



A Community-Based Approach is Reducing Violence Against Women in the City of Bacolod, Philippines

Summary

The City of Bacolod in the Philippines and the City of Kamloops, British Columbia have reduced violence against women and have introduced reproductive health education in Bacolod through a very successful community-based program.

The Women's Issues Program developed as part of a partnership that has existed between the two cities since 1994, supported by the FCM Partnerships and Special Initiatives Program. The program focussed primarily on the establishment of a community-based Quick Response Team (QRT) and a Health Centre in Barangay 3, a village located at the heart of the City of Bacolod. Through train-the-trainer workshops and subsequent 'echo training'¹ sessions, the partners developed a sustainable team of local community stakeholders, particularly women, who have the knowledge and skills to help increase services to women, reduce domestic violence, and improve reproductive health education.

In a very short period, the Women's Issues Program in Barangay 3 achieved most of its expected results and more; it has been observed by and replicated in other Bacolod barangays. As a pilot program that was designed as a learning experience for program designers and participants, this community success story is becoming a catalyst for further such initiatives in other barangays and municipalities in the Philippines.

Introduction

Under the direction of FCM's International Centre for Municipal Development (ICMD) and financed by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Partnerships and Special Initiatives (PSI) Program aims to strengthen the capacity of municipalities and municipal associations in developing countries to improve local service delivery and governance, and to promote sustainable development. The PSI Program supports the establishment of long-term partnerships between Canadian municipalities and overseas local governments, and the organization of short-term capacity-building initiatives, such as training workshops and missions by municipalities, municipal associations, and other enabling institutions.

The partnership between the City of Bacolod, Philippines and the City of Kamloops, British Columbia began under the PSI Program in September 1994. Bacolod (population 340,000) is the capital of Negros Occidental province and the centre of commerce and finance in the Visayas region of the Philippines. Kamloops (population 76,400) is the health care, legal, and financial centre of south-central British Columbia; its economy has been shaped by its history, with agriculture, railroads, forestry, and mining all playing important roles.

In the first phase of their partnership (1995-1998), the Bacolod-Kamloops partners focussed on recreation, urban planning, community organizations, solid waste management, and computerization. In the second phase (1999-2001) they concentrated on computerization, solid waste management, and women's issues.

1 'Echo training' is synonymous with 'knowledge transfer' or the replication of training.

Women's Issues in Bacolod

Violence against women in Bacolod had become a problem. In response to the advocacy of local women's groups, a drop-in centre was established in 1995 for women and children victims of abuse. However, with limited funding support and mostly volunteer staff, coping with the increasing demand for services became a major concern.

Among the young, single, and uneducated female population of Bacolod, unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases had also become serious and growing problems. Prevailing social and religious pressures



Capt. Brigid Tan and members of Council from Barangay # 3. The community provided a Quick Response team for cases of domestic violence, staffed by trained volunteers.

made it very difficult for these women at high-risk to seek qualified, non-judgmental assistance. The City Health Office's Maternal and Child Health Program was providing services for women as mothers, but there was a need to expand the program to include adolescents, especially women who were at high risk due to the prevailing social and economic conditions.

With the ultimate goal of reducing violence against women and improving reproductive health education, the Bacolod-Kamloops partners set the following objectives for the Women's Issues Program:

- To increase the overall knowledge of issues relating to women – most notably, violence against women and reproductive health;
- To motivate and enhance the capacity of women leaders and community members to respond to cases of domestic violence and deliver reproductive health services; and,
- To improve relevant services to women in the community.

The resources required to carry out the Women's Issues Program came from everyone involved – the City of Bacolod, the City of Kamloops, and FCM's Partnerships and Special Initiatives (PSI) Program. FCM contributed funds to conduct exploratory missions, training sessions, and follow-up visits. The staff and volunteers from the City of Kamloops, the City of Bacolod, and Bacolod's DAWN Foundation made important cash and in-kind contributions.

The Approach – Train-the-Trainers and Echo Training

“The local community and council(s) should be mobilized to take action in providing surveillance and offering support for victims of violence, and in negotiating appropriate culture responses and in creating a culture of non-violence, respectively.

“Developing integrated responses to domestic violence through the involvement of local community groups, community health workers, and women serves to create sustainability and accountability.”

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)²

The Women's Issues Program in Bacolod took a community-based approach to reduce violence against women and promote reproductive health education.

The partners approach was to mobilize local community stakeholders through consensus building, train-the-trainers sessions, echo training sessions, and the establishment of support mechanisms.

Consensus Building

Following a joint request from the Bacolod City Council and the Development Through Active Women Networking (DAWN) Foundation, a delegation from the City of Kamloops visited Bacolod in October 1997 and began to explore the need for and feasibility of establishing a women's issues program between the two cities. This led to the Women's Exploratory Program, which included a workshop that involved representatives from forty women's organizations – the first one of its kind in Bacolod. While the difficulties facing Bacolod women were many, and the list of possible projects was long, the participants identified and agreed upon two initiatives:

- A community-based Quick Response Team (QRT) that would be staffed by volunteers trained to deal with domestic violence, and that would be responsive, preventative, and sustainable
- community-based health facility in Barangay 3 that would be staffed by health professionals and trained volunteers, and that could provide information and referral services to single females at risk from pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

The Bacolod-Kamloops partners decided that the best way to transfer skills to Bacolod women would be to train local trainers who could then deliver echo training sessions in Bacolod. The partners felt that this approach would maximize the return on expenditures and would give the women from Bacolod responsibility for ongoing training.

Backed by a well-developed infrastructure of health and social programs in Canada, the Kamloops partners had the expertise required to provide the training for trainers.

2 United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), 2000. "Domestic Violence Against Women and Girls", in *Innocenti Digest*. May 2000, No. 6, pg 15.

Train-the-Trainers Sessions

The Women's Issues Program truly began with the Train-the-Trainers Colloquium held in Kamloops in April 1999, which brought together experts to focus on women's issues that were most relevant to the City of Bacolod. Eight delegates came from Bacolod, representing the Barangay Council of Barangay 3, City Council, City Health Office, Consortium of Women's Organizations, DAWN Foundation, Gender Program, Philippines Department of Social Services and Development, and Philippines National Police Women's Desk. From Kamloops, experts included representatives of the City Council, City Health Unit, Ministry of Children and Families, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), School District, Social Services, victims' services agencies, and volunteer agencies. The Colloquium consisted of train-the-trainer sessions (e.g. orientation talks, field visits, etc.) on various aspects of domestic and family violence and community-based health care for women. The Colloquium in Kamloops also provided an opportunity for small group discussions and a mutual exchange of ideas.

"Teaching others to become self-reliant is one of the best benefits of (such a) program."

Program participant from Kamloops

Echo-Training Sessions

Based on what they learned at the Colloquium in Kamloops, the Bacolod team members delivered echo-training sessions in Bacolod. The training was coordinated by the DAWN Foundation and was supported by FCM Partnership Support Funds. In December 1999, training on gender sensitivity was delivered to 45 barangay health workers, barangay peace officers, elected local officials, members of the barangay court, mothers of street children, and representatives of senior citizens' associations. In March 2000, three sessions were delivered on reproductive health and violence against women, domestic violence, and adolescent reproductive health and sexuality. On a follow-up visit to Bacolod, the Kamloops team members conducted subsequent train-the-trainer and echo training sessions on similar topics. Two echo-training sessions on the paralegal police system and justice system were conducted in early 2001.

During the spring of 2000, training shifted toward response mechanisms. Drawing from the pool of people who had received echo-training sessions, participants were selected to receive Quick Response for Domestic Violence training delivered by the DAWN Foundation. This group included 30 barangay health workers and peace officers, and representatives from the City Health Office, Department of Social Services, and Philippines National Police Women's Desk. The training participants developed a protocol that would govern the Quick Response Team's actions: mission, roles and responsibilities, communication plan, budget, and fund-raising.

Implementation of Support Mechanisms

Following the training, city departments and barangay-based organizations in Bacolod were able to move quickly toward implementation of the new support mechanisms. Almost immediately, they set-up a first Quick Response Team (QRT) and established a new Health Centre in Barangay 3.

The Quick Response Team, trained to respond to violence against women, adopted a Quick Response Protocol – they have a clear mandate, specific roles for each team member, an organizational chart, and a schedule of operation. They also organized monthly planning meetings.



The partnership also focused on other areas of support to Bacolod, such as composting.

The new Health Centre established in Barangay 3 offers classes on contraception, baby visits, and immunization days for infants.

Results – Knowledge is Empowerment

The Women's Issues Program has achieved its planned results in a very short period of time. As a result of the Train-the-Trainers Colloquium in Kamloops, Bacolod women leaders and community members improved their knowledge of Canadian practices and systems associated with women's issues. Through the echo-training sessions delivered by Bacolod trainers, the community in general has gained knowledge and increased its awareness of women's issues. Best of all, the number of municipal services provided to women has increased:

- The new Quick Response Team handles a growing number of cases of violence against women.
- More young women are informed about reproductive health.
- The new Health Centre offers classes on contraception, baby visits, and immunization days for infants.
- The City Health Office's Maternal and Child Health and Family Planning Programs have served 1,263 and 130 new users respectively.



Members of the Barangay Council meet outside Barangay #3 Hall to brainstorm women's issues. Kamloops exchange participants meet with Bacolod City councillor Celia Flor and Captain Carmencita Saliba from the Bacolod police force.

The Women's Issues Program achieved successes beyond its planned results and objectives. The program has been well supported by Bacolod City Council, and today 5% of the city's overall budget is allocated to social and gender development issues. The community has exhibited its support, trust, and confidence in the Program by reporting more incidences of violence against women and, hence, relieving some of the caseload handled by police precincts. One of the greatest results of the Women's Issues Program is that the Bacolod community has realized that local social issues can be very effectively resolved using local resources and by increasing the participation of the entire community.

This community-based approach used in Bacolod is becoming a model for the rest of the city, as the Barangay 3 pilot program is being observed and replicated. Other barangays have begun to make budget allocations for gender and development issues and have set up community-based Quick Response Teams. The Women's Issues Program has been recognized by the Local Government Support Program (LGSP), which will use the program's approach and Bacolod staff for similar activities sponsored by LGSP.

Analysis – Commitment is Always the Bottom-Line

The success of the Women's Issues Program was due to the commitment of its key proponents. The City of Kamloops provided the resources and expertise for train-the-trainers and echo training sessions. The DAWN Foundation committed the necessary personnel and financial resources to undertake follow-up activities. And, finally, the City of Bacolod provided the willing participants and political support so that colloquium participants could share the knowledge they gained with their peers in Bacolod.

"The work has just begun and, as with most change, staying with the change is often more difficult than beginning the process of change."

Program participant from Kamloops

The sustainability of the Women's Issues Program will depend on continued commitment and support (personnel and financial), and on the involvement and continued empowerment of local councils, NGOs, and community stakeholders. The true measure of the program's success will be that it is not only sustainable and successful, but that it will eventually be able to focus less on quick response and more on prevention.

Lessons Learned and Replicability

The Women's Issues Program in Bacolod was a pilot program that was designed as a learning experience for program designers and participants, and as a catalyst for further such initiatives in other barangays and/or municipalities in the Philippines. Program participants offered the following lessons learned:

- Taking a community-based approach, such as the community-based Quick Response Team (QRT) and the Health Centre, promotes easier and more comfortable access to services.
- The involvement of both women and men in the program encourages the consideration of different perspectives and broadens awareness, especially amongst potential perpetrators of violence against women.
- Regular follow-up on the part of community stakeholders ensures accountability of the program.

The partners feel that the success of the Women's Issues Program can be attributed to five key elements:

- The community-based approach
- The leadership of local women
- The ongoing commitment, support, and involvement of local council(s), NGOs, and community stakeholders
- The trustworthiness and credibility of community organization leaders and volunteers
- The extent and sensitivity of knowledge- and capability-based training.

The Program can likely be replicated beyond the context of the Philippines as long as a similar approach is followed, elements of success are incorporated, and attempts are made one community at a time.

"The idea of another country – like Canada – recognizing and supporting the issues of violence against women...and reproductive health education validates the universality of the issues and gives the women and men of the community a sense of sisterhood or brotherhood to respond to the issues."

Program participant from Bacolod

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