

Engaging Multi-Stakeholder Participation in Lake Conservation

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Abstract:

In 2001, a tripartite partnership between the government, industry and civil society was realized through the formation of CLEAR (Conservation of Laguna de Bay's Environment and Resources). CLEAR is composed of Laguna Lake Development Authority (LLDA), Unilever Philippines (ULP), and the Society for the Conservation of Philippine Wetlands, Inc (SCPW). Its original objective was to sponsor the candidacy of Laguna de Bay to the Living Lakes Network, an international network that works for the conservation of lakes.

With the acceptance of Laguna de Bay to the Network, the CLEAR partnership strategically positioned itself to complement the work of LLDA. Since pollution in the lake largely comes from non-point domestic sources (more than 60%), the logical point of intervention was to reach out to the local population through awareness raising, education. The CLEAR program endeavors to influence the behaviour of lake stakeholders towards lake conservation by conducting activities such as Lake Forum Series, Youth Ecological Camp, Community Lake Monitoring Network (CLMN), and various activities for the CLEAR Youth Network.

It has been just six years since the CLEAR partnership was formed and it can already claim some concrete accomplishments. Today, CLEAR is recognized not just in the Lake Basin but in the international community as well as a credible organization that can deliver its commitments and worthy of support from various stakeholders and partners alike. The "power of three" offers many dimensions that surpass what each individual partner could have done on its own. Synergy has been achieved and the strengths of each partner have been reinforced. Moreover, it is highly replicable since it is innovative, has made a difference, has a sustainable effect and is properly documented.

Keywords: partnership, awareness raising, stakeholder participation, synergy

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1. INTRODUCTION

Laguna de Bay, the largest inland water in the Philippines and one of the biggest lakes in Asia, is a multi-use resource that benefits the domestic, agricultural and industrial sectors of six provinces, 49 municipalities, and 12 cities. It has a surface area of about 900 sq km with an average depth of 2.5 meters. The lake basin is home to about 10 million people. Although aquaculture and fisheries are its major uses, the lake also acts as a giant waste sink for the most of the Metropolitan Manila area. Water quality in the lake is already classified as Class C (fit for fisheries) and no longer fit for contact recreation purposes (Class B); although with appropriate treatment, may be fit for drinking (Class A). Over 60 percent of the organic waste in the lake comes from domestic sources (LLDA, 2006). Being a non-point source, domestic wastes are hard to regulate, much more control.

The Laguna Lake Development Authority (LLDA) is the government agency mandated to promote the development and balanced growth of Laguna de Bay Region and advocate the sustainable development of the lake region by tapping its full potentials as a natural resource using a balanced system of allocation, preservation, and conservation. Just like any other government agency in the country, the LLDA admits that it alone cannot do all the work required to effectively ensure the ecological integrity of the lake while pursuing economic development.

In 2001, a tripartite partnership between the government, industry and civil society was realized through the formation of CLEAR (Conservation of Laguna de Bay's Environment and Resources). CLEAR is composed of Laguna Lake Development Authority (LLDA), Unilever Philippines (ULP), and the Society for the Conservation of Philippine Wetlands, Inc (SCPW). The partnership was formalized on 07 June 2001 by signing a Memorandum of Agreement among the parties concerned.

CLEAR was organized primarily to espouse the candidacy of Laguna de Bay as member of the Living Lakes Network. After its acceptance into this international network of lakes in August 2001, the CLEAR partners continue to spearhead lake conservation awareness campaigns among key stakeholders to draw support towards a unified effort to conserve the Lake and its resources. With the overall goal of safeguarding the ecological integrity of the Lake, it embarked on activities that not only increased awareness about lake conservation but most importantly fostered partnership among the different lake stakeholders.

The CLEAR partnership strategically positioned itself to complement the work of LLDA in this respect. Based on the premise that pollution in the lake largely comes from domestic sources, the logical point of intervention will be to reach out to the local population through awareness raising, education eventually leading to behavioral change. This is why the CLEAR project's activities are all directed towards this strategy. Although initially the IEC activities targeted various stakeholders (youth, Women, LGUs, industry), CLEAR eventually focused its activities to target the youth as the main beneficiary of its Information, education and communication campaigns. Why the youth – because it exemplifies idealism and the future. They will be the future leaders and hopefully, they will be able to influence their families as well as their schools in promoting and implementing lake conservation activities

The Lake stakeholders are varied and all have different interests in the lake. The local communities who depend on their livelihood on the fisheries in the lake have been for sometime now being marginalized not just because of the dwindling catch due to pollution but by the proliferation of fish pens and cages. The large industrial estates in the lake basin are concerned about meeting emission and discharge standards. The Local Government Units (LGUs) on the other hand need to be always aware of new rules and regulations that the lake basin authority is implementing. With these as examples of the dynamics going on in the lake basin, there is a clear need for a venue so that the stakeholders can come together and discuss common concerns and burning issues. The CLEAR partnership endeavors to address these concerns by setting the following lake goals and objectives:

- To establish an information and communication network that would foster dialogue and exchange of knowledge among stakeholders towards a more concerted effort in the conservation and management of the lake;
- To further strengthen partnerships with local communities by involving local government units in lake stewardship projects;
- To broaden the involvement of local industries in lake conservation efforts;
- To hold the 10th Living Lakes Conference successfully (short term).

2. METHODOLOGY

To achieve what the partnership have set as objectives, there was a need to configure how the CLEAR will operate and what approaches will be employed in pursuing its activities.

2.1 How the Partnership Works in the CLEAR context

The CLEAR partners are considered equal in all aspects. They are the pillars of a three-legged stool representing the sectors in the partnership namely the Government, the NGO, and the Industry. Initially, joint activities undertaken by the partners were done on a per-task basis per partner basis based on previously agreed work plan. This means that although there is a designated lead partner for each activity, each partner has a specific task to perform where they also spend for their expenses incurred for the assigned task.

However, when CLEAR was tasked to host the 10th Living Lakes Conference, the partnership assumed a different configuration that has remained until today. After a visioning workshop, CLEAR's organizational structure was configured and exists up to this day. A major feature of the reorganized structure is the designation of SCPW as the Secretariat of CLEAR. As such, it performs administrative and coordinative functions for the efficient and effective implementation of the CLEAR program. It is headed by a Program Manager who is the SCPW Executive Officer and assisted by a Program Officer and a Technical Assistant. All three are organic staff of the SCPW and are rendering part-time services to the CLEAR Program.

The mode of financial support also changed. While there was no transfer of funds from one entity to another in the old set-up, there were some significant changes in the new setting. First of all, Unilever has started providing financial support in 2004 to maintain the Secretariat especially since preparations were about to start for the Living Lakes Conference. This new arrangement allowed capacity development in the NGO especially in managing finances and project implementation. Although the task-led arrangement in the implementation of project activities still hold, fund administration is already lodged with SCPW on projects to be spearheaded by Unilever. In other words, a seed money covering the cost of maintaining the Secretariat and the activities to be led by Unilever according to the agreed Work Plan is now being transferred to SCPW. On the part of the government, the old set-up still applies. LLDA is the lead partner for the Ecological Camp and for this activity, they directly disburse the money. This is to avoid getting caught in the maze of government procedures that could delay the activity.

CLEAR meets at least once a quarter. The Secretariat provides staff functions during these meetings including sending out of notices, preparing meeting highlights and following through of agreements. The partners conduct a planning and evaluation workshop once a year where they review and plan their activities and set priorities and budget.

2.2 Stakeholder Participation in CLEAR Activities

Being a support project and complementary to the efforts of the regulatory agency, the instruments and methods used by CLEAR are mostly social instruments in nature. It is largely anchored on partnerships and participation (the tripartite partnership of CLEAR, the involvement of the LGUS, academe, and other NGOs in the eco-camp and CLMN). It also promotes empowerment and capacity building through awareness building, information and communication (stakeholders conference, forums) and innovative organizational arrangements (an institutionalized partnership amongst the civil society, business and government regulatory agency).

Below are some of the activities conducted to achieve CLEAR's objectives:

Activity 1: Stakeholders Conference

This is a big gathering of representatives from stakeholders of Laguna de Bay held every year with the following objectives:

- to inform stakeholders of the state of the lake and current initiatives for the conservation of Laguna de Bay;.
- to prepare the stakeholders for a more in-depth involvement in the conservation of Laguna de Bay



Activity 2: Lake Forum Series

The CLEAR partnership holds a series of fora that brings together the different stakeholders to discuss common concerns, burning issues and to have the opportunity to learn what each one is doing as far as lake conservation and management is concerned. It is envisioned that the activity will generate local best practices that can be shared and replicated.



Activity 3: Youth Ecological Camp

CLEAR conducts an Ecological Camp, dubbed as *Kilos Kabataan Para sa Lawa*, as one of its major strategies in educating the community, particularly the youth, on the need to conserve Laguna de Bay. The ecological camp aims to ensure the sustained efforts to conserve Laguna de Bay and to foster a deeper sense of appreciation and commitment especially among the lakeshore communities.



Activity 4: Community Lake Monitoring Network (CLMN)

The CLMN is a cooperative program combining the technical resources of CLEAR and the volunteer efforts of the communities lakewide who collect water quality data on their side of the lake. It requires minimal time and expense, yet it can provide data that is essential for achieving the goals of lakewater quality management. The CLMN is a cost-effective mechanism for obtaining good basic water quality data on lakes. It is not intended to replace the existing monitoring activities of LLDA, it is just meant to complement it and at the same time use the activity as a means to communicate the importance of the Lake.

Activity 5: Hosting of the 10th Living Lakes Conference

CLEAR hosted the 10th Living Lakes Conference on 15 to 19 2005 in Tagaytay City. The conference theme "*The Lake and its People: Responsible Stewardship by Lake Communities*" was centered on the interaction between the lake and its people.

Activity 6: Developing Lumban Delta as an Eco-Tourism Site: A Design Competition

CLEAR and the ASAPHIL (Association of Architectural Students of the Philippines) - UP Diliman Chapter organized a design competition known as "Developing the Lumban Delta as an Eco-Tourism Site: A Design Competition".

Activity 7: CLEAR Youth Network

During the 10th *Living Lakes Conference* in Tagaytay City in May 2005, a forum for the youth was held as a parallel session with the conference workshops. This was attended by the various Eco-Camp graduates and the ASAPHIL Lumban Delta Design Competition participants. At this parallel session, the group resolved to form a network of youth that will work for the conservation of Laguna de Bay.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Making the CLEAR Partnership Work

The new configuration of CLEAR which designated SCPW as the Secretariat ensures its sustainability and promotes credibility. Having a Secretariat provides for a more organized and systematic program operations. It ensures efficient documentation, transparency in fund management, and a constant presence that represents the Partnership in many engagements and events. It should be noted that the importance of CLEAR working as one and not as separate entities has to be the primary image that the Stakeholder should perceive. At the same time, the individual roles of bringing in the resources from the three sectors as well as representing their concerns should not be lost or diluted in the process. The CLEAR is enabled by the dedication and technical know-how of the SCPW, the resources and commitment of Unilever, Philippines and the authority and expertise of LLDA. The strength of the partnership lies in the synergy that came about with the power of three – which is way more than what each one could have achieved on their own.

3.2 Targeting Stakeholders for Optimum Effectiveness and Impact

For the past 6 years, CLEAR has conducted the following activities as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: CLEAR Activities and the Level of Participation Among Lake Stakeholders

Activity	Frequency or Number of Times the Event was Held	Description of Participants/Beneficiaries	Partners that worked with CLEAR
1. Stakeholders Conference	3 (Event was held once a year in 2002, 2003, and 2004)	Key Stakeholders in the Lake Basin including Mayors; All municipalities in the Lake Basin; a total of more than 500 participants attended the 3 sessions	- Eco-Index
2. Youth Ecological Camp	5	High School Students in five lakeshore towns; total of 117 participants from 32 High Schools	- Local Government of Tanay, Rizal - Tanay Environment Foundation - University of the Philippines at Los Banos, College of Human Ecology (UP-CHE) - Samahan ng Mga Mag-aaral ng

			Teknolohiyang Panlipunan - Local Government of Lumban, Laguna - CBK Power Limited - Friends of the Seven Lakes
3. Youth Congress	2	Former Eco-campers and participants to the Lumban Delta Design Competition; total of 180 participants	- Local Government of Tanay - University of Rizal System - Protected Areas and Wildlife Bureau - CBK Power Limited - Local Government of Lumban, Laguna
4. Community Lake Monitoring Network	Twice a year (once during wet and dry season respectively)	Former Eco-campers and community partners; five lakeshore towns	- Tanay Environment Foundation - UP-CHE - Municipality of Lumban - Fisheries and Aquatic Resources Management Councils
5. Lake Forum	4 Once a year	Key Stakeholders depending on the topic or burning issues; 29 lakeshore towns/total of about 100 participants	- Local Government of Lumban - CBK Power Limited - University of the Philippines School of Urban and Regional Planning - Eco-Index
6. Designing the Lumban Delta as an Ecotourism Site	Special Project	About 150 architecture students from 10 architecture schools	- ASAPHIL (Architecture Students Association of the Philippines) - Local Government of Lumban, Laguna
7. Living Lakes Conference	Special Project	About 200 participants from at least 34 countries	- Local Government of Lucban, Quezon - Local Government of Tanay - Federation of River Basin Councils in the Laguna de Bay Lake Basin - Global Nature Fund

During the first three years of CLEAR, the activities were directed towards every key stakeholder (See Table 1). Thus, there was the Stakeholders Conference for all stakeholders but where Local Government Units and the industry are prominently in attendance; the Eco-Camp for high school students; Lake Forum for specific concerned stakeholder, i.e. Environmental User Fee System for the Industry, Ecotourism for tour operators, among others. However, as the years progressed, it became clear that the niche for the partnership will be the youth. This was also confirmed during the “brand key” workshop where the partners identified its brand positioning for CLEAR.

The move to concentrate interventions on a specific target market in the Lake Basin was to focus CLEAR's activities, optimize scarce resources and achieve optimum effectiveness and impact. Focusing on the Youth also promotes sustainability of activities especially when coordinated with the schools and the Local Government Units.

As a result of this, CLEAR's regular activities now include the following:

- a) Youth Ecological Camp
- b) Youth Congress
- c) Community Lake Monitoring Network (CLMN)

The target is to conduct at least one eco-camp per year, one Youth Congress annually, and CLMN activities for ten lakeshore towns for the next 3 years.

The Stakeholders' Conference is now a regular event conducted by the LLDA. The Lake Forum is held on a case-to-case basis depending on whether there is a burning issue that needs to be explored with the stakeholders. The Design Competition on the other hand will be held every two years.

3.2 Forging Partnerships among Lake Stakeholders

CLEAR has always made it a point to involve stakeholders in its activities. The involvement ranges from being just participants or recipient of information to contributing resources to the event either through partial sponsorships or counterparting to full sponsorships. Over the years, CLEAR has formed partnerships with Local Government Units, schools/academic institutions, industry, NGOs, POs, and national government agencies, and international organizations, among others. However, a more important aspect of this is the partnerships that were catalyzed by CLEAR among local stakeholders that came about during CLEAR-sponsored events.

It has been six years since the CLEAR partnership was formed already and it can claim some concrete accomplishments in terms of achieving their objectives. Today, the partnership is recognized not just in the Lake Basin but in the international community as a credible organization that can deliver its commitments and worthy of support from various stakeholders and partners alike. Examples of specific achievements are the following:

- a) It helped in increasing the awareness on lake conservation at both local and national levels. As a result of this, it is now easier to form partnerships with other sectors of society. In fact, the SCPW has gained new partners especially among the industry and Local Governments, i.e. CBK Power Corporation and LGU of Lumban, Laguna along with the private landowner will be supporting the development of a Lumban Delta Wetlands Center in their town.
- b) It has been proven that the Annual Stakeholders Conference is an effective forum for dialogue especially among the LGU, business sector and the LLDA (the government authority). This best practice which promoted transparency was initiated by CLEAR is now made part of the LLDA regular activities – the best proof that the strategy really worked.
- c) The CLEAR partnership has generated interest in Corporate Social Responsibility especially among the industries. There are now numerous inquiries to Unilever and SCPW on how to go about setting up CSR projects.
- d) Because of the CLEAR partnership and its activities, LLDA has enhanced its credibility among its critics which is perceived to be a major factor in the increased compliance to environmental regulations.
- e) The successful holding of the 10th Living Lakes Conference was also one singular event that accelerated lake conservation awareness among the different stakeholders of the Lake. It has such profound impact that it leapfrogged the information, education and communication efforts of the CLEAR partners in such a short time.
- f) As a result of the Youth Ecological Camps and the CLMN, projects especially on solid

waste management have been undertaken by the campers in their respective schools. The Eco-Campers is now known to be the Core Group of students that initiate school and local community activities. In fact, the group from Los Banos, Laguna has grown from a core group of 35 campers to more than 150 members. The group has also started holding its own eco-camps using the CLEAR curriculum.

- g) The CLEAR partners, especially the NGO partner (SCPW), are increasing being perceived as a source of unbiased technical expertise as it is being consulted on environmental concerns within the lake basin, i.e. Laiban Dam issue in Tanay, Rizal, etc.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 Success Factors

Some of the main factors that contributed to the success of CLEAR partnership and its activities are the following:

- a) The CLEAR partnership offers a venue for the three segments of society (NGO, Business, Government) to work together for the conservation of Laguna de Bay.
- b) Transparency when working with the LGU and other sectors of society, thus gaining their respect, trust and support
- c) Mutual respect and trust among the three partners (SCPW, LLDA, Unilever)
- d) Clear roles and responsibilities/accountabilities as specified in the Memorandum of Agreement and in the Annual Work and Financial Plans
- e) Making the NGO partner the Secretariat since it is perceived as a neutral entity.
- f) Resource sharing - the partnership brings to the table their individual expertise and strength
- g) Making the NGO partner the custodian of externally-sourced funds and the official representative to the Living Lakes Network
- h) Each entity in the CLEAR partnership can still pursue other conservation initiatives outside of the partnership including those in their regular functions as long as it does not conflict with the interest of CLEAR.
- i) The holding of the 10th Living Lakes Conference gave the CLEAR partners exposure and mileage that could not have been achieved by ordinary interventions.

4.2 Lessons Learned

There are many lessons learned in the course of implementing the CLEAR project foremost of which stem from the value-added attribute of having the three entities in the CLEAR partnership. Examples are cited below.

- a) Before CLEAR, there was no venue for stakeholder dialogue with the LLDA (government authority). There was always that stigma that when the government calls for a meeting, it is usually to impose more regulations. During the holding of the Stakeholders Conference, the three partners (NGO, Business and Government) signed the letter of invitation. This resulted to a total number of people in the audience which was almost double of what was expected. This became the trend for the succeeding events and this became an effective venue for dialogue with the LLDA General Manager on the status and issues surrounding Laguna de Bay and its environs. This event has now become a regular activity of the LLDA under their Annual Learning Event.
- b) The SCPW, the NGO partner has strengthened partnership with the local NGOs like the Federation of River Basin Councils in the Laguna de Bay Region and coordinated activities with them. In this manner, duplication of efforts is avoided and synergy through cooperative activities are fostered (Eco-Camp in Tanay, Youth Congress)
- c) The LLDA, being the government entity, facilitates the entry of the CLEAR partners in the lakeshore towns where activities are to be undertaken. This makes things easier especially coordinating with the Mayor and the Municipal Planning and Development

Officer.

- d) Unilever, Philippines brings in the resources, network and know-how of the private sector. Since Unilever is known for its credible Corporate Social Responsibility Programs, they are instrumental in bringing in partners in the industry that are also concerned with water management and conservation.

The lesson that can be clearly learned from these experiences is that the “power of three” offers many dimensions that surpass what each partner could have done on its own. In other words, synergy has been achieved and the strengths of each partner has been reinforced.

4.3 Replicability

The practice is highly replicable as explained below:

1. it is highly innovative – having the 3 partners from the Civil Society (SCPW), the business sector (Unilever), and the government (LLDA) is not the usual working partnership. Traditionally these are the sectors that are constantly in disagreement especially on environmental issues, and this has been successfully surmounted by the CLEAR partnership.
2. it has made a difference - the CLEAR partners and their projects and activities have certainly made a difference in the awareness of individuals and communities around the lake. There is an increased consciousness as shown by more LGUs and communities wanting to do more for the lake.
3. it has a sustainable effect – it has been shown to a certain extent that the CLEAR and its activities has a sustainable effect since it is targeting the education of the youth which is expected to result to behavioral change towards a more conservation-oriented lake stakeholders.
4. it has been properly documented - the processes in the formation of CLEAR and in the implementation of its activities have been properly documented to make replication easy. These can provide excellent guidelines for policy making and planning of new projects. Its potential for replication is high especially in areas where there is a need for multi-sectoral management of a resource such as a lake.

In sum, the CLEAR program has already achieved most of its short-term objectives. The outcome of the long-term objective of behavioral change to a more conservation-oriented stakeholders should of course be the marked change in the water quality and other ecological parameters in the lake. While in the six years of implementation, some improvements have been observed (such as the decrease in industrial waste loading due to increased compliance to the Environmental User’s Fee System) it is still not enough considering that domestic waste loading is still very high. Marked change in behavior as an outcome of education usually takes place after at least 10 years of intensive and continuous IEC (information, education, communication) intervention. There is still a long way to go but CLEAR is surely moving in the right direction.

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