

San Carlos City, Philippines

The City Profile:

Population: 133,000

Land Area: 45,150 ha.



City of San Carlos: The Liveable Community in Northeast Negros - Philippines

The Sustainable City Project

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 dubbed “A Quadrant for Liveable Community Framework” as the anchoring structure of 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. The three (3) pronged strategic objectives are as follows: 1) Development of the City into a 405 hectare agro-industrial zone by increasing economic activity and agricultural productivity; 2) Improvement of the quality life of its more than 100,000 local populace through the provision of quality basic services, jobs, housing and well-designed communities; and 3) Protection and proper management of its environment and natural resources. The project’s features and components are 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 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, known 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 centres, tourism facilities), social development initiatives (i.e., health, social housing, job creation), and environmental protection (i.e. reforestation, aquatic resource management). The PhP16M fund for the formulation of the Master Development Plan as a People and Community-Led initiative was sourced totally from the private sector and non-government organizations without any cash outlay from the Local Governmental coffers.

The distinctiveness of the strategies employed by the local government of San Carlos gained the attention of more than 30 Local Government Units (LGU) in the Philippines 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.

The San Carlos Sustainable City Project is a multi-awarded action from both local and international bodies. Recently, San Carlos City has bagged the Hall of Fame in the annual Search for Excellence in Local Governance Awards sponsored by the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) Region VI for winning the Best Performing City award for the third time in a row this 2010. ◆