

The Advocate

The official newsletter of the League of Cities of the Philippines

Q1-Q2 2020



2020 Mid-Year COVID-19 Report



A rundown of
the League's
response to
COVID-19

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Promoting
the welfare of
cities during
the pandemic

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The LCP City
Database
Project comes
into its own

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About the Cover

When LGUs in the Philippines assumed the responsibility of providing food aid to their constituents in the early months of the community quarantine, it became regular practice for almost all city governments to share in social media photos of chairs with food packs and sacks of rice along the streets or right outside people's homes. This method of distribution was a way to minimize contact between LGU frontliners and residents to avoid possible transmission of the coronavirus. It took place at a time when people had no means to secure food and other essentials due to stay-at-home orders of the national government brought by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The humble chair came to symbolize the Philippine local government response to the pandemic and the resulting community quarantine. The League chose this as the cover of this special issue as it signifies the commitment of city governments to serve their constituents no matter the circumstances and limitations. The cover pays tribute to the resourcefulness and creativity of local governments to deliver and provide the necessary assistance even in critical moments such as the COVID-19 pandemic—a proof that no adversity, strife, nor calamity, can ever undo their duty so long as their mandate to serve the public remains.

COVER PHOTO BY THE LGU OF OLONGAPO CITY

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The Advocate 2020 Mid-Year COVID-19 Report

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PHOTO BY THE LGU OF TARLAC CITY

Introduction

The health crisis caused by the outbreak of COVID-19 is unpredictable and severely affects every aspect of local administration and governance. From ensuring the health and safety of its populace to welcoming their returning constituents, reviving the local economy, and generating employment, cities in the Philippines and around the world are facing gargantuan tasks for which no one is prepared. With more than 70% of reported COVID-19 cases in the country located in cities, effective and timely responses have become more important now than ever.

For the League of Cities of the Philippines, the crisis has called for a shift in focus, but responsibilities have remained the same: service delivery towards members, liaising with and on behalf of members with other levels of government, and the provision of learning and knowledge exchange. This mid-year report showcases the important work of the League in ensuring that cities can continue to work at the frontlines of this pandemic. It is divided into five chapters:

- **Our COVID-19 Response** highlights the various initiatives of the League to provide accurate and timely information to its members during the pandemic and community quarantine. It features the LCP's flagship COVID-19 advocacy and also shares the League's efforts to closely coordinate with its members during the ongoing public health crisis.
- **Continued Lobbying Efforts** features updates on the League's priority issues such as the implementation of the Mandanas Decision, discussions on federalism, housing, and local administration.
- **Deepened Involvement in Various Policy Priorities** provides a substantive discussion on education, health, social welfare, and environmental initiatives of the League. It encapsulates our efforts to help implement the Basic Education - Learning Continuity Plan, provide

practical knowledge to our members regarding effective health delivery, ensure more inclusive social welfare programs, and promote environmental preservation in the context of urban development.

- **Project Development and Implementation** shares the benefits of the LCP City Database Project, the efficient management of existing projects such as the GFPS Project, and new programs that the League successfully negotiated such as the Cities' System Capacity Development Project.
- **Global Exchanges and Networking** highlights the League's participation in various international conferences including the 10th Session of the World Urban Forum in Abu Dhabi.

The report concludes with a summary of activities that members can look forward to in the remaining months of the year with a promise to assist members in their new role as frontliners in this pandemic by helping to build resilient and sustainable cities. ●





Our COVID-19 Response

The League recalibrated its workplan in the first half of the year to meet the demands of its member cities as they respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The responsibility of local government units (LGUs) in controlling the outbreak and managing its impact has been underscored in meetings attended by the LCP with relevant national government agencies as early as February. This prompted the organization to launch initiatives to further complement the efforts of city governments, promote their response interventions, and highlight the importance of local actions in flattening the curve and mitigating the systemic impacts of the ongoing health crisis.

In order to sustain the 2019-2022 LCP Executive Agenda despite disruptions in its regular workplan, the League aligned its COVID-19-related services according to the goals provided in the Agenda. As the national government placed the country under a community quarantine, the LCP facilitated communication and information dissemination among its members, generated League-wide consensus on urgent and relevant issues, elevated local government concerns to the national government, and promoted knowledge transfer and cooperation among its members.

Pre-Lockdown Positioning

As early as February, the League has acknowledged the vast implications of the coronavirus outbreak for local governments in terms of policy and response. In its statement dated 05 February 2020, the League emphasized that public health is a local function and that geographical realities will greatly influence the manner by which local chief executives will protect the health of their constituents.

The League also took part in preparatory meetings by the national government to anticipate the eventuality of a pandemic and keep track of directives for local response. The following are meetings that were attended by city mayors and representatives from the LCP Secretariat before social

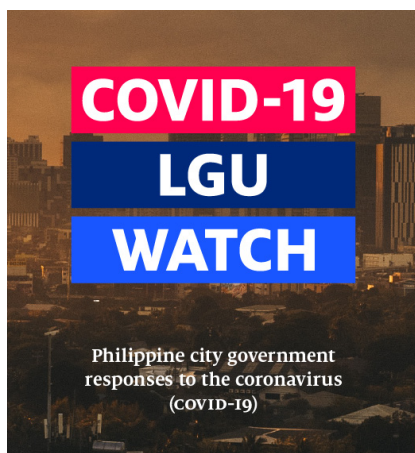
distancing was enforced by the government on 12 March 2020:

- On 04 February 2020, the League attended the public hearing of the Senate Committee on Health and Demography to gather updates in the response of the national government to the 2019-nCoV. It was in this meeting that the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) made mention of a memorandum circular directing local governments to establish barangay health emergency response teams.



President Duterte speaks before local chief executives at the presidential dialogue on 10 February 2020 to address the coronavirus situation and provide instructions for local action. PHOTO BY REY BANUQUET OF PCOO

- On 10 February 2020, the League facilitated the attendance of its members to a dialogue between President Duterte, local chief executives, and select cabinet members. During the meeting, the President assured governors and mayors that the national government is ready with financing to respond to the coronavirus outbreak and reminded them to follow the protocols set out by the Department of Health (DOH). The LCP later on issued a policy note from the dialogue which provided a guide to local governments for actions related to the 2019-nCoV.
- On 04 March 2020, the League took part in the emergency meeting of the Tourism Coordinating Council where Department of Tourism (DOT) Secretary



Above left: The COVID-19 LGU Watch serves as the League's flagship advocacy to document and promote city government responses to COVID-19; **above middle:** LCP Chair and Cebu City Mayor Edgar Labella (leftmost) establishes Cebu Emergency Operation Center to closely monitor updates on the COVID-19 situation in the city PHOTO BY THE LGU OF CEBU CITY; **above right:** LCP President and Bacolod City Mayor Bing Leonardia orders the closure of classes and suspension of graduation ceremonies after President Duterte declared a state of public health emergency. PHOTO BY THE LGU OF BACOLOD CITY

Bernadette Romulo-Puyat revealed the agency's new direction of boosting domestic tourism in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The DOT secretary also reported on programs geared towards providing support to LGUs for their tourism projects.

- On 09 March 2020, Metro Manila mayors and the League, through LCP Chairman and Cebu City Mayor Edgardo Labella and LCP Representative for Region IV-A and Sta. Rosa City Mayor Arlene Arcillas, joined the meeting of the Inter-Agency Task Force for the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF-EID) to discuss updates on the novel coronavirus and the first confirmed local transmission in the San Juan City.

#COVID19LGUWatch

It became apparent in the discussions from the pre-lockdown meetings that effective local actions are crucial in flattening the curve for COVID-19. This was made evident by the swift and early efforts of several city governments in preparation for an impending health crisis. As LGUs began imposing strict physical distancing measures, mobilized health-related resources, and established COVID-19 task forces, the League quickly launched an advocacy initiative called the COVID-19 LGU Watch on 12 March 2020 to focus on the impact of local response interventions during pandemic.

COVID-19 LGU Watch served as the LCP's banner program in the months that followed. It could be said that this program is the League's first digital-native program as all of its related activities were implemented online. Using simple productivity apps, the League created micro-initiatives that allowed LCP member cities and the public to learn about the good practices of city governments in mitigating the impacts of COVID-19.

While the program became a platform to raise awareness on COVID-19 policy and service delivery issues at the local level, it also helped drive public sentiment on the importance of local government interventions during the pandemic.

COVID-19 City Tracker

The COVID-19 Tracker (bit.ly/covid19citytracker) is an online portal that keeps track of the policy issuances and concrete actions of city governments related to the pandemic and the community quarantine. It was developed by the League to veer away from quantitative COVID-19 data portals and focus on building a qualitative database of COVID-19 actions per city. It was also meant to serve as a reference material for member cities looking for good practices which they can replicate in their own LGUs.

Members from the LCP Secretariat regularly monitored online news articles, official websites, and Facebook pages of member cities for updates on city LGUs. They then uploaded noteworthy updates to the tracker which can be accessed by LCP members and the public. Many of the League's member cities also contributed in building the tracker by submitting their LGUs' share of documented efforts and issuances.

National and Local Issuances on COVID

In relation to the COVID-19 City Tracker, the League also created an online repository of policy issuances issued by every city via Google Drive which can be accessed at bit.ly/IssuancesOnCovid. The repository was created for member cities and the public to keep track of city-level executive orders, ordinances, guidelines, and advisories given the pace of developments and the shifting strategies in response to the coronavirus and the ensuing lockdowns. Issuances on COVID also compiles relevant national issuances and guidelines to make sure that cities can respond with appropriate policies supporting these national directives. The League is grateful to cities who have been diligent in submitting fresh issuances as this helped in updating the database in a timely and regular manner.

COVID-19 City-Level Data

Using data from the DOH, the League also developed an online data visualization that captures data on COVID-19 cases at the city level. The COVID PH City Stats (bit.ly/covidphcitystats)

revealed that more than 70% of COVID-19 cases in the country are located in cities, thus highlighting the need for drastic interventions and further assistance in high-burden cities. An abbreviated version of the COVID-19 City Stats is also available in the COVID-19 City Tracker.

LGUs Kontra COVID-19

The LGUs Kontra COVID-19 is another micro-initiative launched by the LCP to put a spotlight on city government leadership in the fight against the pandemic. It was also the League’s way of emphasizing the important role of LGU representatives as government frontliners. In this initiative, the League asked city mayors to write down their messages of solidarity and support to all Filipinos as the country was about to shift from an enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) status towards a state of new normal. These messages were posted on the LCP Facebook page along with photos of city mayors holding up signs that say #LGUsKontraCOVID19 and #WeHealAsOne to align with the national government’s battle cry during the

pandemic. *Editor’s note: The messages submitted by city mayors are published on pages 11 to 14 of this report.*

Philippine City Responses to COVID-19

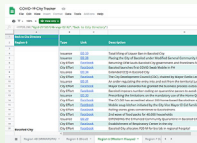
As the IATF-EID gradually eased on community quarantine restrictions for most parts of the country and a number of cities began re-opening their local economies post-ECQ, the League launched an online publication entitled *Philippine Local Government Responses to COVID-19* on 22 June 2020 to document and summarize the wide-ranging and significant response interventions taken by city governments in the early months of the pandemic. By studying the actions of cities from the COVID-19 City Tracker, the League was able to identify six (6) areas of intervention that guided the COVID-19 actions of cities in the country:

1. Baseline mitigation strategies
2. Local policy issuance and compliance
3. Social amelioration program facilitation

LCP COVID-19 LGU WATCH INFORMATION PLATFORMS



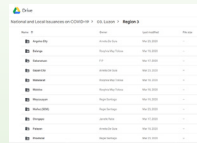
OFFICIAL FACEBOOK PAGE



COVID-19 CITY TRACKER



COVID PH CITY STATS



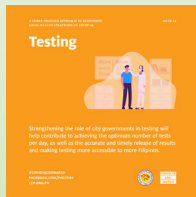
ISSUANCES ON COVID



OFFICIAL WEBSITE



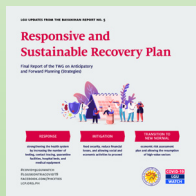
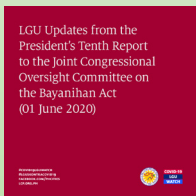
VIBER COMMUNITY



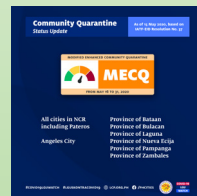
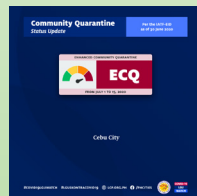
Visual explainers discussing LGU responses to COVID-19



Messages of solidarity from city mayors via LGUs Kontra COVID-19



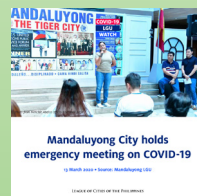
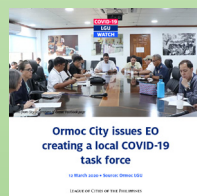
Visual explainers on LGU-relevant updates from the national government



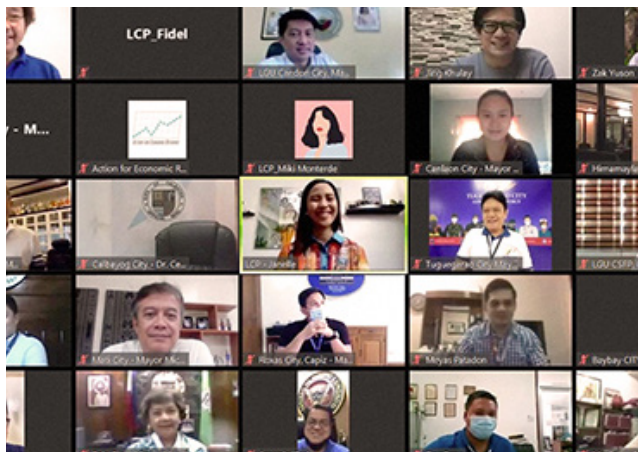
Community quarantine status updates



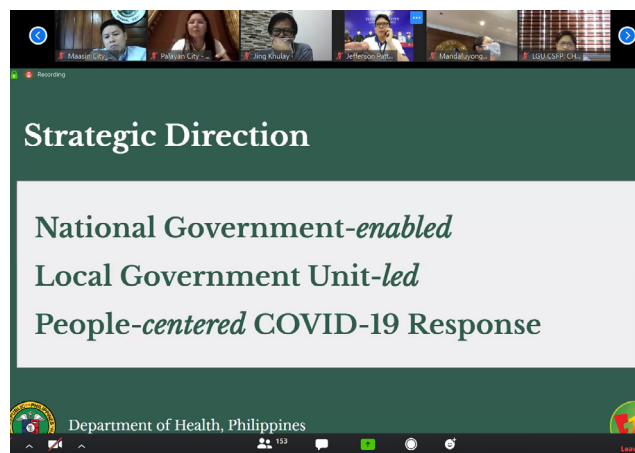
Highlights from briefings by the national government



Updates and good practices from city governments



Above left: The League conducts a webinar on the DOH guidelines for expanded testing in partnership with COVID-19 Action Network Philippines where DOH Usec. Maria Rosario Vergeire addressed questions and concerns of city mayors regarding community-based expanded testing in cities; **above right:** In her presentation, Usec. Vergeire explains the national government's strategy against COVID-19.



4. Partnership with various sectors
5. Local health and containment strategies
6. Management of returning OFWs and LSIs

A copy of the summary document has been shared to relevant partners to open up avenues for collaboration. It is also available for download at www.lcp.org.ph.

Keeping the LCP Community in Touch

The use of mobile and social media platforms allowed the LCP to sustain its services and continue providing assistance to its members despite stay-at-home orders and restrictions in mobility. The League managed to keep its lines of communication and coordination with member cities more open during the ongoing pandemic to provide members the necessary support and guidance.

The League launched a Viber group at the onset of the ECQ in March to readily anticipate and accommodate the concerns of city governments with regard to the emerging COVID-19 policies and strategies of the national government. Eventually, the mobile platform allowed the League to give its members concise and up-to-the-minute updates from the IATF-EID, National Task Force Against COVID-19 (NTF COVID-19), and the Office of the President. It also saw the introduction of the LCP Bulletin where announcements were regularly made regarding online learning events, private sector assistance, relevant publications, and opportunities for partnership during the pandemic.

Through the Viber group, the League was able to create an efficient venue to engage mayors in vital online discussions and build consensus on urgent COVID-19-related issues in real time, faster than a typical email or e-newsletter. More importantly, however, the mobile platform became a digital platform for fellowship where city mayors can share among themselves their local situation and extend solidarity and support with each other during this very challenging period.

Meanwhile, The League's official Facebook page was instrumental in generating awareness on the issues related

to local government response to COVID-19. It served as the League's primary channel for its public affairs initiatives, including the COVID-19 LGU Watch. Through the LCP Facebook page, the League was able to promote the best practices of LGUs from the COVID-19 City Tracker on a regular basis. It also became the platform to share local and national issuances, as well as LGU-relevant updates from the IATF-EID and the Office of the President. The League also gave its Facebook followers access to vital content that touched on various aspects of the pandemic. These came in the form of live webinars, videos, and visual explainers.

Stronger Partnerships to Combat COVID-19

The League was fortunate to work with government partners and non-government organizations that identify with our advocacy for local government support during this pandemic. Trough concrete initiatives, the following partners helped amplify our voice and provided our member cities concrete opportunities for further development:

- **Policy Webinars with the COVID-19 Action Network Philippines:** The COVID-19 Action Network Philippines (CAN) is a network of civil society organizations and the private sector established to coordinate actions in stopping the spread of COVID-19 and protect the lives and livelihood of Filipinos. The network collaborated with the League in staging two successful high-level policy dialogues on expanded, community-based testing and blended learning for the upcoming school year.
- **City Best Practices with The Asia Foundation for the LGU vs COVID PH Portal:** The LGU vs COVID PH portal was created by the Asia Foundation to equip local government officials with innovations and best practices in the fight against COVID-19. The League assisted in providing content to the DILG-endorsed portal by regularly sharing an inventory of city best practices culled from the COVID-19 City Tracker.

- **Launch of the DiskarTech App by RCBC:** Marking the first time that the League formally supported the digitalization of financial services for economic development, LCP President and Bacolod City Mayor Evelio Leonardia attended the online launch of RCBC’s mobile app called DiskarTech on 01 July 2020. In his message of support, Mayor Leonardia mentioned that digitalization is an important factor in improving the lives of local constituents and the development of cities.
- **Online Roll-Out of the Liveable Cities Labs by the Liveable Cities Challenge:** Together with our long-time partners from the Liveable Cities Challenge, the League is co-organizing an online version of the Liveable Cities Labs. The Labs is a series of webinars that provide a multi-stakeholder perspective on the digital transformation of cities post-COVID-19. The inaugural session was held on 22 July 2020 where city mayors and other local chief executives learned about the importance of internet connectivity to successfully implement online distance learning.
- **Financial Support by the Land Bank of the Philippines:** On 29 July 2020, the League supported Land Bank of the Philippines’ launch of the Restoration and Invigoration Package for a Self-Sufficient Economy Towards UPgrowth for LGUs (RISE UP LGUs) which was created to boost the capacities of LGUs in responding to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. In his statement, LCP Secretary-General and Calapan City Mayor Arnan Panaligan expressed the full support of the League to the objectives of the lending program.
- **A Platform for Sharing Best Practices by Galing Pook:** On 31 July 2020, the League, in partnership with Galing Pook Foundation and CAN, co-hosted the Forum on Adaptive Innovations at the Local Level which featured the unique practices of Iloilo City and Pasig City as presented by Mayor Jerry Trenas and Mayor Vico Sotto respectively.

Policy Advocacy in the Time of COVID-19

Through constant communication with cities and monitoring of updates at the national level, the League ensures it is abreast on the most urgent and salient policy issues related to COVID-19. The League solicited the inputs of cities on these salient issues which informed the development of knowledge products, articulation in letters and position papers, as well as prioritization in organizing webinars. The League ensured that the concerns of cities regarding the local implementation of national guidelines were articulated in communication with national government agencies.

Recognizing the appeals and experiences of member cities, the League transmitted a letter to DILG Secretary Año to emphasize the importance of a localized response to COVID-19 as well as promoting the local autonomy and creativity of cities in policies and programs. On 05 May 2020, the League, represented by LCP President and Bacolod City Mayor Evelio



Top: LCP President Mayor Bing Leonardia (right) joins NTF COVID-19 Secretary Carlito Galvez, Jr. (left) in an ULAP meeting to discuss the role of LGUs in advancing the National Action Plan against COVID-19; **above:** LCP Secretary-General and Calapan City Mayor Arnan Panaligan expresses his support for the lending program of Land Bank of the Philippines for LGUs to help the latter respond to the ongoing pandemic.

Leonardia, participated in the dialogue of LGUs with NTF COVID-19 Chief Implementer Secretary Carlito Galvez, Jr. The dialogue delved into salient issues on testing, management of locally-stranded individuals, and implementation of the Social Amelioration Program. It also prompted the League to relay unanswered questions of member cities to Secretary Galvez.

To continue its meaningful engagement with members of the IATF-EID and NTF COVID-19, the League also participated in meetings of the Sub-Task Group on Governance (STG) as part of the latter’s *Strengthening Capacity of Governments to Ensure Continuity and Efficiency in the Delivery of Public Services Action Plan*. The STG is an initiative of the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) and serves as a platform for the League to elevate the concerns of cities and be updated on national guidelines for dissemination to its members.

The League also gathered the inputs of member cities for its position regarding the much-debated issue of religious gatherings, which was manifested on 01 June 2020 by Mayor Leonardia in a meeting with IATF-EID, local chief executives, and religious groups. Said meeting was in response to concerns that such gatherings in GCQ areas may spark an upsurge in COVID-19 infections and derail the shift to more relaxed quarantine guidelines.

The League also consistently monitored congressional meetings on issues related to COVID-19 and presented inputs to the Congress related to the first Bayanihan Act, particularly on emergency powers, the requirement of manifesto in flights for contact tracing, and granting of free funeral services to indigent families. ●



Continued Lobbying Efforts

Despite disruptions in its regular operations in the first half of 2020, the League ensured that the voices of cities are articulated clearly and succinctly in various fora. It has consistently taken a clear stance on pressing policy issues that affect city governments which include health, environment, education, housing, and governance, among many others. Through able representation in meetings and submission of comments and position papers, the League managed to promote and champion the welfare of cities.

Sustained Engagements on the League's Priority Issues

The League ensured consistent engagement with national government agencies on issues relevant to member cities. At the same time, we coordinated closely with member cities to gather and synthesize their inputs for submission to relevant agencies.

- **The Mandanas Decision:** The League continued its participation in dialogues to facilitate the release of the national tax allotment (NTA) as clarified by the Supreme Court decision on the Mandanas case. It attended a meeting with the DBM where the agency presented the “Proposed Further Devolution Transition Plan” which includes the identification of national government projects and services to be devolved to LGUs. On 30 January 2020, LCP President Mayor Evelio Leonardia attended a NEDA briefing on the Common Legislative Agenda and suggested that bills seeking to recentralize the functions of LGUs must be further studied instead of delisting the same.
- **Liberalization of the 20% Development Fund:** The League solicited comments from its members regarding the Department of Budget and Management’s (DBM) proposed revisions to the 20% Development Fund which provide a “negative list” of items. City respondents concurred that the revisions are a significant improvement from the previous guidelines since they provide LGUs with a wider latitude in funding development programs. Accordingly, the League submitted these comments for the consideration of the budget department.
- **Real Property Valuation:** The League also participated in a dialogue with the Department of Finance (DOF) on real property valuation and assessment reform and updating the income classification of LGUs. The League supported the valuation reform with reservations while it fully supported updating the income classification of LGUs.
- **Green, Green, Green (GGG) Initiative:** The League continues to monitor and coordinate with member cities to ensure compliance with DBM’s pioneering funding program for green, public spaces called “Green, Green, Green.” On 04 March and 23 June 2020, it issued a memorandum to member cities to facilitate the improved utilization of allocated funds for the said program following DBM Secretary Wendel Avisado’s disclosure that only a handful of cities have disbursed their funds for the program. As a response, several cities have complied accordingly and even shared updates on their proposed projects.
- **The National Land Use Policy:** As a complementary measure to the Green, Green, Green fund in the designation of city spaces, the League also supported the institutionalization of a national land use policy for equitable and efficient allocation of land and its resources. In its comments to the proposed Executive Order on the said policy, the League lauded the interim measure which seeks to significantly empower local governments in fulfilling their mandate of managing land and its resources in a just and sustainable manner. This position



Top: Meetings at the House Committee on Housing and Urban Development allow the League to articulate its positions on the proposed Urban Development and Housing Act and quality housing for informal settlers; **above left:** LCP President and Bacolod City Mayor Bing Leonardia (right) receives his appointment as the local government representative of NEDA's Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council PHOTO BY THE LGU OF BACOLOD CITY; **above right:** DBM Secretary Wendel Avisado (left) meets with Mayor Leonardia (right) to discuss further the release of the NTA; **right:** LCP Junior Policy Officer Miki Monterde participates in the Senate Committee meeting on Urban Planning, Housing and Resettlement following the eruption of the Taal Volcano.

serves as a parallel effort to the League's position paper on the National Land Use bills pending at the House of Representatives.

Articulated City Positions in Congressional Hearings

Consistent with our engagement in previous Congresses, the League remained vigilant in monitoring and actively manifesting our position on critical issues affecting local governance. The League manifested the initial position of cities on the following issues subject to the approval of the LCP National Executive Board:

- **Conversion of LGUs:** The League opposed bills that sought to hasten the process of converting municipalities to component cities by exempting them from the population and land area requirements of the Local Government Code of 1991.
- **Federalism:** The League has consistently participated in various dialogues and forums on federalism. Similarly, it also took advantage of opportunities to elevate the related concerns of cities by submitting a position paper in time for the scheduled voting of the House Committee on Constitutional Amendments initially scheduled on 19 February 2020 but postponed to a later date. In its position paper, the League expressed its support for the institutionalization of the Mandanas Decision in the

Constitution and strengthening the fiscal capacities of LGUs.

- **Housing:** The League actively took part in deliberations on several policy proposals that aim to make the Urban Development and Housing Act more responsive to land availability and the needs of the urban population. It took a consistent and decisive stand on related measures that allow informal settler families to acquire quality housing. The League also requested inputs from member cities on data related to socialized housing and submitted the same to the House Committee on Housing and Urban Development.
- **Local Administration:** The League consistently highlighted the situation of LGUs in its position on specific measures including the establishment of OFW desks and the mandatory appointment of the Local Cooperatives and Local Tourism Officers. Despite recognizing the laudable intent of these bills, considerations should be given to the financial implications and the limitations on Personnel Services. Meanwhile, the League expressed its support to the Senate bill enhancing inter-LGU cooperation. The League will review the substitute bills for these issues and provide comments for the consideration of the Congressional Committees. ●

UPDATES ON THE LEAGUE'S PRIORITY ISSUES



THE MANDANAS DECISION

The League participated in dialogues and meetings to facilitate the release of the NTA and recommended further study on proposals that seek to recentralize LGU functions.



GREEN, GREEN, GREEN

The League issued a memorandum to member cities to facilitate the improved utilization of allocated funds for the green public spaces program, resulting to an increase in LGU compliance.



REAL PROPERTY VALUATION

The League supported valuation and assessment reform with reservations and fully supported updating income classification of LGUs.



NATIONAL LAND USE POLICY

The League supported the institutionalization of a national land use policy and lauded measures that seek to significantly empower local governments in fulfilling their mandate of managing land and its resources



LIBERALIZATION OF THE 20% DEV'T FUND

The League submitted to DBM the comments of member cities which note that the proposed revisions creating a 'negative list' of items in the utilization of the fund are a significant improvement from previous guidelines.

ARTICULATED CITY POSITIONS IN CONGRESSIONAL HEARINGS



CONVERSION OF LGUS

The League opposed bills that sought to hasten the process of converting municipalities to component cities by exempting them from the requirements in the Local Government Code of 1991



HOUSING

The League took a consistent and decisive stand on related measures that allow informal settler families to acquire quality housing.



FEDERALISM

The League expressed its support for the institutionalization of the Mandanas Decision in the Constitution and strengthening the capacities of local governments in its position paper submitted to the House Committee on Constitutional Amendments



LOCAL ADMINISTRATION

The League emphasized that financial implications and limitations in Personnel Services must be considered in establishing OFW desks and the mandatory appointment of Local Cooperatives Officers and Local Tourism Officers

LGUs Kontra COVID-19

The LGUs Kontra COVID-19 is an initiative launched by the LCP to put a spotlight on city government leadership in the fight against the pandemic.

Let's take a look at the messages of solidarity and support previously shared by our city mayors on the official Facebook page of the LCP...



"I look forward to counting on our people to internalize and make it second nature to wear face masks, practice social distancing, wash their hands, and disinfect every so often, especially after the ECQ, until the virus transmission stops dead at zero."

Mayor Linabelle Villarica

MEYCAUAYAN CITY



"Thanks to all the front liners for their unwavering support so that our nation will soon be free from this crisis. Kaya natin 'to kasi walang hindi kakayanin ang mga Pilipino."

Mayor Rosalina Jalosjos

DAPITAN CITY



"Let us act together for the common good. And to all the frontliners, for all that you're doing, for your courage and your selflessness, we thank you and may God reward you for your service to the Filipinos."

Mayor Mercedes Teves-Goñi

BAIS CITY



"To my fellow Filipinos, as we enter the 'new normal,' be assured that we will continue serving you in these trying times. Let us together face this new normal with strengthened resilience, unwavering faith, and a renewed hope."

Mayor Arth Bryan Celeste

ALAMINOS CITY



"As stewards of our cities, we need to make sure that false sense of safety should not prevail. [...] We should push further to protect our people. We have endured so much and if we consistently keep our guards up, by the grace of God, we will make it through together."

Mayor Roxanne Pimentel

TANDAG CITY



"We know in our hearts, with the help of the Almighty, this too shall pass. Meanwhile, may this crisis bring out the strength within us Filipinos to survive. Let us follow our leaders, let us observe all necessary precautions, let us help one another, let us heal as one."

Mayor Lani Mercado-Revilla

BACOR CITY



"We glorify the heroism of all our medical and volunteer frontliners in our fight against the spread of COVID-19. May we all honor their great sacrifices by also doing our share to win the battle against the disease. We fight as one, we will heal as one."

Mayor Judy Chin-Amante

CABADBARAN CITY



"It is only by responding and acting as one—as one nation—can we truly prevail. As our own hashtag says #KayaNgSantaRosaLabananAngCorona, the City of Santa Rosa shares this with all local government units because we are confident that we can act as one and heal as one."

Mayor Arlene Arcillas

SANTA ROSA CITY



"Let us be one in thought and in deed to combat this unseen enemy; so that together, we shall emerge victoriously and heal as one nation."

Mayor Josemarie Diaz

ILAGAN CITY



"We are standing together, we are healing as one. Through our collective efforts, your cooperation, and with the guidance of God the Almighty, we will survive this pandemic. Let us stand together and let us stand strong!"

Mayor John Geesnell Yap II

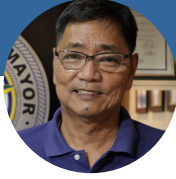
TAGBILARAN CITY



"Amid unsettling times, now is the time we can be better than the best in us. Remain vigilant, obedient, and calm working as one, healing as one, and winning as one."

Mayor Benjamin Magalong

BAGUIO CITY



"We, Fernandinos, are reminding all Filipinos about the importance of instilling love, hope, and faith into their hearts and minds as we are about to #HealAsOne and enter into the 'new normal' phase of living. During these COVID-19 pandemic trying times, be a 'light' to everyone and keep its glow shining."

Mayor Edwin Santiago
SAN FERNANDO CITY, PAMPANGA



"The best way we can cope with this collective experience is to take care of one another, be productive, and help in rebuilding our nation. Please believe that better days are ahead of us. Let us be hopeful and excited for a new world that is set to emerge from this unprecedented event shared across the globe. Let us shift, adapt, and grow. Let us #HealAsOne."

Mayor Evelio Leonardia
BACOLOD CITY



"We will show the whole world that no pandemic or any other disaster will stop the Filipino people from standing back up on our feet, rising above this storm, and becoming better citizens of this beautiful country."

Mayor Cynthia Guiani-Sayadi
COTABATO CITY



"Realize the importance of: faith in God, hope in the fidelity of friendships, love of family. With God's grace, our COVID battle plan for Zamboanga City is: Heal the sick and feed the hungry!"

Mayor Maria Isabelle Climaco
ZAMBOANGA CITY



"We cannot lower our guard until such time that a vaccine against COVID-19 has been developed. Let us therefore remain vigilant and continue to implement public health and safety measures. Together, let us heal as one. Let us rebuild our country and move forward to greater heights of prosperity. One city, one nation!"

Mayor Arnan Panaligan
CALAPAN CITY



"Our previous experience in the Marawi Siege was a challenge but has now become a symbol of resilience and solidarity which we should embody as we heal and rise together again."

Mayor Majul Gandamra
MARAWI CITY



"As we enter into the new normal, let us hold each other's hand and hold on to our faith in God and in our leaders. These are times that call for greater cooperation and collaboration. Together, with care for each other, we will triumph over the challenges we face."

Mayor Andrea Ynares

ANTIPOLO CITY



"This pandemic is a trying time for all of us, but most especially for the frontliners, the poor, and the vulnerable groups. Call for unity is a must so that we, as one people, one community, and one nation, will rise to the occasion. Together we heal as one in our fight against COVID-19."

Mayor Nacional Mercado

MAASIN CITY



"Let us be reminded to choose unity over conflict, empathy over indifference, and hope over fear. Together we can heal as one. Magbayanihan na tayo, Pilipinas!"

Mayor Darel Dexter Uy

DIPOLOG CITY



"The crisis we face is unprecedented in recent history. It requires us to do extraordinary things, to bear exceptional burdens. Never before was there an utmost urgency to unite in spirit, than now. But the Filipinos are strong, we shall overcome."

Mayor Carlo Jorge Joan Reyes

GUIHULNGAN CITY



"As we transition to a new normal where COVID-19 is a reality, social distancing, hand washing, and wearing face masks should now be part of our daily lives. We must also remember that basic human kindness and compassion can help us pull through this unprecedented crisis. Let us stand together and heal as one!"

Mayor Beverly Rose Dimacuja

BATANGAS CITY



"As we slowly transition to the new normal, discipline, cooperation, and compassion become ever more important in ensuring our victory against the deadly virus. I am especially thankful to God for the unending grace He has shown to our city and our citizens who embody our tagline #BoronganonDisiplinadoAko without fail."

Mayor Jose Ivan Dayan Agda

BORONGAN CITY



Deepened Involvement in Policy Priorities

The League ensured meaningful and sustained participation in priority thematic issues both in the legislative and executive arenas. These include education, health, service delivery, transportation, and the environment. In addressing these thematic priorities, we adjusted accordingly in relation to the League's COVID-19 response.

Better Health Delivery

The unprecedented occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the urgency of strengthening the country's local health systems. Related to this, the Universal Health Care (UHC) Law was envisioned to contribute to supporting local health systems. The Special Health Fund is an essential component in the implementation of the UHC Law at the local level. In the Inter-Agency Technical Working Group (TWG) meeting on the use of the Special Health Fund, it was emphasized that LGU counterparts for health are still mandatory and should be reflected in the Local Investment Plan for Health.

The League strived to manifest its position on a range of issues related to health and health delivery in Congressional meetings. On the issue of improving the benefits of rural health doctors, it supported the intent of the measure and proposed that the provision on appropriations should be clarified to guide local implementation. The League also participated in the Senate Committee hearing on bills that aim to amend RA 11332 or the Notifiable Diseases Act as well as the establishment of mandatory quarantine facilities at the local level. The League manifested recommendations to the bill on upholding local autonomy in implementing lockdowns and the clear distinction between national and local governments in the management of different types of quarantine facilities.

A substantial portion of the League's efforts related to health governance for the first half of the year was geared towards

providing technical and actionable information to member cities to guide local action on COVID-19 health planning and programming.

The League developed parallel efforts in support of the national government's principal strategy of test, trace, and treat. Accordingly, the League developed a policy note on a three-pronged approach to health responses to COVID-19 which elaborates on technical and actionable information as well as good local practices regarding the three main strategies.

Many cities have lamented the challenges when it comes to testing and the local implementation of related guidelines from the DOH. In response, the League developed a policy note on testing guidelines which includes options for improving access to testing, and their applicability to return to work protocols. Furthermore, in partnership with the COVID-19 Action Network (CAN) Philippines, the League organized a webinar with DOH Undersecretary Maria Rosario Vergeire on 22 May 2020. The online dialogue served as a venue to clarify guidelines on various testing strategies as well as opportunities for DOH and cities to collaborate. The League then followed up in a letter to DOH the concerns of cities that were not addressed during the dialogue. The responses of DOH were synthesized in a briefer on frequently asked questions which was circulated to cities. The League is in the process of developing another policy note on updated guidelines on testing to be disseminated to member cities in August following the virtual dialogue with Usec. Vergeire.

Another positive development related to expanding the testing capacities of cities is the League's engagement with the Nutrition Center of the Philippines (NCP) where the LCP Secretariat disseminated information to member cities



Above left: Contact Tracing Czar and Baguio City Mayor Benjie Magalag presents his city's acclaimed contact tracing system before local chief executives in an online session on elevating the role of LGUs in contact tracing; **above right:** LCP President and Bacolod City Mayor Bing Leonardia participates in the dialogue between the IATF-EID and local chief executives on protocols for locally stranded individuals and returning OFWs; **right:** Tabaco City Mayor and LCP Focal Mayor for the SDGs Krisel Lagman-Luistro moderates the virtual dialogue between the DOH and city mayors on strengthening to role of cities in implementing basic education for the upcoming school year.



regarding the establishment of low-cost modular testing laboratories through the NCP. Several members expressed interest in coordinating with the NCP to avail of the cost-effective options of the modular testing laboratories.

When it came to contact tracing, the League commended the appointment of its Focal Mayor for Anti-Criminality and Illegal Drugs, Baguio City Mayor Benjamin Magalong, as the NTF COVID-19 Contact Tracing Czar. Thus, in response to the urgent need to bolster local contact tracing efforts, the League invited Mayor Benjamin Magalong in a webinar on 21 July 2020 to relay the contact tracing strategies and digital programs being used by his city as well as specific recommendations that other cities can apply in their own contexts. This information was documented in an LCP briefer featuring the contact tracing strategy and programs of the LGU of Baguio City.

As for treatment and quarantine, the League expressed its gratitude to the DepEd for allowing LGUs to use schools as quarantine facilities. This served as a boost and support to cities in strengthening containment and isolation efforts.

In our effort to influence national policies on strengthening health governance, the League participated in a dialogue with the DOH-Bureau of Local Health Systems Development where LCP representatives provided key inputs and updates on the challenges experienced by cities and the innovations implemented to address these concerns. These inputs were

then relayed by the DOH in a meeting with international developmental partners. The League strives to continue engaging the DOH and other partners in health to improve health service delivery and health outcomes for all Filipinos.

Substantive Education Financing

Education continues to be a critical issue for member cities, particularly on liberalizing the use of the Special Education Fund (SEF). The League continued its coordination and engagement with oversight agencies namely the Department of Education (DepEd), the DILG, and the DBM to appeal for more flexibility in the use of the SEF. Among the priority issues for discussion is the updating of the Joint Memorandum Circular on the SEF to make the policy more responsive to the needs of learners amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Policy dialogues are also scheduled with these agencies in August to obtain consensus in expediting the approval of the updated circular.

Parallel efforts are undertaken in legislative engagements to promote a more long-term institutional reform for the expansion of the use of the SEF. The League took part in committee deliberations and TWG meetings on inclusive education, liberalization of the SEF guidelines, and empowerment of the local school boards. In these issues, the League reiterated its position to support bills that aim to improve the leeway and flexibility of LGUs in using the SEF. In particular, SBN 1579 is anticipated as a game-changer bill as it seeks to enhance the

COVID-19 POLICY INITIATIVES OF THE LCP

10 FEBRUARY 2020 POLICY NOTE

Key Points from the Dialogue of President Duterte with local chief executives

MARCH 2020 DOCUMENTATION

IATF-EID updates, presidential briefings, and the President's reports on the Bayanihan Act

23 APRIL 2020 POLICY NOTE

A Three-Pronged Approach to Responsive Local Health Strategies on COVID-19

20 MAY 2020 ONLINE DIALOGUE

DOH Guidelines on Expanded Testing by DOH Usec. Maria Rosario Vergeire

21 MAY 2020 POLICY NOTE

Guidance for LGUs on Rationalizing the Use of Test Kits

25 JUNE 2020 BRIEFER

Cities' Frequently Asked Questions on COVID-19 Testing

06 JULY 2020 BRIEFER

Elevating the Role of Cities in Basic Education

09 JULY 2020 BRIEFER

Baguio City's Best Practice in Contact Tracing

10 JULY 2020 ONLINE DIALOGUE

Strengthening the Role of Cities in the Future of Basic Education with DOH Usec. Annalyn Sevilla

21 JULY 2020 ONLINE DIALOGUE

Contact Tracing with Contact Tracing Czar and Baguio City Mayor Benjie Magalong



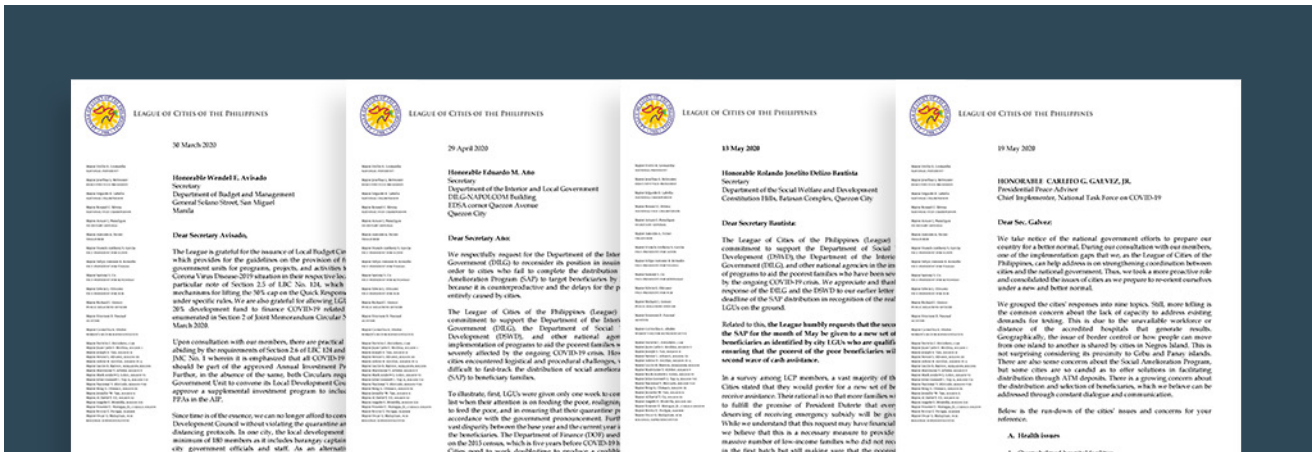
functions of Local School Boards in deciding local priorities as well as the strategic allocation of the SEF. The cohesiveness of the bill's components and the transformation of the Local School Board paved way for the support of the League and the withdrawal of its earlier position focusing on the negative list. The LCP is also coordinating closely with the House Committee on Basic Education to participate in the ongoing deliberations on their counterpart bill for the expansion of the use of the SEF.

Responding to the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on education, the League monitored and participated in activities related to the opening of classes and implementation of the DepEd's Basic Education - Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP). It also sought the position of member cities on the proposed opening of classes on 24 August 2020.

The League made sure that it took part in national dialogues with the Department of Education. On 11 and 12 June 2020, it

joined the Senate Committee on Basic Education inquiry on the Learning Continuity Plan of the DepEd as well as the special meeting of the Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines (ULAP) on the resumption of classes amid the COVID-19 crisis. In the Senate Committee meeting, the League manifested its support to the pronouncement of President Duterte to delay face-to-face classes until a COVID-19 vaccine is available. It also expressed its concerns regarding the disparities between learners that may be widened due to differences in accessing available learning modalities. Meanwhile, in the ULAP special meeting, LCP President Mayor Leonardia relayed the appeal of cities for DepEd to move the opening of classes from August to October.

Heeding the request of member cities for a more focused dialogue on their basic education concerns, the League facilitated a webinar between member cities and DepEd Undersecretary Annalyn Sevilla in partnership with CAN Philippines. During the webinar, Usec. Sevilla elaborated on



The League sends executive correspondences to heads of national government agencies to make sure that the concerns of city mayors are directly communicated to the national government during the ongoing pandemic. These letters aim to strengthen alignment between the local and national governments on various strategies to address COVID-19.

the implementation of the BE-LCP as well as the key roles of LGUs. The League also disseminated a policy brief on salient points for the localization of the BE-LCP to guide its member cities.

Overall, the League maximizes all possible access points and platforms to continue its advocacy of making local programs and financing for education more responsive to the needs of learners, even amid the COVID-19 crisis.

More Inclusive Social Welfare Programs

Prior to the imposition of the community quarantine, the League sought to forge linkages with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) for the implementation of the graduation and exit strategy of the *Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program* (4Ps) beneficiaries. The support of cities to the poorer sectors of the population play a critical role in preventing setbacks among graduates of the said welfare program. The DSWD expressed their interest in collaborating with the League in documenting success stories and piloting the proposed graduation strategy modern in selected highly urbanized cities. However, this proposed partnership has been shelved due to more pressing concerns related to the COVID-19 response.

The adverse impacts of the pandemic were felt strongly by the poorer sectors of society, especially members of the informal sector who needed financial support from the national government. LGUs played a central role in the identification of the beneficiaries and the distribution of the Social Amelioration Program (SAP). As such, the League endeavored to provide timely information to member cities to guide them in the implementation of the emergency subsidy program. It also elevated their concerns regarding the local implementation of the program to relevant government agencies.

The League developed and disseminated a briefer on the role of LGUs in the different subsidy programs of the government. In response to the appeal of member cities, it also relayed to DILG Secretary Eduardo Año the request of LGUs to extend the deadline for the validation of beneficiaries. Thankfully, the

secretary granted the appeal and recognized the League in its advisory extending the validation deadline. To accommodate as much local beneficiaries as possible, the League also wrote a letter to DSWD Secretary Rolando Bautista to the expand the list of beneficiaries for the second tranche of the SAP. Lastly, the League continues to monitor the provision of SAP emergency subsidy and the corresponding role of LGUs especially with the impending enactment of the Bayanihan 2 Law.

LSIs and Returning OFWs

Among the urgent concerns of cities on COVID-19 relate to protocols on the management of returning residents such as locally stranded individuals (LSIs) and returning overseas Filipino workers (OWFs). On 05 June 2020, the League, represented by LCP President Mayor Evelio R. Leonardia and LCP Chair and Cebu City Mayor Edgardo Labella participated in the dialogue between the IATF-EID and LGUs on protocols for returning residents. Mayor Leonardia clarified that LGUs should still be allowed to implement local health protocols such as re-testing and quarantine upon arrival of the individual. This was affirmed by the Department of National Defense Secretary Delfin Lorenzana. The League relayed the other concerns of cities through a letter to the IATF-EID following the dialogue.

The League also monitored succeeding discussions on locally-stranded individuals such as the meeting of the League of Provinces of the Philippines on building consensus on protocols for LSIs and the meeting of the *Hatid Tulong* Team with DILG Regional Offices. In August, the League is set to participate in the ULAP special meeting with the NTF COVID-19 that will discuss new updates on the protocols for the management of returning LSIs.

Reliable Transportation

The League manifested its position on bills which seek to improve the road system in the country and enhancing alternative modes of transportation. It expressed its reservation on the total prohibition of single motors, pedicabs, and tricycles on major roads and recommended a provision for these alternative modes of transportation. Meanwhile, the



Top: Ormoc City Mayor Richard Gomez (second from left) welcomes members of the National Solid Waste Management Commission (NSWMC) prior the presentation of the city's solid waste management (SWM) plan; **above:** Masbate City Mayor Rowena Tuason (seated, left) joins the NSWMC for the presentation of the city's SWM plan.

League supported proposals that seek to mainstream the use of bicycles and other forms of mobility.

The League also worked with civil society organizations to make public transportation more accessible and efficient amid mobility restrictions due to COVID-19. The League met with the Move as One Coalition to explore the option of service contracting public utility vehicles and the establishment of bicycle lanes. As part of the next steps, the League plans to discuss the salient details with LCP Focal Mayor for Mobility and Transportation and Bacoor City Mayor Lani Mercado-Revilla to consider the possibility of endorsing the proposal in the LCP National Executive Board Meeting.

Environmental Conservation and Protection

The League has been actively participating in various bills geared towards environmental preservation and conservation. As an active member of the National Solid Waste Management Commission (NSWMC), the League participated in the deliberation of the 10-Year Solid Waste Management Plan of the cities of Ormoc, Tacloban, and Calbayog on 19-21 February 2020. It also supported the position of the NSWMC on the establishment of waste-to-energy (WTE) facilities to manage solid wastes. The relevant committees in both Houses of Congress invited various stakeholders to discuss bills that will institutionalize the WTE industry and identify additional functions of various government offices such as local government units. The WTE bills will also give authority to LGUs to partner and explore cooperation on undertakings and joint ventures to identify a common WTE facility provider.

The League supported the proposal to institutionalize the WTE industry in the country. The establishment of WTE

facilities is a strategic technological solution to challenges in the implementation of the Solid Waste Management Act, with the added benefit of energy production. The League supports the crafting of meaningful legislation that will provide clarity on existing policies and will enhance the provisions of the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act enacted 20 years ago. LCP remains a strong advocate of an innovative and sustainable solution to solid waste management.

In various congressional deliberations and national agency meetings, the League recommended the finalization of specific guidelines for clustering of LGUs based on the recommendations of the NSWMC, including the establishment of specific requirements for the pre-establishment phase. The League also recommends the provision of clear mandates for the Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the NSWMC. The League also called for clarity regarding the financial arrangements for establishing WTE facilities and the partnership mechanisms that are available for local government units. Lastly, it recommended revisions on the penalty provisions to safeguard the ecological balance with health, general welfare, and safety of the community.

Energy Efficiency and Clean Air

The League also participates in meetings and workshops related to energy efficiency and conservation to clarify the roles and functions of cities. On 17 to 18 February 2020, the League participated in a small group discussion on the Nationally-Determined Contribution and the Energy Efficiency Conservation Act organized by the Department of Energy (DOE) to discuss how the agency can assist LGUs in contributing to the attainment of the NDC.

On 12 February 2020, the League participated in the workshop organized by Clean Air Asia as part of the *Clean Air for a Sustainable Future: A Transdisciplinary Approach to Mitigate Emissions of Black Carbon in Metro Manila, Philippines (TAME-BC) Project*. The TAME-BC Project aims to reduce black carbon (BC) emission levels in the rapidly urbanizing megacity of Metro Manila and to raise the awareness on air pollution. The said workshop was participated by various stakeholders from the national government agencies and local government units. It provided an avenue for researchers to discuss various concerns on air pollution and became a collaborative learning exchange of practices and solutions among the participants.

Representatives from the Cities of Manila and Quezon, as their pilot sites, shared their ongoing mitigation programs and policies following the Clean Air Act and Climate Change Adaptation Program. Clean Air Asia hopes to discuss more of the project with the rest of the local chief executives in Metro Manila to synchronize strategies on mitigating the negative effects of BC on public health and the environment.

Manila Bay Rehabilitation

The League managed to adopt a three-pronged approach in the rehabilitation of the Manila Bay by participating in policy meetings and programmatic initiatives. These include the Sub-Committee on Water Resources convened by the NEDA, the



LCP Deputy Executive Director Veronica Hitois (leftmost) visits League of Municipalities of the Philippines (LMP) Secretary-General and Mayor of Barcelona, Sorsogon Cynthia Falcotelo-Fortes (seated) and LMP Executive Director Andrea Loriaga (second from right) to discuss possible avenues of collaboration in promoting inter-local cooperation to improve the solid waste management in the Manila Bay region.

consultations on reducing marine litter in Manila Bay organized by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and its partnership with the Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG International).

On 17 February 2020, the League attended the 34th Board Meeting of the NEDA Infrastructure Sub-Committee on Water Resources wherein the members discussed the creation of an independent water regulator for water supply and sanitation, water security roadmap for Metro Manila, and the updates on the bill that seeks to establish the Department of Water Resources (DWR). In the current master plan of the Manila Bay, it is envisioned that a separate agency attached to the DWR will be created specifically to implement the action plan for its rehabilitation.

On 28 January 2020, the League participated in the Program Assessment Workshop organized by EcoWaste Coalition to assess the magnitude of pollution in the Manila Bay area. The meeting provided background information on the municipal waste recycling program implemented by the cities of Navotas, Malabon, Manila, Las Piñas, and Parañaque given that significant communities or barangays in these cities are located in the Manila Bay region. The EcoWaste Coalition project aims to improve knowledge of stakeholders on plastic pollution in Manila Bay and raise people's awareness through research with the help of academic institutions such as De La Salle University - Dasmariñas and the University of Santo Tomas.

The last piece of the puzzle in the efforts of the League to contribute to the rehabilitation of Manila Bay is through its partnership with the VNG International. The League's fruitful long-term partnership with the Dutch organization has yielded another project that will help improve the capacities of cities in the rehabilitation of Manila Bay. For 2020, the *Governance of Inclusive Green Growth in Cities (DEALS) Program* will work with cities along the Manila Bay in establishing the Coastal Line of

Defense as a flood prevention strategy indicated in the Manila Bay Sustainable Development Master Plan (MBSDMP). With funding support from the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the duration of the project will be from January to December 2020 and will include a series of webinars for stakeholders in various levels of cooperation. •



Project Development and Implementation

The League continues to develop and manage existing projects for the benefit of cities despite the ongoing pandemic. From January to June 2020, it managed to reach the highest number of responses to its City Database Project. As a result, the League is harvesting the benefits of a credible database as evidenced by the organization's informed policymaking, innovative project development, and creation of meaningful partnerships.

During this period, the League also successfully negotiated its education initiative in partnership with The Asia Foundation and updated its approach to the implementation of the *Promoting Gender and Development (GAD) Advocacy in Philippine Cities Through Establishment and Strengthening of GAD Focal Point Systems (GFPS) Project*.

Relevance and Strengths of the LCP City Database Project

Early on into the middle of 2016, the previous LCP National Executive Board recognized the importance of building and investing in its own database where pertinent information on member cities will be kept for use by the League for its policy and advocacy work and program development. This data repository, managed and implemented by the League's Secretariat, eventually became the go-to reference to aid service delivery to member cities.

While the bulk of data collection and validation activities began in 2018, the 2019-2022 LCP National Executive Board welcomed and adopted the continuation of the City Database Project as the current administration's flagship initiative as they saw its contributions in improving the League's functions, including membership services. This 2020, the League is now reaping the benefits of the project: comprehensive city

data and best practices pointing to a more data-driven and evidence-based policy positioning and programming.

As of July 2020, an average of 60% of cities have responded to the fifteen (15) sets of city database survey instruments. Data collection covered the following offices in local governments: (1) Agriculture; (2) Assessor; (3) Business Permit and Licensing; (4) Disaster Risk Reduction and Management; (5) Environment and Natural Resources; (6) Gender and Development; (7) Health; (8) Information; (9) Planning and Development; (10) Social Welfare and Development; (11) Tourism; (12) Treasury; and (13) Urban Poor Affairs and/or Housing. While technically not supervised by local governments, the City Database also included the city offices of the Bureau of Fire Protection and the Philippine National Police in its data gathering.

Across various sectors, from environment to local economy, revenue, and COVID-19 response, use of data is crucial in manifesting informed positions of cities on pressing issues related to local governance. For the first half of 2020, the League has been prolific in articulating the voice of cities through its policy and advocacy work. The City Database supported this aspect of the League's work by supplying evidences in the form of data.

Similarly, project development during the first half of the year remained business as usual and responsive to calls for proposals despite the sudden uncertainty initially brought by the pandemic. Development of concept notes, independently and in collaboration with various development partners, was significantly strengthened by the City Database—from identifying issues to be addressed by the project, substantiating city selection criteria, and providing context to the project's objectives and expected outputs, among others. All these



Above left: Members of the LCP City Database Project pay a courtesy call to Iloilo City Mayor Jerry Treñas (middle) during the team's validation visit; **above right:** The League supported the conduct of Bacolod City's National Women's Month Celebration kick-off ceremony as part of the LCP's GFPS Project PHOTO BY THE LGU OF BACOLOD CITY



referred to data sourced from the project. While the pandemic altered the development sector landscape brought by the shift in priorities by funding donors and beneficiaries towards COVID-19 response, the League has quickly responded and changed its velocity towards aggressive search for funding opportunities that can potentially support the COVID-19 responses of cities. The collected best practices and initiatives of cities gathered through the COVID-19 LGU Watch, were good additions to the growing repository of the City Database.

Lastly, as to forging partnerships and collaboration, the City Database ignited and captured the interest of development partners and the private sector to work with the League brought by project's robust and reliable data management system.

Informed Policymaking

Strategic use of city data was manifested in the League's feedback to both houses of Congress and various national government agencies in the form of well-informed position papers and policy briefs:

- **Data on cities' environment and natural resources** backed the League's response on the ongoing discussions on waste-to-energy technology and facilities.
- **Data on business permit and licensing of cities** were used to illustrate business permit processing duration in cities to support comment on the Bureau of Internal Revenue's (BIR) memorandum to remove the mayor's permit in the business permit application process.
- **Demographic and revenue data of cities** support ongoing discussions on liberalizing the utilization of the Special Education Fund (SEF).
- **Data on topography of cities** were used in response to DILG's request for inputs to the draft memorandum circular in establishing bicycle lanes and walking paths, among others.

Another notable purpose of the City Database was when the League asserted to the DSWD its recommendation to extend the deadline of submission of actual socio-economic and employment data of cities to be used in the selection of aid beneficiaries under the Social Amelioration Program of the national government. COVID-19 data of cities along with demographic and socio-economic data were also utilized in developing a policy note on resiliency planning.

Innovative Project Development

The use of local city data has always been fundamental in the League's project development work. City profiles from the city database are consulted when developing project proposals and concept notes. This ensures that proposed interventions are responsive and complement the needs and issues of cities. This is illustrated in the concept note developed by the League in collaboration with ICLEI Southeast Asia in response to the European Commission's *Local Call for Proposals for Civil Society Organizations in the Philippines* submitted in April 2020. As project co-applicant, the League assisted ICLEI in formulating the selection criteria for the pilot cities, organized scoping missions in the target cities, and ensured the soundness and relevance of the project concept and activity budget by contributing to the proposal writing. The said project proposal aims to empower the civil society in accessing wider and institutionalized spaces in particular such as the environment, disaster management, and social protection.

Particular attention was given to women-led housing and urban design in the concept note submitted to the Rockefeller Foundation's third round of Co-Impact Grant also in April 2020. The proposed initiative aims to support pilot cities in lifting structural barriers in women's property ownership and engage them in sustainable urban design.

Last January 2020, the League also responded to the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law, and Development's call for proposals for the *Women2030 Sub-grant for National Monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals and Development Justice*. In the League's proposal, it aims to contribute to the national



Above left, right: Members of the League's GFPS Project visit the LGU of Mandaluyong City to gather information on the local government's gender and development (GAD) activities, particularly best practices and challenges in mainstreaming GAD in local strategies and programs

government by ensuring that the laws supporting Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are properly and effectively implemented; help local governments in institutionalizing national laws at the local level; gather new perspectives and approaches in monitoring and reporting SDGs; and strengthen the organization's grasp of gender-responsive local governance. The proposal also aims to complement the League's ongoing project on creating and strengthening GAD Focal Point Systems in cities.

Meaningful Partnerships and Collaboration

It should be important to note that the efforts of putting up the League's City Database ignited the interest of development partners and members of the private sector. The World Bank Group reached out to the League to discuss its *Green and Resilient Development in Selected Secondary Cities in the Philippines Technical Assistance Program*. In turn, the League assisted the financial institution in refining the city selection criteria of the program.

Discussions with Chemonics International also took place as inputs from the League informed areas of possible collaboration for the anticipated *Cities for Enhanced Governance and Engagement (CHANGE) Project* funded by USAID. The project aims to support the national government's thrusts on people-centered, clean, and efficient government per the *2017-2022 Philippine Development Plan*. It banks on the principle of establishing strong partnerships and enabling collective actions between LGUs and communities to be able to bring governance closer to the people. The first phase of the project will be implemented in the target cities of USAID's *Strengthening Urban Resilience for Growth with Equity (SURGE) Project* namely Batangas, Cagayan de Oro, General Santos, Iloilo, Legazpi, Puerto Princesa, Tagbilaran, and Zamboanga. Phase 2 cities will be identified by USAID in accordance with its existing efforts and considerations.

UNDP Philippines has also involved the League, particularly the team behind the City Database Project, to participate in the series of discussions and user acceptance testing exercises in developing its SDG Dashboard. The League has been helpful

in identifying important information related to SDG indicators that are available in cities and shared feedback on the design and features of the dashboard that are user-friendly to the public, particularly those from local governments.

In a similar initiative, the Liveable Cities Challenge, which initially expressed their interest to collaborate for an integrated cities dashboard, has invited the League to be part of and become a co-presenter to its Liveable Cities Labs, an online platform for a series of webinars which aims to share innovation, best practices, and solutions for cities especially in the time of COVID-19.

Successful Negotiation and Better Implementation of Existing Initiatives

In 2019, the League obtained funding support for its gender-related initiative called *Promoting Gender and Development (GAD) Advocacy in Philippine Cities Through Establishment and Strengthening of GAD Focal Point Systems (GFPS) Project* from the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI), a local competitive grant funded by the Embassy of Canada in the Philippines. A multi-year funding was granted to the project, extending implementation for two fiscal years (FYs) from 2019 to 2021.

Project highlights for the first half of 2020 include the successful conduct of finance monitoring by representatives from the Embassy of Canada in January 2020 and the completion of validation visits to the 12 target cities for FY 1 in early March 2020. City GFPS and GAD-related initiatives and best practices of the following cities were gathered: Baybay, Dumaguete, Island Garden City of Samal, Lamitan, Mandaluyong, Masbate, Passi, Quezon, Roxas, Tagum, Tayabas, and Zamboanga. During the project team's validation visit in Mandaluyong City, they were joined by a representative from the Embassy of Canada for their project monitoring visit. The project team received positive feedback in its conduct of validation interviews as they saw the value of data extracted from face-to-face key informant interviews.

Also, part of FY 1 activities is the project's participation in the National Women's Month Celebration (NWMC) of Bacolod City in March 2020. The project team met with representatives

from the Bacolod City Council, City Mayor's Office, and City Social Welfare and Development Office to discuss the event preparations. The project was able to sponsor the event commemorative shirts which the city government used in its NWMC kick-off ceremony. However, due to travel restrictions brought by COVID-19 in March, representatives from the League and the Embassy of Canada were not able to participate in the NWMC closing ceremony. In the same month, the project team also submitted its narrative and finance report for the closing of FY 1.

For FY 2, the League has re-strategized project implementation beginning August 2020 towards March 2021. It will shift to online platforms for most of its activities, including the validation exercises. The League has already submitted its proposed changes to FY 2 activities and budget to the Embassy of Canada. Despite the pandemic, the League will continue to reach out to cities to document their gender-related best practices and issues through the project.

Apart from gender and development, the League was able to successfully negotiate an education project. Designed to support the objectives of the *Advancing Basic Education in the Philippines (ABC+) Project* developed by USAID and the Department of Education (DepEd), the League was tapped by The Asia Foundation to lead the implementation of a project under the ABC+ entitled *Cities' System Capacity Development (Ci-Cap) Project*. The USAID-funded project aims to build and strengthen cities' system capacity and commitment to plan, mobilize, and manage resources in support of improved learning outcomes of children at the primary level. To achieve

this, project activities include scoping missions through desk research, organizing webinars on education financing, conducting policy dialogues on SEF utilization, and organizing a learning exchange and education summit for its culminating activity.

This one-year engagement will allow pilot cities from the Bicol and Western Visayas Regions to showcase their best practices in education and make use of their experiences as evidences and inputs to the ongoing amendments of the Special Education Fund guidelines. Moreover, pilot cities will be introduced to a vast network of education stakeholders which can facilitate access to funding especially for demonstration projects.

Disruptions to the project implementation brought by COVID-19 allowed the project to maximize the use of technology by collaborating with the COVID-19 Action Network (CAN) Philippines in organizing a webinar entitled *Strengthening the Roles of Cities in the Future of Basic Education* last July 2020. The League, through this project, is also looking into holding a series of dialogues with DepEd. The timeliness of the webinars and online discussions highlighted the project's responsiveness to the urgent issues on education brought by the COVID-19 pandemic. ●

CROSS-CUTTING IMPACTS OF THE LCP CITY DATABASE PROJECT

INFORMED POLICYMAKING



Strategic use of data was demonstrated in the League's feedback to both houses of Congress and various national government agencies through well-informed position papers and policy briefs.

INNOVATIVE PROJECT DEVELOPMENT



City profiles from the database were consulted when developing project proposals as demonstrated in the concept notes prepared for international funders.

MEANINGFUL PARTNERSHIPS



The project ignited the interest of development partners and members of the private sector, including the World Bank, Chemonics International, UNDP Philippines, and the Liveable Cities Challenge.



Global Exchanges and Networking

The League continues to make its presence felt in the global arena by representing Philippine cities in high-level events such as the 10th Session of the World Urban Forum in Abu Dhabi, UAE. These international engagements proved to be beneficial to the League and its members in terms of wider networking opportunities that can yield project partnerships and technical assistance to cities. The League's growing international presence and its membership to global-local government associations, particularly its positions held in UCLG-ASPAC and CityNet, have become more essential in knowledge transfer.

COVID-19 has greatly impacted the nature of engagement with these associations that thrive on conferences and dialogues, among others. Despite this challenge, the League remained relevant by continuously participating in international webinars mostly focused on the sharing of best practices related to COVID-19 response. City mayors have been invited to become resource speakers in these webinars, which highlighted our similarities and affinities with other nations.

LCP Participates in WUF10

On 08-13 February 2020, the League participated in the 10th Session of the World Urban Forum (WUF10), a non-legislative technical forum convened by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) since 2002. It is recognized as the foremost thought leadership forum in the field of sustainable urban development and human settlements.

Jointly organized with the Abu Dhabi Department of Urban Planning and Municipalities, WUF10's theme of *Cities of Opportunities: Connecting Culture and Innovation* cuts across various development agenda related to finance, urban development, housing, culture, national heritage, innovation,

science, and information technology. The event became a strategic opportunity for multi-stakeholder cooperation in the implementation of the New Urban Agenda and the SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities and drew participation from local and national leaders, government officials, civil society, academia, private sector, grassroots, and other policy and decision-makers from around the world.

As a result of the League's participation in the event, Philippine cities are set to benefit from two urban projects successfully negotiated during the networking sessions. These are projects related to the integrated neighborhood approaches to urban planning and management and the development of socialized housing projects in the Philippines. Both initiatives will be implemented in partnership with the UN Environment Programme.

The League also presented at a side event called "Circular Economy: Changing the Way We Think About Jobs," and at a One UN event on "The Law and Climate Change Toolkit." In both engagements, the LCP shared the various strategies of cities in achieving resource efficiencies such as the experience in Sorsogon City. LCP narrated how the city was able to translate and mainstream a highly technical concept of urban metabolism into the way the city is being planned.

In the session called "Financing the Sustainable Development Goals," the League articulated the importance of setting up a comprehensive financing framework for the SDGs which follows the guidelines set out in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.

The League also witnessed the presentation of Sipalay City Mayor Maria Gina Lizares on her city's executive agenda called *Sustainable GAINS: Goals 2022 on Localizing the Sustainable*



Above left: LCP Deputy Executive Director Veronica Hitosis (third from right) serves as a panelist at a session in the 10th World Urban Forum; **above right:** Sipalay City Mayor Maria Gina Lizares (left) shares her city's SDG-related programs at a session on community engagement; **right:** Iloilo City Mayor Jerry Treñas presents his city's initiatives to respond and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic at an online forum organized by CityNet



Goals, Advancement, Innovation and Inclusivity, Nutrition, Safety and Security at a session that tackles the importance of community engagement. The mayor's participation in WUF10 is part of the activities of the Mayor's Academy where she was successfully chosen as one of the pioneering fellows of the said international program.

Annual Meeting of the UCLG CIB Working Group

On 17 June 2020, the League participated in the annual meeting of the Capacity and Institution Building (CIB) Working Group of the United Cities and Local Government (UCLG) chaired by VNG International and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. The three-hour meeting revolved around the role of associations in a COVID-19 scenario where access to finance and international cooperation might take a hit due to the economic impact of the pandemic.

One particular session during the meeting discussed the shift from international travel to distant technical assistance of ongoing international cooperation programs between local governments. Participants were presented with examples of cities adjusting well to distance learning due to reliable internet connection as well as cities that are struggling to provide the same due to poor internet connectivity.

Iloilo Shares Experience in CityNet Session on COVID-19

On 9 June 2020, the League participated in an online session organized by CityNet which focused on the impacts of business continuity plans (BCPs) during the pandemic by covering not only health issues, but also social, economic, and political aspects of the crisis.

As one of the speakers of the session, Iloilo City Mayor Jerry Treñas presented his city's initiatives in response to the current public health emergency. These include the activation of the city's emergency operations center; the creation of the Iloilo City COVID-19 and Compliance Teams; relief assistance to barangays; Kitchen Patrol for frontliners; livelihood assistance for ambulant vendors and the LGBT community; and deferment of taxes.

Mayor Treñas also shared Iloilo City's exit plan which prioritizes industries to increase economic relevance as well as the four pillars of his rehabilitation and economic recovery plan which include infrastructure projects, livelihood opportunities, financial channels, and cooperation with provinces and municipalities located in Region VI. ●



Administrative Updates

The LCP Secretariat Works from Home

The first half of the year saw a major disruption in the regular operations of the LCP Secretariat due to the COVID-19 pandemic. With the imposition of community quarantine in the country in March, the Secretariat had to adopt a work-from-home arrangement to ensure that it remains available to attend to the needs of its member cities especially during the ongoing public health crisis. Various work schedules and protocols were also implemented in accordance with the guidelines of IATF-EID and with the approval of the LCP Secretary-General.

Financial Assistance to Cities

It is important to note that for the first half of the year, the League also extended financial aid to member cities that were struck by natural disasters and declared a state of calamity in January. These include the cities of Borongan and Tacloban from Region VIII that were affected by Typhoon Ursula and the cities of Batangas, Sto. Tomas, Tanauan, and Lipa from Region IV-A that were affected by the eruption of the Taal Volcano. •



PHOTO BY THE LGU OF TARLAC CITY

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic became an opportunity for cities to zero in on the essentials of public service. It allowed local governments to continue finding ways to deliver to their constituents in this time of great need. As such, the League will stay committed in providing timely and relevant services to its members as the country braces towards a new normal. We will be with our member cities every step of the way in creating strategies that will help them survive this pandemic. Even as the public health situation remains unstable, one thing is certain: good local governance will help cities tide over the current crisis, adjust to a new normal, and build back better.

Two international activities co-organized by the LCP and its network of partners may have been postponed as a result of COVID-19: the International River Summit in Legazpi City and the Clean Air Summit in Iloilo City. However, for the remaining half of 2020, we will intensify our knowledge sharing activities on health, environment, and education, with governance as the unifying theme. We will bank on the strengths of our partnerships in braving these challenging times:

- Urban Resilience with UN Habitat in October to December 2020
- Effective implementation of the Basic Education - Learning Continuity Plan from July to December 2020
- Governance of Inclusive Green Growth in Cities September to December 2020
- Liveable Cities Labs by the Liveable Cities Challenge
- Vaccine Confidence Program from September to December 2020
- Investment Forum of the Building Climate Resilience Through Urban Plans and Designs in October to November 2020

Together, let's create sustainable and resilient cities. ●



PHOTO BY THE LGU OF NAVOTAS CITY



PHOTO BY THE LGU OF CEBU CITY



PHOTO BY THE LGU OF SAN JUAN CITY

