CASE STUDY

Green Initiative in the Philippines: Eco-town Framework Project

Under the Eco-town framework project, climate resilient green growth planning was integrated in San Vicente’s economic development.

Background Information

The municipality of San Vicente in the Philippines incorporates twenty-two islands and islets that are home to diverse wildlife and twenty-four distinct ethnolinguistic groups. The community farms rice that’s largely consumed locally, and fishermen can bring income into the community by selling their catch to external markets.

Higher average temperatures and changes to precipitation could greatly impact both agriculture and fisheries. Those livelihoods are already being negatively impacted by climate change which layers decreased productivity, decreased income, increased poverty, food security, malnutrition, and decreased tourism opportunity on the region. With food security at risk, and the danger of enhanced risk of diseases such as malaria and dengue threatening public health, the Filipino government decided to pilot a program that could increase resilience in such communities.

San Vicente’s people are driven to transform their home into a sustainable and profitable tourism destination that balances the critical factors of economic growth, culture, heritage and environment. The Philippines’ national policy framework on climate change response is already in place, which reflects the country’s steadfast commitment to address climate change threats. The country’s goal is to step the forefront of developing and mainstreaming evidence-based climate adaptation and mitigation policies by effectively collaborating with key stakeholders in their efforts to achieve a climate-resilient and climate-smart Philippines that fosters healthy, safe, prosperous, and self-reliant communities.

To lead those efforts, the Philippines create the Climate Change Commission (CCC), an independent and autonomous body that has the same status as that of a national government agency, reports to the office of the President of the Philippines. The CCC is the government’s lead policy-making body. It is tasked with coordinating, monitoring, and evaluating the government’s programs and action plans that relate to climate change.
Approach, Delivery, & Challenges

The Climate Change Commission (CCC) partnered with the Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI), an International NGO that was founded to support and promote economic growth through projects and programs that are more sustainable with their use of natural resources, while also being less carbon intensive. Together, they implemented Eco-Town Framework Project. The Eco-town project was implemented between the years of 2012 and 2015 in the Municipality of San Vicente. The primary goal of Eco-town was to build a model for ecologically stable, and economically resilient local communities.

The demonstration project aimed to test and validate opportunities to reduce the vulnerability of communities and ecosystems to climate change impacts, while also promoting adaptation measures that drive economic growth. It also aimed to gain a better understanding of the dynamics between the changing climate and related development factors, like economic, environmental, and social dimensions. Economic growth and climate change adaptation, two concepts that are often viewed as opposed, if not mutually exclusive, became integrated parts within the Eco-town framework. The project aimed to provide a model for future Eco-towns via the following goals:

- Gain a thorough understanding of the natural resources available in the local context, and the kinds and levels of potential threats due to climate change.
- Determine potential adaptation measures and prioritize these efforts through the combination of science and local knowledge.
- Integrate and prioritize climate change adaptation efforts in local development plans.

San Vicente went through several stages in implementing its Eco-town transformation.

I. Baseline information was gathered to help determine things like socio-economic profiles, development priorities, climate change projections, and natural resources assessments (this identifies the town's natural resources like forests, marine ecosystems, flora, fauna, and natural gas to come up with an ecological profile) to help determine the challenges, needs, and strengths of the community. They then worked to identify threats and opportunities based on the information that was gathered.

II. Next, they ran a vulnerability assessment, which included a risk hazard analysis and a sectoral assessment to determines which communities, infrastructure, and natural resources were most vulnerable to climate change.

III. With the baseline information and assessments in hand, they then began to prioritize their efforts. Prioritization was bases on multi-criteria analysis, with menu of climate change adaptation measures to choose from.

IV. Once prioritization was complete, they were ready to begin planning so that work could begin. This started with climate proofing, a combination of comprehensive development and land use plans.

Benefits & Lessons Learned

The project had both bottom-up and top-down elements. Trust and a sense of ownership were fostered via the implementation of engagement forums and capacity building programs. Capacity building activities included training workshops on natural resources assessment, GIS-mapping, project development, microfinance, and green services. Other such efforts covered climate proofing and cross-visits. These events were aimed at developing a platform for shared understanding, encouraging participation, enhancing a sense of ownership and responsibility, and improving the overall of results.
Those programs also helped facilitate communication in general as they helped local stakeholders develop a better understanding of the issues at hand, so that they could take responsibility accordingly. Local stakeholders took part in consultations where experts provide guidance. Together, they helped identify adaptation measures and the local stakeholders learned about the connection between the vulnerability that had been identified and the expected outcomes from their adaptation efforts.

Opportunities & Next Steps

Several recommendations for climate change-related adaptation plans and policies came out of the Eco-town. Among these were modernizing farming practices and introducing crops that are more climate-resilient, installing seawalls and dikes, and implementing an early warning system. In February 2014, San Vicente’s Municipal Legislative Council passed resolutions adopting the results of the analysis of the Eco-town project, while also accepting the recommended adaptation measures. Doing so represented the town’s first step to incorporate green growth efforts into its local development plan. President Aquino commended the project results while expressing the desire to expand the effort to other municipalities.

The project was positioned as an enabler, rather than a donor effort, which is believed to have helped ensure the town’s people took ownership with strong stakeholder engagement. Further, scientific findings were integrated with local community knowledge. Respecting local knowledge establishes trust and offers opportunities to fill knowledge gaps and reduce project risk.

The key lesson learned from the Eco-town project was that while preparing for climate change can be perceived as a hindrance, it can be made into an opportunity for sustainable economic growth. The project placed San Vicente on the path to green growth, and in doing so, it can become a model for other Local Government Units (LGUs) in the Philippines.

Eco-town was created as model for green growth. LGUs are expected to learn from the model in developing local plans for sustainable, climate resilient growth. Those plans and efforts will be rolled up to the provincial, and national, levels, as embedding green growth is a core strategy for the Philippines in terms of development planning.

Vulnerability to climate risks is a reality in the Philippines. Dealing with those risks is a necessity as the country’s economic and physical survival are both threatened by climate change. The Eco-town practice is an initial step towards building ecologically stable, economically resilient communities throughout the country. The Eco-town project demonstrated the ability of green growth to reduce vulnerability to climate change, and thereby enhancing resilience. It also proved the importance of prioritizing adaptation measures that align with the local economic development model. Climate change presents us with significant challenges, but these circumstances can serve as a powerful catalyst to foster positive green growth. We must identify and implement adaptation measures that fit the needs of the communities they impact, while building the necessary resilience to climate change. The Eco-town framework is a promising model that for the sort of climate-resilient green growth that’s required.

References


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