daily catch equivalent to 200 pesos. The regular monitoring of municipal waters netted 1,152 apprehensions that generated

3,300,500 pesos in penalty fees over the past three years, providing the town with additional income.

Replicability

From the documentation, this policy case emerges as quite a successful practice of poverty alleviation through combining different strategies focusing on the improvement and integration of three key sectors in the life of the inhabitants of the Municipality of Concepcion: health, population and environment. A deeper investigation of this policy, dating back to the beginning of 2000, would provide a more detailed picture of its conditions and further advancements. At this stage, however, we can suggest two types of reflections in light of the decentralization process undertaken in the Philippines a few decades ago.

The first type regards the context where the policy case is found. In the Philippines, the decentralization process brought a larger number of elected positions in local government which increased subsequently the importance of democratic accountability. The formal process of opening up towards democratization was accompanied by the persistent presence of forms of corruption in patron-client relationships. Local civil society organizations, aware of the rights offered to them by this devolution, have demanded more democratic accountability. Overall, the institutional and social changes required moving from a centralized to a decentralized system of governance and powers need time for adjustments and arrangements. In the specific context of this policy case, the commitment of the mayor and the executive personnel played an important role that gave more strength to the proposed results and actions, resulting in the successful implementation of the programmes which was facilitated by having full powers on health and wealth sector devolved to local governments.

The second type of reflection considers the local financial resources. One has to bear in mind that local authorities in the Philippines have to rely on their own resources, which are only hypothetically sufficient to cover all the functions of their mandates. Considering this, a greater effort is required of them. In this case, the local municipality was able to obtain financing from diverse founding sources (see tables) and use the funds efficiently without overlapping.

Furthermore, this policy required a municipal capacity to manage the complexity of problems that touch different spheres of life, which began with an internal reorganization of the municipality to regenerate its bureaucratic machine and enable it to create virtuous cycles and long-lasting actions. In terms of transferability, then, internal administrative reforms may be pre-conditions to root and entrench programmes and plans in the governmental structure and to guarantee the coordination of functions and competencies oriented to concrete results.

Further information

The narrative was written in 2007 by Engr. Rene Sobremonte, Municipal Planning and Development Officer, Municipality of Concepcion; Dr. Helen Miguez, Municipal Health Officer, Municipality of Concepcion; Janice Matulac, Municipal Information Officer, Municipality of Concepcion; and Dr. Raul N. Banjas, Municipal Mayor of Concepcion, under the coordination and edition of Prof. Cabannes assisted by Yasar Adnan Adanali, at the Development Planning Unit, University College London, UK.

All narratives compiled in 2007 including this one were revised by a DPU editorial committee composed of Ernesto Jose Lopez Morales, Sonia Roitman, Michelle Pletsch, Steffen Lajoie, Luisa Dornelas, Iyad Issa and Pechladda Pechpakdee.

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