



Photo by Jimmy A. Domingo

Climate change, dwindling fossil fuel supplies and food shortages are prodding communities to promote sustainability strategies. San Carlos City is among those that have adopted the sustainability framework in its development strategy.

In pursuing the sustainability framework, the people of San Carlos City initiated a development project—the San Carlos Sustainable City Project—to remodel the city as the standard of excellence in sustainable development. It is unique in balancing economic growth and environmental protection, and for its equal focus on rural and urban development. Necessarily, the project entails the involvement of all sectors of the community.

The Sustainable City Project adopted key strategies that are innovative. This includes the establishment of an independent development organization—the San Carlos Development Board, Inc. (SCDBI), which manages and coordinates the development

San Carlos City Orchestrating Efforts Toward a Sustainable City

initiative of the City of San Carlos. The SCDBI is a non-profit organization that was created with the mandate to oversee the implementation of the city’s Master Development Plan. It is the only type of private organization in the country that coordinates a local development initiative. With a single body overseeing all the different initiatives, redundancies in development efforts were avoided or reduced.

San Carlos City developed its own practical and sustainable development strategy, dubbed as the Master Development Plan (MDP), which spans a 20-year period. The MDP is the city’s blueprint to transform the traditional and historic sugar-based economy to a more ecologically-oriented commerce and industry.

Among the programs outlined in the MDP include the establishment of key energy-efficient infrastructures (e.g. roads, solid waste management, and energy development), economic productivity (e.g. special economic zone, rural growth centers, tourism facilities), social development initiatives (i.e., health, social housing, job creation), and environmental protection (i.e. reforestation, aquatic resource management). The Ph16M fund for the formulation of the Master Development Plan was sourced totally from the private sector and non-government organizations without any cash outlay from the LGU.

Regular consultations were conducted by the SCDBI with communities and stakeholders in the

planning and implementation of programs and projects. The Local Participatory Planning approach was employed in formulating the barangay development plans, which became the basis for project initiatives and interventions in the eighteen barangays of the city. This approach ensured people's participation. The villages identified their own development needs and designed projects and activities that were tailored to their specific conditions and resources. This practice ensured that the communities controlled the sustainable use of their land and water resources.

The city government set the tone in sustainable practices with the energy efficient design of the city hall which does not utilize an air-conditioning system. This alone, translated in an annual savings of approximately P1.2 million in electricity costs. Among the flagship programs of the San Carlos Sustainable City Project is the establishment of the first bio-ethanol plant in the country, which could generate forty million liters of ethanol annually or one-tenth of the national annual requirement. This substantially reduces the country's reliance on imported fossil fuel.

The city government also constructed the Translink Highway that connects San Carlos to the Capital city of Bacolod resulting in a 50% reduction in travel time. This highway also opened up access to remote mountain areas of the city resulting in increased economic activity in the rural areas. The Water Port was also expanded with the reclamation of four hectares of the sea. This extended the port to 242.5 meters long which made it

more accessible to Roll-On, Roll-Off vessels.

To ensure food self-sufficiency and security, the city government established Rural Growth Centers (RGCs) in three strategic mountain barangays, which serve as nodes of development in the rural areas. The two Agricultural Productivity Training Centers (APTCs) operating in two of the three RGCs have provided trainings in organic crop production as well as orientations on unsustainable economic activities to more than a thousand farming households. Agricultural productivity is evident with 36 tons of different vegetables and crops produced annually.

In terms of social services rendered, urban congestion and homelessness are being addressed through the city's social housing program. Currently, 1,760 homelots out of the total demand for 2,507 homelots have been provided to the homeless.

Because of the alternative livelihood and the increased job opportunities, the people of San Carlos now earn a per capita income of US\$1,814, which is higher than the national government figure of US\$1,400. Subsistence incidence in the city significantly dropped from 15.8% in 2000 to the current level of 13.8%.

In terms of environmental protection, the solid waste management program of the city is so effective that it has managed to divert 63% of the waste. The city has an Eco-Center which is an integrated facility for handling waste. It has a landfill as well as a composting and materials recovery

facility. In addition, the program for upland eco-system management has resulted in the reforestation initiative covering almost two hundred hectares. The coastal and marine resources are amply protected with the declaration of these areas as marine reserves.

As mentioned earlier, the key to the successful establishment of a Sustainable City is the people's participation and the built-in participatory mechanisms. Even the composition of the Board of Trustees of the SCDBI was designed to include multi-sectoral representatives. The implementation of the Sustainable City Project is done in coordination with the NGOs and the various community institutions and people's associations.

The Master Development Plan was institutionalized through a provincial ordinance approving the comprehensive development and land use plan of the City of San Carlos. This ensured sustainability of the project.

The distinctiveness of the strategies employed by the local government of San Carlos gained the attention of more than 30 LGUs who intend to replicate the project. But the formation of an independent body such as the SCDBI is applicable only if the minimal conditions and key result areas are present, such as a strong private sector, active civil society groups, a transparent LGU, and a dynamic community. With these elements in place, more cities could start moving up on the sustainable development ladder.

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