

# Balanga City Goes Clean, Green and Smoke-Free



An example of what the ABKD initiative produced - clean waterways lining residents' homes in Balanga City.  
Source: Centre for Liveable Cities

A citywide coastal clean-up, a trust fund for green cities and banning smoking are just some of the initiatives that Balanga City has for liveable and sustainable outcomes.

CLC and Temasek Foundation International (TFI) visited Balanga city in Bataan province to visit Mayor Francis Garcia, and Governor Albert Garcia, both alumni of the Temasek Foundation International Leaders in Urban Governance Programme (TFILUGP).

During their week in Singapore for the programme in November 2017, the province drew inspiration from Singapore's Active, Beautiful and Clean Waters (ABC) programme. This was adapted to become Ayusin, Buhayin, Kalingain Daluyangg (ABKD), which improved the province's 33 riverways and coastal areas. The citywide coastal clean-up improved the water conditions so much that Mayor Francis was recognised by the national government.



A banner advertising Balanga City's smoke-free status and raising awareness of the consequences of smoking.

Source: Centre for Liveable Cities



The grounds of Las Casas Filipinas de Akuzar – a museum and heritage homes showcase.

Source: Centre for Liveable Cities

The mayor is also boosting the greening efforts of his city as well as 143 other cities in the Philippines. Serving also as the Secretary General of the League of Cities, Philippines, Mayor Francis has secured a trust fund of approximately USD 50 million to support the better use of green spaces. Some upcoming plans include the establishment of pocket forest parks, arboretum and botanical gardens. The cities will also rejuvenate their streetscapes with eco-friendly bike lanes and walkways, tree planting, construction of bioswales and pervious surfaces.

Besides building infrastructure to improve the city, Mayor Francis has also stubbed out smoking. Balanga City is proudly smoke-free, so much so that a city engineer joked that his father-in-law preferred staying in the next city when he visits just so he can continue smoking. The city achieved this status in a variety of ways. Accompanying the many signs in the city that remind its residents and visitors not to smoke, are groups of counsellors who engage smokers and convince them to stop. This is reinforced with heavy fines and penalties for smoking, including the closure of business or revocation of business licences.





Balanga City officials showing CLC and TFI around the villages on site visits during the Flood Management and Green Spaces Forum.

Source: Centre for Liveable Cities

During the visit, CLC expert Yap Kheng Guan participated in a Flood Management and Green Spaces Forum organised by the city to address the recent flood caused by two weeks of incessant rain in July 2018. The 5-foot high flooding affected life in 23 out of 25 barangays (villages) in the City, and damaged property, infrastructure as well as industry. At the forum, Yap, who was a former Senior Director with the Public Utilities Board in Singapore, shared how Singapore came up with flood mitigation measures in the seventies. Balanga City is currently reviewing its master plan to see how it can include more drainage and flood management elements. It will also look at technological simulations, land-based practices such as deforestation and land clearing as well as acquiring privately-owned land around the waterways for drainage widening.

In addition to efforts to create a more liveable environment, Balanga City is also positioning itself to become a technology hub by emphasising the training of IT skills and empowering its youth. Some 600 PCs have been installed in two public schools to improve access to new technology and educate them with new capabilities. The government has also worked with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and communities in the barangay to build IT learning hubs, which are open till late in the evening and even on Saturdays. These multipurpose halls are set up in open spaces provided by the barangays and installed with equipment sourced by the NGOs. They are administered by young graduates hired by the government to help the youth learn IT skills and solve any technical problems.

While Bataan province is largely agricultural, it lies approximately 124 km from Manila, and this close proximity gives it a huge potential for eco-tourism. Bataan has a rich WWII history, and is the site of the American surrender to the Japanese, as well as where the 100 day march took place. Mount Samat National Shrine is built on top of a WWII museum and honours the wartime sacrifices. Las Casas Filipinas de Akuzar is a museum, hotel and showcase of heritage colonial and Filipina homes that have been flown from different locations in the country, to be sited near the beautiful, Bagac Bay.



Mount Samat National Shrine built atop a WWII museum to honour the contributions and sacrifices of Filipinos and American soldiers. Source: Centre for Liveable Cities



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Mayor Francis (right) and Vice-Governor Cristina (middle) chat with Joanne (TFI) and Kheng Guan (CLC) at the sidelines of the Flood Management and Green Spaces Forum. Source: Centre for Liveable Cities



Posing for a "One Bataan Group Photo". Source: Centre for Liveable Cities



# About the Author



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Nisha works on international capacity development programmes in Urban Governance at CLC. She was part of the team that launched the ASEAN Smart Cities Network, and was with the WCS team where she also managed the global WCS Young Leaders Network. She was previously a Crime Analyst, and developed capacity building programmes in safety and security with the Ministry of Home Affairs.