



BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS

PHE Programming in the Municipality of Concepcion

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The sustainability of development programs is a major concern for many nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) involved in program design and implementation. This case study tells how the Philippines country office of Save the Children U.S., a development NGO, established a successful partnership with the local government units of the municipality of Concepcion to ensure that integrated population-health-environment (PHE) programming would be mainstreamed and sustained within local government activities after Save the Children's involvement ended in the municipality.

Background: Concepcion's Poverty, Lack of Access to Basic Health Services, and Environmental Degradation

Concepcion is located in Iloilo province in the Western Visayas region of the Philippines. The municipality has 25 *barangays* (the Filipino term for a village, district, or ward), 11 of which are located on small islands. In 2000, Concepcion ranked as the poorest municipality in Iloilo. Surveys indicated that 5,598 households (87 percent of households in the municipality) lived in poverty.

At this time, Concepcion had poor delivery and access to basic health services. Supplies of family planning commodities in the rural health centers were not adequate, and there were low numbers of family planning users due to lack of information and understanding.

As a result, the population growth rate in Concepcion has been very high.

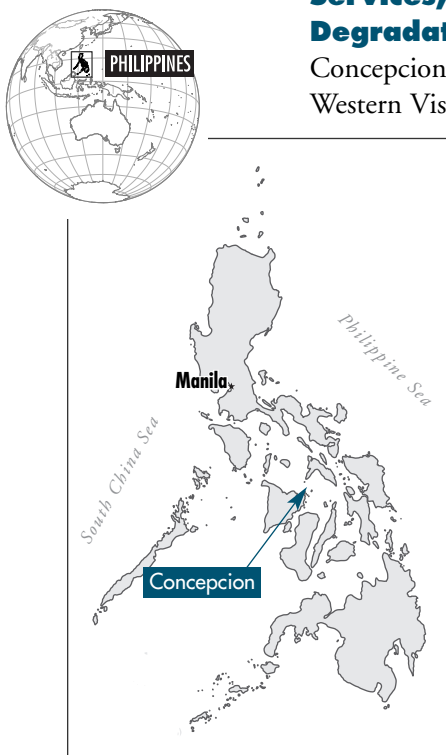
Adding to the situation was widespread overfishing as well as destructive fishing practices. Local fisherfolk had experienced severe decrease in their fish catch, from a high of 10.0 kilos per fisher per day in 1995 to a low of 0.2 kilos per fisher per day in 2000.

Part 1: Forging the Partnership

"Bayang Magiliw, Perlas ka ng Silanganan, ... pag may mang-aapi, ang mamatay ng dahil sa iyo ..." (Land of the morning, child of the sun returning ... when thou art wronged, sons to suffer and die ...)

The Philippine national anthem has just been sung, and the mayor of Concepcion, Raul Baniyas, was reminding his staff of his vision: to eliminate poverty in the municipality by the year 2020. Little did the staff know that the mayor was still in search of solutions to realize this ambitious target.

In 1999, a year after the mayor crafted his vision, Save the Children (SC) received a grant from the David and Lucile Packard Foundation to implement an integrated PHE program in the Philippines. The aim of this program, called the "People and Environment Co-Existence Development Project" (PESCO-Dev), was to improve the health of families and communities through measures that address population growth and the degradation of coastal resources. The main premise of the project was that couples who have an unmet need for family planning are likely to take action to address their needs if reproductive health services are available to them and if they understand the links between a growing population, the local environment, and the quality of life.





Kathleen Mogelgaard

Many residents of Concepcion rely on coastal resources for their livelihood, but a severe decrease in per capita fish catch has made it increasingly difficult to earn a living in the coastal municipality.

To accomplish their objectives, SC staff decided to develop partnerships with local government units (LGUs).¹ “SC wanted to enhance the capacity of the LGUs rather than duplicate their services or even compete with them,” explains Naida Pasion, former SC acting country director. “Since population and environmental programs are mandated functions transferred to LGUs from the national government, LGUs are better able to sustain and mainstream a project than other service providers.”

SC staff searched for LGUs to find a setting that both presented reproductive health and environmental challenges and where SC could test approaches that integrate PHE activities. The staff felt the integrated model would broaden acceptance for reproductive health and coastal resource management (CRM) activities. Although SC was not specifically focused on poverty alleviation, the staff believed that achieving reproductive health and environment outcomes could help Mayor Bantias achieve his goal of eradicating poverty in Concepcion.

Selecting the Project Site

SC has specific criteria for selecting project sites and entering into partnerships. “We looked at population size, environmental factors, and how supportive LGUs would be of the project,” says Diosdado Mendoza, SC’s program manager. “We also looked at the LGUs’ history and thus their potential for sustaining the project.”

But these criteria alone did not directly lead SC to Concepcion; rather, what most attracted SC was Concepcion’s membership in the Northern Iloilo Alliance of Coastal Municipalities. In addition to its history of commitment and leadership in solving problems affecting its members, this alliance offered a unique forum to share experiences among LGUs. Another attractive aspect of Concepcion is its geographic significance: It has concentrated populations located on the Visayan Sea, a rich ecosystem and one of the most important fishing grounds in the Philippines.

Establishing the Relationship

In February 2000, the PESCO-Dev team from SC scheduled its first meeting with the LGU of Concepcion. Mayor Bantias appointed his executive secretary, Ed Capio, as the point person for the project. Upon learning that Capio came from the same town as SC project officer Elsa Camarista, the PESCO-Dev team assigned Camarista to the LGU of Concepcion. The hope was that this commonality would facilitate a quick rapport between the two partners.

At the meeting, Capio produced a large map of the municipality, which showed numerous island *barangays* as well as mainland *barangays*. He explained that the priority areas of the LGU were island *barangays*, since access to services was needed in those areas more than elsewhere. Although SC recognized the needs of the island *barangays*, their location created many challenges related to weather and transportation. SC feared these issues could significantly delay the project activities.

In the end, a compromise was reached: PESCO-Dev would include two contiguous mainland *barangays* that had large, concentrated populations and environmental challenges; and one island *barangay* near the two mainland *barangays*.

Defining the Relationship

After SC and the municipal government had identified the *barangays* and agreed on the general goals of improving reproductive health and coastal resource management, the next phase for SC was building the partnership with the smaller political units that make up the municipalities: the *barangays* themselves.

“It was clear that the success of the PESCO-Dev Project would be partly determined by the acceptance of the project by the *barangay* leaders and community residents,” explains Camarista. Building the commitment of the *barangays* happened in two ways. First, SC carried out workshops with *barangay* leaders that strengthened their skills in mobilizing community members, development planning, and project decisionmaking. Second, SC continued working directly with municipal leaders so that PHE plans would get budgetary and policy support and would be aligned with the annual municipal development plan.

The result was that both levels of the local government units (LGUs)—the *barangay* and the municipality—held each other accountable, creating mutual and sustained support and commitment. “It was the mayor and key municipal staff and not SC who made sure the *barangay* local government unit understood the project and supported the partnership with SC,” says Rene Sobremonte, the municipal planning development coordinator.

To ensure commitment and community support, SC staff targeted couples of reproductive age as well as adolescents, fisherfolks, and farmers. A core group of community members were trained by SC to become family planning volunteers and adolescent peer facilitators; they taught the youth about adolescent reproductive and sexual health as well as marine conservation. As a result of the training and support provided by SC, community members became more engaged when the *barangay* officials pushed the municipal government to become responsive to *barangay*

needs. This, in turn, resulted in LGUs—both the municipality and the *barangay*—opening up dialogues with community members.

To ensure project implementation, the municipal and *barangay* LGUs committed to assist Camarista by providing back-up support for the PESCO-Dev project and by allocating matching funds to support monitoring and evaluation activities. As PESCO-Dev progressed, more and more LGU staff and mayoral appointees became actively involved. Many of those people previously skeptical of the project became the ones on the front line.

“We got meaningful policies developed, both in health and the environment,” says Val Bracamonte, municipal councilor and committee chair on health for Concepcion. “PESCO-Dev is leading the way.” Sobremonte adds that the LGU was able to develop a comprehensive development plan, which made them unique compared with other LGUs.

Discussion Questions

1. What made the PESCO-Dev project relevant to the municipality of Concepcion? What was the situation in Concepcion prior to the implementation of the project?
2. What criteria did SC use in the selection of PESCO-Dev project sites and LGU partners for the project? What other criteria or characteristics do you think are important when entering into a partnership with a LGU or any other public entity?
3. What were the initial activities undertaken by SC in the process of establishing an effective partnership with the municipality of Concepcion?
4. The SC project served to strengthen the relationship between the municipal and *barangay* LGUs as well as between the LGUs and the community. Why might this be important for a project that bridges several sectors? How did SC accomplish this?

Part 2: Making the Partnership Work

Nurturing the Partnership

It took time to build trust in the community and to overcome negative impressions created by previous NGOs that were not able to show tangible results after years of operating in the area. In the past, other NGOs mainly gave out goods and extended soft loans, shortcutting the development process. Such strategies did not educate the people in the community and (in some cases) led community members to view themselves as mere beneficiaries of assistance coming from the outside. The community once remarked to SC staff: “We cannot get anything from attending meetings! Give us money for livelihood projects!” But SC’s Camarista kept engaging partners in analysis and planning, helping them understand PHE as a development intervention and an empowerment tool.

Through consistency and commitment—demonstrated by showing up on time (and often early) for scheduled meetings despite having to travel several hours—Camarista eventually earned the support and commitment of the partners at the *barangay* and municipal levels. She was soon able to identify officials who would support the PESCO-Dev agenda by making policies in support of project goals, allocating resources, and voicing their support for the project with the local chief executives. Their involvement also provided legitimacy to the project activities.

Generating Development Plans

In mid-2000, SC staff conducted an assessment of health facilities in Concepcion and their ability to deliver quality reproductive health services there. The health assessment was followed by an environmental assessment in 2001, in which a team coordinated by SC trained the partner LGUs and community members to combine their indigenous knowledge with standard scientific approaches.

“It was a tedious exercise assessing the biodiversity of trees and corals, but the exercise made me proud of myself for acquiring this kind of skill,” says Remy Navarro, chairman of the Barangay Fisheries and Aquatic Resource Management Council (BFARMC).

These activities enabled partners to construct three-dimensional maps that formed the basis of the LGU PHE development plans in Concepcion.² The plans were later developed into activity-project proposals, which were required to access funding from the municipality. SC was instrumental in empowering *barangay* leaders by providing them skills in project-proposal writing and in methods of resource mobilization.

The proposals were submitted for deliberation and matching funds to a group of stakeholders, which included the local chief executive, council members, department heads, reproductive-health and environment specialists, and the SC manager. It was an engaging discussion, with stakeholders evaluating each project proposal in terms of how it could address challenges in the areas of population, health, and the environment.

“That was an exceptional process we underwent ... we wrote our project proposal, we defended it, and we negotiated for commitment and fund support!” says Gemma Moquete, a family planning volunteer.

Then SC introduced Appreciative Community Mobilization (ACM) to help community members understand and analyze the interaction of PHE issues within their communities. ACM is a capacity-building process that also is a strategy used by SC to ensure project sustainability.

ACM engages and mobilizes the community members to actively involve themselves in different phases of development intervention:

- Discovering their assets and strengths (the discovery phase);
- Creating a community vision of their future that reflects people’s aspirations and hopes (the dream phase);
- Formulating goals and objectives that outline what the community feels would be a desirable future (the design phase); and
- Implementing activities (the delivery phase).

By building on the assets and positive strengths of the community, the ACM process helps to motivate community members to participate in development planning and develops accountability for creating a better future.

The results of the environmental assessment and previous health research were incorporated into the ACM process and augmented the data collected and the outputs. “We learned to craft goals that supported the vision of our municipality,” Navarro of BFARMC explains. “We came up with plans and we learned how to negotiate with our municipal officials using the data we generated from the PESCO-Dev project.”

“All these activities strengthened the trust and our belief in the partnership,” adds Mayor Baniias. “PESCO-Dev developed and enhanced our skills in participatory community planning.”

Project Results

PESCO-Dev created significant results and policy development in support of population, health, and environmental conservation (see Table 1 for a number of indicators of the project’s accomplishments in Concepcion). “The partnership influenced the LGU tremendously and changed the way we design and implement population, health, and environment programs,”

Table 1

Selected Accomplishments of PESCO-Dev Project in Concepcion

	2000	2004
Trained family planning volunteers	0	93
Family planning users	1,280 (2002)	1,550
Established marine protected areas (MPA)	1	9
Trained adolescent peer facilitators	0	40
Policies or resolutions passed in support of PHE activities and programs	0	16
Constructed counseling rooms for family planning/adolescent reproductive and sexual health	0	3
Enrolled beneficiaries in social health insurance program	0	1,233
Organized and strengthened Municipal Fisheries and Aquatic Resource Management Councils (MFARMC)/Barangay Fisheries and Aquatic Resource Management Councils (BFARMC)	0	8
Deputized fish wardens	0	187

SOURCE: Comprehensive Land-Use Plan of Concepcion (2002) and Rural Health Unit of Concepcion records.

says Helen Minguéz, the municipal health officer of Concepcion. For example, Barnagay Health Workers shifted from their traditional tasks and became effective communicators for family planning and environmental resource management.

And despite the official conclusion of the project, the LGU of Concepcion has continued serving as a working PHE model both within the alliance and outside Iloilo province and the West Visayas region. Local and international development groups and potential donors visit Concepcion and learn how the municipality integrated PHE issues and why it has been so successful.

“We have learned a lot about how PHE programming can help combat poverty,” says Mayor Baniias. “We have even maximized this experience and introduced the same strategy to benefit the entire alliance. With the help of SC, a technical proposal was funded by the Philippine-Canadian Development Fund and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), replicating the activities we implemented under the partnership ... So, in linking PHE with poverty alleviation in Concepcion, we are able to achieve better and stronger results in both reproductive health and CRM than any time before.” (See Table 2 for how poverty and health indicators in Concepcion improved from 2001 to 2003.)

Next Steps and Challenges

Inspired by the success of the PESCO-Dev project in his town, Mayor Baniias has continued his PHE advocacy locally, nationally, and internationally. At the local level, existing mandated structures such as the local health board and the municipal development council must be

Table 2

Selected Poverty and Health Indicators in Concepcion, 2001 and 2003

	2001	2003
Poverty incidence	87%	68%
Crude birth rate (per 1,000 live births)	25.0	18.8
Maternal mortality (per 1,000 live births)	3.4	0.0
Prevalence of malnutrition among preschoolers	6.87%	4.82%

SOURCE: Comprehensive Land-Use Plan of Concepcion (2002).

strengthened to serve as vehicles for promoting PHE. The partnership forged between SC and the LGU serves as a learning model on how other kinds of partnerships can be built—such as among traditional or nontraditional financial institutions, government agencies, and the private sector.

One challenge for the LGU is the continued funding for PHE initiatives in the municipality. Such funding would complement internal resources to cover all island *barangays*. The LGU should enhance its resource mobilization skills and widen its network to sustain PHE outcomes. Sustaining a maternal mortality rate of zero and reducing the prevalence of malnutrition among preschoolers would be good indicators that the LGU is meeting its goal of eradicating poverty. The task of sustaining these numbers lies largely in the hands of the LGU itself.

Today, when the staff of Concepcion's municipal government sings the national anthem and recites the municipal vision of eliminating poverty by the year 2020, everyone is now reminded that the task is not meant for the mayor alone, but for everyone who understands PHE as an effective solution to poverty alleviation.

Discussion Questions

5. In what ways did Elsa Camarista work to nurture the partnership and demonstrate her commitment to the community? Based on your own experience, what strategies have you employed to help nurture a partnership? Have you tried strategies that were not as effective as you had hoped?
6. What trainings did SC provided to LGU partners to ensure appreciation, acceptance, and smooth implementation of the project?
7. SC has phased out from its role in PESCO-Dev in Concepcion. What kinds of activities did SC initiate in this partnership to ensure project sustainability? How else can PHE efforts be sustained over the long term?

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References

¹ LGUs are political subdivisions which constitute the foundational structure of the government. These units are provinces, municipalities, cities, and *barangays*. The state guarantees and promotes the autonomy of the LGUs—especially the *barangays*—to ensure their fullest development as self-reliant communities. All provinces are composed of municipalities or cities. Each municipality or city is composed of a number of villages or *barangays*.

² A three-dimensional map illustrates the status of natural resources in the communities and how these resources change through time. Processing the results of mapping increased awareness of the prevailing environmental conditions and trends; it also built consensus in the community on future land use.

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