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INTER-LOCAL COOPERATION TO ADDRESS TRANSBOUNDARY URBAN ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

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KEY MESSAGES

- Inter-local cooperation, the coordinated collaboration between two or more municipalities under Republic Act (R.A.) 7160, can solve transboundary issues more effectively and democratically if legal, financial and institutional aspects are incorporated properly.
- Cooperation between local governments enhances overall governance systems and facilitates technical and policy exchange, policy ambition as well as effectivity.
- Inter-local cooperation should be supported legally by agreements between all actors involved and institutionally by a higher governmental level or institutionalized through officially approved sectoral collaborations (e.g. by utilities on specific services).



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Fast and efficient movement of people, goods, and services has significantly accelerated economic growth of countries globally. Evidently, transportation is a crucial element in sustaining development. As the means and quantities of transportation evolved, however, it resulted in major and interrelated challenges common to cities around the world.

The increasing volume of road vehicles is directly proportional to the demand for fuel use as well as their areas of access. Therefore, their transboundary scale of operations add complexity to addressing these problems. Several local governments have to coordinate their efforts, enter into partnerships or alliances. This inter-local cooperation appears challenging for national and local policymakers to effect long-term solutions.

The Philippines share many of these challenges. But local government units (LGUs) may enter into alliances to address their common issues such as traffic congestion and air pollution.

According to the Philippine Development Forumⁱ (2010), there are three critical ingredients in the formation of an “alliance” – *legal, institutional, and financial*. Legal ingredients refer to instruments that formalize the alliance among members. Institutional ingredients refer to the operational guidelines that form the backbone of the alliance. Finally, financial ingredients refer to resources that operationalize and sustain the programs, projects, or activities of the alliance.

It is also worthy to consider the situation of Pasig City. It is at the eastern border of Metro Manila, bounded by eight cities and municipalities. As such, Pasig City serves as the strategic access to the metro and, inevitably, bears the burden of transport-induced air pollution caused by motor vehicles plying and passing through the city. The existing legal and institutional mechanisms available afford and inter-local cooperation among the concerned cities and municipalities as their strategy towards low carbon mobility.

PROBLEM DEFINITION

According to the 2018 World Air Quality Report, the top 50 most polluted cities in the world are in Asia. The IQAir World ranked the Philippines as 57th out of 98 in the world's most polluted countries with an average of 17 ug/Ncm PM2.5 level in 2018. The transport sector is viewed to significantly contribute to this pollution and this is expected to worsen as the volume of vehicles increases.

While Pasig City is indeed implementing a number of transport policies and programs to improve its road traffic and air quality condition, the implementation was often criticized.

While LGU alliances have demonstrated significant successes, formation of inter-local cooperation is not a popular strategy to address transboundary urban challenges brought about by transport and air pollution due to a) lack of consensus on common issues, vision, and strategy; b) absence of clear structure vis-à-vis mandates and capacities of members; c) weak financial management within the alliance; and d) lack of political will among local chief executives.



KEY FINDINGS

Transport and air quality improvement is a priority urban issue of Pasig City. Already in 2010, the city's data showed that 60% of its air pollution (e.g. PM10) is attributed to mobile sources. Various local stakeholders agree that poor air quality conditions resulting from worsening traffic congestion is a major concern.

Pasig City has been aggressively advocating for low carbon mobility options. The *Bayanihan sa Daan*ⁱⁱ: *Sustainable Transport Program* is implementing carless weekends, promotion of walking and cycling by providing enabling policies and infrastructures, encouraging the use of public transport and carpooling by providing free shuttle services and priority lanes for high occupancy vehicles, and deployment of electric tricycles.

Despite the success of these initiatives, opportunities for scaling up are restricted within the city boundaries.

An alliance with and among its neighboring LGUs to advance the low carbon mobility agenda in Metro Manila can deliver a bigger and more lasting impact.

Initially, an alternative form of inter-local cooperation was drawn during the City-Business Ideation Workshop (CiBiX) which convened several businesses involved in the transport industry with the Pasig City. The participating businesses expressed that inter-city collaboration on sustainable transport policies and ordinances could ease administrative and regulatory barriers on transportation operations within Metro Manila. The LGU fostered partnerships with businesses, to serve as agents to connect with other neighboring LGUs. For example, Pasig City operationalized a bike sharing scheme at Robinsons Galleria – a popular shopping mall destination for Pasig residents which is situated in Quezon City.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

At the National Government Level:

- The DILG shall institutionalize LGU inter-local cooperation as a strategy to address transboundary urban environmental problems. Adopted strategic actions should always be governed by LGU alliance formal agreement which mandatorily integrate the legal, institutional, and financial ingredients as defined by the Philippine Development Forum to provide for their stability and sustainability.
- Empower the Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA) to ensure that programs and projects formulated by LGUs engaging in an inter-local cooperation intended to address their transboundary environmental problems are harmonized. They should not be conflicting but reinforcing and catalyzing high-impact and long-term solutions aligned with the general urban mobility plans and programs of Metro Manila.
- Advocate for the passage of Senate Bill 844, which proposes to enhance inter-LGU cooperation by amending certain provisions of the Local Government Code. The National Registry of Alliances shall be responsible for the “formulation of requirements, guidelines, and procedures for the application, creation, registry, regulation and monitoring of inter-LGU alliances.”
- The President to constitute in an Inter-Agency Task Force comprising representatives of the MMDA, the concerned congressional offices, the relevant national government agencies, the League of Cities of the Philippines, League of Municipalities of the Philippines, civil society organizations, transport groups, and research institutions.

At the Local Government Level:

- Establish an inter-local cooperation committee related body within their respective LGUs to perform activities such as:
 - Identify their own environmental issues and challenges that LGU alliances may address;
 - Liaise with other LGUs, offices and organizations relevant to the formation and implementation of programs and projects resulting from an alliance;
 - Serve as LGU secretariat and technical working group on all matters pertaining to inter-local cooperation entered into by the LGU.
- Develop and adopt legal and financing mechanisms to sustain the alliance and for the institutionalization of its established programs and projects, in the long term.



CONCLUSIONS

Governance decentralization grants LGUs in the Philippines certain autonomy or powers to programs within their jurisdictions. However, there are causes and solutions to environment and climate change-related problems that have to be found beyond territorial limits of one LGU.

Proposed interventions demand partnership arrangements with all stakeholders within and outside the LGU if they are meant to be responsive in the long-term. Otherwise, an inter-local cooperation is needed which is prescribed by Section 33 of the Local Government Code (RA 7160).

Alliance formation, however, is to be founded by a common understanding by stakeholders of the environmental and climate issues involved, the vision for solutions, and the political will to take actions. The alliance should be governed by the proper instruments, impressed with the legal, institutional and financial elements consistent with the prescription of the Philippine Development Forum. Consequently, the programs ventured by the partnership should be innovative and technology-driven in order to achieve climate ambitions.

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Endnotes

- i The Philippine Development Forum serves as the primary mechanism of the national government for facilitating policy dialogue among stakeholders on the country's development agenda.
- ii "*Bayanihan sa Daan*" loosely translates to "Cooperation on the Road".



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The purpose of the policy brief series under the IKI Ambitious City Promises project is to support more informed evidence-based decision-making on the priority areas within the project cities or their respective national governments. It is targeted at the policy-makers and the government officials who are involved in developing and/or executing the climate action plan.

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