

Fourth National – Subnational Dialogue in the Philippines

Selected national government authorities and officials from three cities in Philippines discuss urban planning, wastewater concerns and financing in nexus dialogue



L to R: Mr. Vic Aquitania, ICLEI SEAS Regional Director facilitates the panel discussion “Unlocking the Nexus Potential of Philippine Cities” with Mr. Willy Prilles, City Planning and Development Officer of Naga City; Ms. Colleene Lacsamana, City Environment and Parks Management Officer of Baguio City; and Ms. Erlinda Creencia, City Environment Officer of Santa Rosa City.

The Fourth National – Subnational Dialogue was organized by ICLEI Southeast Asia in partnership with the GIZ Urban Nexus Project in Manila last November 06. The dialogue is a strategy employed by the “Integrated Resource Management in Asian Cities: The Urban Nexus Project” in an attempt to bridge the gap between the local, regional and national government, particularly in the areas of water including wastewater, energy, and land use as well as cascading finance to the local level.

Nexus is a three-year regional project commissioned by the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development and implemented by GIZ. It works with 10 cities from six Asian countries namely China, Indonesia, Mongolia, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. The project focuses on the synergies between water, energy, and food (with link to land use). ICLEI Southeast Asia serves as nexus implementation partner in the Philippines and Indonesia. Naga City and Santa Rosa are the two nexus pilot cities in the Philippines.

The recently-concluded event is a follow-up to the first nexus dialogue last October 2014 as well as city-specific dialogues organized for Santa Rosa and Naga held in May and August 2015 respectively. The first dialogue affirmed the importance of creating platforms for knowledge exchange between the local and national government. However, it was difficult to come up with concrete arrangements and specific solutions to issues identified. Hence, the city-specific dialogues were conducted to further discuss each city’s concerns, in more detail including also the provincial level as well as regional organizations such as Laguna Lake Development

Authority (LLDA) and the Integrated Watershed Management Program (IWMP). This fourth dialogue aimed at looking at how agreements from previous activities have progressed, identify impediments, and further clarify emerging issues and concerns in particular finance.

Nexus is anchored on implementation of concrete pilot projects. Naga City intends to address its sanitation concerns particularly on wastewater, and explores the idea of going into energy generation using the black water collected. Santa Rosa City is working on a low-cost housing project incorporating sanitation as well as urban agriculture with an end goal of creating a self-sufficient community within the City. Both cities are looking into the feasibility of applying the vacuum sewer system for its wastewater concerns including a separation of grey- and black water streams.

During the dialogue's onset, Commissioner Linda Malenab-Hornilla of the Housing and Land Use Regulatory Board presented the outcomes of the 6th Asia-Pacific Urban Forum (APUF-6) held in Jakarta last month. She discussed how the Jakarta outcome document can influence the formulation of the Philippines' urban development agenda. She highlighted the important role of local governments in achieving national development targets and emphasized that the gap between national and local governments should be addressed through continuous dialogues. The approved "Call for Action" of APUF 6 also emphasizes the need for a **nexus approach** to meeting the current and future natural resource demands in cities, in particular for energy, water and food, as well as housing and basic services, and a shift from sectoral to integrated and ecosystem-based planning.

One relevant issue tackled at the event is the available financing options at the national government for nexus projects. Two mechanisms were discussed namely the 1) National Sewerage and Septage Management Program (NSSMP) of the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) and 2) People's Survival Fund (PSF) where the Climate Change Office – Climate Change Commission (CCO-CCC) serves as secretariat. A third option is the Unified Finance Framework (UFF) recently established at NEDA to promote infrastructure projects of local government units.

The NSSMP aims to improve water quality and protect public health in urban areas of the country by 2020. It provides a 40% cost share by the national government (NG) made available for sewerage projects. To date, only 17 highly urbanized cities (HUCs) outside Metro Manila are eligible to apply for the grant. Both Santa Rosa and Naga City are interested to access the grant but since neither are considered as HUCs, they remain ineligible. Per Mr. Eduardo Chua of the DPWH, the NEDA Board chaired by the President, has yet to make its final decision regarding the amendment which includes the expansion of NSSMP to cover non-HUCs.

On the other hand, the PSF, created through Republic Act 10174, was formally opened last October 28. The PSF aims to finance adaptation programs and projects and has an allocation of PhP1 billion programmed annually into the national budget. Ms. Erika Erro of CCO-CCC explained that the PSF is managed and administered by the PSF Board composed of nine members representing the national government, civil society, academe, and business sector. All local governments are eligible to apply in the PSF but priority is given to those which have high poverty incidence, exposed to climate risks, and located in key biodiversity areas.

Other topics covered during the dialogue include 1) role of National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) on regional development planning, 2) piloting of the Integrated Watershed Management Program (IWMP) of the Laguna Lake Development Authority as a means to

promote ridge-to-reef approach and inter-local cooperation in Santa Rosa sub-watershed, and
3) Department of Energy policies concerning waste-to-energy projects.

At the meso-level, Dr. Richard Cordial, President of Bicol State College of Applied Science and Technology (BISCAST) shared how it has benefitted from the project and presented the college's current initiatives highlighting its nexus resilient housing project, currently being constructed. As the only academic partner of nexus, BISCAST's experience reiterated the huge potential of academic institutions especially in the areas of research and technology transfer. Dr. Manny Mendoza of the Commission on Higher Education in Region V promised to promote the Nexus approach as a tool for creating integrating planning within the academe areas of instruction, research and extension.

The dialogue was attended by 26 participants representing eight national government agencies, one state college, and three local governments. Baguio City, an HUC located in Northern Philippines, also participated in the dialogue and shared how the City intends to apply nexus framework particularly in its wastewater programs.

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