

# Iloilo City, Philippines

## Revitalizing the Iloilo river through collaboration and integration



Iloilo City has developed a master plan to rehabilitate, protect and develop the Iloilo River by collaborating with multiple stakeholders and integrating a set of policies and strategies. The Iloilo River Development Master Plan Project demonstrated how increased public participation, joint action and integration of policies and strategies can result in a shared vision and agenda for restoring the ecological balance of the Iloilo River while developing its economic potential.

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### Abstract

The Iloilo River plays an important role in the continued economic growth of Iloilo City. It offers economic opportunities and constitutes a natural resource. By the year 2000, however, the river had reached an alarming level of deterioration. Recognizing the need to save the river, Iloilo City's Mayor made a commitment to develop a sustainable development program for the river's revitalization.

In 2001, the Mayor presented the concept of the Iloilo River Rehabilitation Project at the Mayors of the Asia-Pacific Summit in Honolulu, Hawaii. Following this, the United States Asia Environmental Partnership offered to finance the development of the Iloilo River Development Master Plan (IRDMP). The city government, then, in partnership with the Iloilo Business Club, employed inclusive and integrated planning processes to establish a public-private partnership to develop a ten-year master plan. The applied approach actively involved all stakeholders in all important stages of the planning and decision making process. Completed in 2003, the masterplan provided a shared agenda and common framework for the rehabilitation, improvement and sustainability of the Iloilo River.

### Restoration of Iloilo river for economic services, environmental quality and biodiversity

Cities are increasingly facing the complicated pressures of urbanization in form of spreading informal settlements, pollution, inadequate solid waste management, and the destruction of habitats. A new sense of urgency have prompted cities to adopt flexible approaches to urban design to incorporate ecology and biodiversity into urban planning.

This is particularly true for shared resources such as the Iloilo River in Iloilo City. The river plays an important role in providing economic ecosystem services to Iloilo City in addition to enhancing environmental quality and sustaining biodiversity within the city. But through the pressures of urbanization and development, the river deteriorated to an alarming level, spurring need to be rehabilitated, protected and restored to an ecological balance.



#### Population / Land area

~ 478,000 (2007) / 70 km<sup>2</sup>

#### Municipal budget

Approx. PHP 548 million (2010)  
(US\$ 12.4 million)

*Iloilo joined ICLEI in August 2003*



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## Case Study

### City context

Iloilo City is one of the fastest growing, highly urbanized cities outside of Metro Manila. Its strategic location in the Philippine archipelago has made it the

business and government gateway to the flourishing Western Visayas region and earned then the city its title 'Heart of the Philippines'.

Located in the center of Iloilo City, with an approximate length of 15 km, Iloilo River is an important natural resources that provides economic services and opportunities for the continued growth of the city; it is also a major commercial asset, as the river's paths traverses the active parts of the city, giving it an edge for development.

The Iloilo River played a significant historical role in the rapid economic growth of the city. The opening of the Iloilo Port in 1855 allowed trade and

economic activity to thrive. The sugar industry, in particular, rose in the 1960s because local and international trading vessels used the Iloilo River wharf to bring industrial and agricultural cargo into the city.

However, with commercial and industrial expansion, competing demands for space and resources emerged. The increased urban activities in and around the river, brought about by rapid urbanization and a growing population, has resulted in the destruction of habitat, loss of marine life, and the general environmental degradation of the river.

### Iloilo river rehabilitation and development efforts

In 2001, the city conceptualized the Iloilo River Rehabilitation Project, which was presented by Iloilo City's mayor at the Mayors of the Asia-Pacific Summit (MAPES) in Honolulu, Hawaii. Subsequently, the United States-Asia Environmental Partnership (US-AEP), through the Asia Foundation (TAF), offered financial assistance to the Iloilo City Government under the Environment and Civil Society Partnership Program to fund the preparation of the Iloilo River Development Master Plan (IRMDP).

TAF invited Iloilo Business Club (IBC), a non-governmental organization representing business industries of Iloilo City, to partner with the city government in managing the project. This was in order to comply with the aim of the funding program, which was to increase the level and quality of public participation in environmental decision-making processes. Realizing that saving Iloilo river would require integrated solutions and an effective public-private partnership, the city government, together with IBC, formed a multi-sector consultative group composed of representatives from national government, barangays (villages), private and business sectors, academia, churches, and non-governmental and

Photo: City Environment and Natural Resources Office, Iloilo City



Overview of Iloilo City, Iloilo Strait and Iloilo River.

#### Iloilo river

As an estuarine ecosystem, the Iloilo River maintains a high level of productive biological and aquatic activities. In particular, it serves as a spawning area for milkfish, shrimp and other marine species. Studies conducted by the University of the Philippines in the Visaya have shown that the river is home to the rare emerald shrimp species, *Metapenaeus insolitus*, as well as 22 of the country's 35 mangrove species, including the rare mangrove species *Sonneratia ovata*.



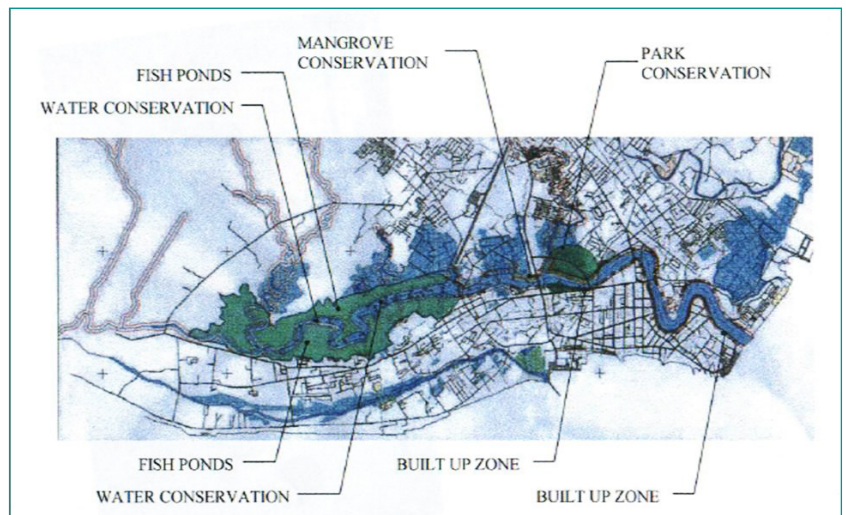
community organizations.

The city made it clear that the community should actively participate in all stages of the planning process. During the initial consultation, the city government recognized the importance of having a multi-agency consultative and coordinative body that would be responsible for the management and development of the Iloilo river. The Iloilo River Development Council (IRDC) was created through an executive order to institutionalize the master plan's early and sustained implementation. To ensure a comprehensive and participatory approach, the executive order established several multi-sector working committees to work under the Council.

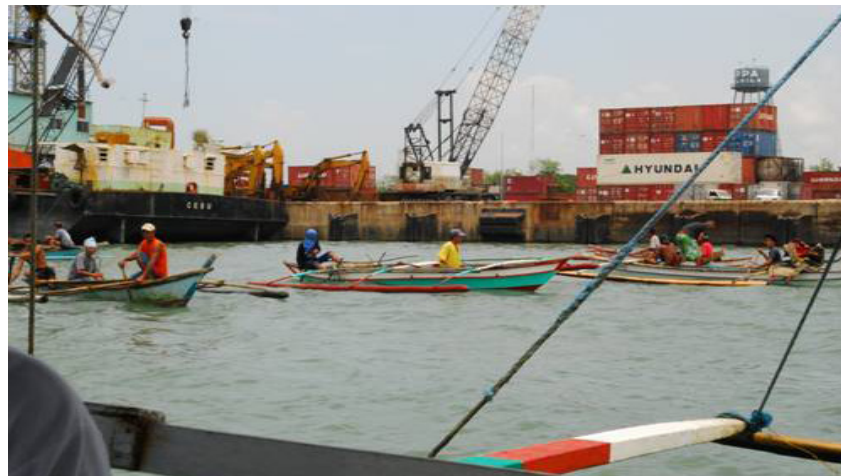
The initial consultation and the subsequent series of meetings, stakeholder workshops and public and city council hearings resulted in the collective identification of the issues and concerns affecting the river's environmental quality. This also served to integrate the diverse goals and objectives, and various initiatives, programs and projects also identified by the stakeholders.

The IRDMP, a ten-year plan that blueprints the rehabilitation, improvement and sustainability agenda of the Iloilo river, was completed in April 2003. The plan was approved and adopted by the Iloilo City Council in July of the same year.

As a document, the IRDMP is unique, not only because it was produced through a collaborative effort between all stakeholders in the city, but because its major emphasis on the necessity of preserving the biodiversity and ecological balance of the river. It proposes three development thrusts: Firstly, improving the environmental quality of the Iloilo River; secondly, providing economic development opportunities; thirdly, sustaining the quality of life in and around the river.



Environmental land use map for Iloilo River.



Annual river clean up.

## Results and impacts of the project

The adoption of inclusive and participatory planning approaches by Iloilo City in developing the master plan led to the following achievements.

**Raised awareness.** Increasing the level and quality of public participation, as well as the level of environmental awareness among all stakeholders and the general public, led to the following achievements.

**Greater acceptance.** The promotion of a multi-stakeholder arrangement for the rehabilitation and development of Iloilo River led to a greater acceptance of the need to cooperate and share responsibilities between stakeholders.

**IRDC improved cooperation and coordination.** The creation of the IRDC resulted in better cooperation among the involved agencies and stakeholders and improved coordination of development strategies and policies in the areas of land



Proposed green and blue park  
along the river bank.

use and urban design, socio-economic improvement, infrastructure facilities, institutional mechanisms and environmental protection. This made it a good governance model for a public-private partnership.

**Policy enactment.** The city government enacted two key policy measures which stemmed from the master plan. The first is the Basic Fishery Ordinance, which declares to develop and protect the city's inland and coastal fisheries and aquatic resources. Salient features include the provision against mangrove cutting, prevention of aquatic pollution and establishment of community-based watch groups, among others. The second measure is the Environment Code, which includes measures to conserve and protect biodiversity, including the declaration of certain ecologically fragile areas of the Iloilo River as protected areas.

**Mangrove reforestation.** Iloilo City collaborated with the Department of Public Works and Highways to plant 54,000 mangrove seedlings along identified areas of the river bank. The IRDMP enabled the Mangrove reforestation as well as the following:

**Establishment of the 'Bantay Suba' (River Watch).** A collaborative effort between the city government and 200 volunteers to monitor and prevent illegal fishing, cutting of mangroves, and illegal construction along the river bank, among other destructive activities.

**Annual river cleanup.** A bi-monthly removal of solid waste debris from the river with active

participation of the private sector, non-governmental organizations, and ordinary citizens.



Iloilo River has a relatively high  
biodiversity.

## Lessons learned

**Public-private-partnership can offer win-win.** A win-win scenario was achieved with the establishment of a public-private partnership to develop the master plan between the city government and the Iloilo Business Club. The partnership between the two sectors was especially important to the city government because the IBC took the responsibility of providing the direction and framework for the short- and long-term plans for the development of the Iloilo River. The IBC also provided the technical analysis and formulated the urban design requirements for the master plan.

**Stakeholder involvement through institutional body.** Attracting the involvement of all stakeholders by establishing the IRDC helped the project gain credibility and was crucial for encouraging people to participate in the consultations, meetings and workshops. An inclusive approach proved to be necessary in mobilizing a wide range of stakeholders.

**Political leadership and will.** The role and the will of the political leader, in this case, the mayor, helped to focus attention on the issue of rehabilitating the river and mobilizing people from various organizations.

**Collaboration increases effectiveness.** The master plan is a product of a collaborative effort between the public and the private sectors at the local level. The project has demonstrated how increased public participation, joint action



and integration of policies and strategies can result in a shared vision and agenda. This makes local actions more effective and efficient, duplication is avoided, resources are shared, and impact of actions becomes more coherent. Prior to the project, initiatives have been sporadically undertaken by concerned agencies and institutions to improve the condition of Iloilo River. However, the project showed that a master plan is imperative to assure the sustainability of the Iloilo River.

**Integration at early stage enables ownership.** Integrating all the stakeholders at the earliest stage possible is a determining success factor. In this case, the stakeholders were involved in all stages of the planning process, which ensured sufficient ownership on their part to carry out their commitments.

**Research and analysis for better assessment.** Comprehensive research and data gathering at the onset of the project would have provided a more accurate and detailed analysis of the current condition of the Iloilo River. A detailed situational analysis of the environment of the river would have produced a more effective master plan. Concerned government agencies have inadequate baseline and historical data on the existing environment of the river which would have been useful in establishing trends for analysis. The project management team, consisting of the city government and the IBC, had to draw upon whatever information was available. Data gaps were then treated prudently.

## Replication

The project has demonstrated that full and active participation of stakeholders in all stages of the planning process and an effective public-private partnership are essential preconditions for success.

The IRDM Project may serve as a good example for participatory planning processes in other highly-urbanized cities. While employing inclusive and integrated planning processes are a complex challenge to highly urbanized cities, it is still achievable and critical to the success of the project. Furthermore, integrated planning processes lead towards a shared vision and agenda and help to avoid problems of unlinked development.

The creation of the IRDC is a good model for effective public-private partnership and ensures continuity and sustained implementation of the master plan. A committed local authority adds to the credibility of the project. The master plan is first of its kind because it places primary importance to environmental conservation and protection. Its replication potential is high mainly because of the common problems brought about by rapid urbanization.

## Budget and finances

Financial assistance for the preparation of the Iloilo River Development Master Plan was provided by the United States and the Asia Environmental Partnership



Only non-destructive fishing gears and methods are allowed for use in the river.

## Key Contacts

### Iloilo City, Philippines

City Environment and Natural Resources Office

3rd Floor, Robinson's Place

Tel. +63-33 / 336-8262;

Email: noel\_hechanova@yahoo.com

### ICLEI Southeast Asia

#### Secretariat (SEAS)

Units 3 & 4, Manila

Observatory

Ateneo de Manila University,

Loyola Heights 1108

Quezon City, Philippines

Tel. +63-2 / 426-0851

Fax +63-2 / 426-0851

Email: iclei-sea@iclei.org

www.iclei.org/seas

### ICLEI Japan Office (JO)

Cosmos Aoyama B2F

5-53-67 Jingumae,

Shibuya-ku, Tokyo 150-0001, Japan

Tel. +81-3 / 5464-1906

Fax +81-3 / 3797-1906

Email: iclei-japan@iclei.org

www.iclei.org/japan

### ICLEI World Secretariat (WS)

Capacity Center

Kaiser-Friedrich Strasse 7

53111 Bonn Germany

Tel. +49-228 / 97 62 99-00

Fax +49-228 / 97 62 99-01

Email: capacity.center@iclei.org

www.iclei.org

(USAEP), under the Environment and Civil Society Partnership Program. Funds were channeled through The Asia Foundation who then invited the Iloilo Business Club to be the lead agency for the project to comply with the condition of the funding program.

## Local Action for Biodiversity

The Local Action for Biodiversity (LAB) program is a global urban biodiversity program coordinated by ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability's Global Biodiversity Centre, in partnership with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The LAB Pioneer program began in 2006 with a selected group of local and regional authorities from around the world, representing over 54 million citizens. The program provides an accessible and enabling platform for committed, leading local governments from around the world. This is achieved by profiling and promoting the importance of urban biodiversity and the role of local governments in its management, as well as by sharing the experiences, successes and challenges of urban biodiversity management in the participating cities and local authorities.

ICLEI provides guidance in assessment, planning and implementation; strategic networking opportunities; profiling opportunities for the participating local authorities at global and regional events; and creates a platform for local authorities to contribute to global advocacy on biodiversity issues.

www.iclei.org/biodiversity

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- Author: Rhea Rose Victoria (ICLEI SEAS); Editors: Nathan Brettschneider, Rüdiger von Krosigk and Richard Simpson (ICLEI WS).



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