

Sustainable Development in the World's Center of Marine Biodiversity: Puerto Galera's PPP Experience

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Tourism is the lifeblood of Puerto Galera. It is the main source of income for the residents and a major source of revenue for the local government. Tourist arrivals have risen from 138,000 in 2002 to 637,000 in 2003 and, reportedly, to more than 1 million in 2004. Along with the growth of commercial activities, the municipality is faced with the challenge of making the tourism boom a sustainable activity by limiting the damage that rapid and unplanned development brings to the environment.

The Sabang Sewerage Collection and Treatment System is an initiative of the Municipality of Puerto Galera, initiated as a consequence of the clamor by the local community to provide a lasting solution to the issue of uncontrolled sewage discharges to the coastal waters. The sewage discharges to Puerto Galera's coastal areas raised fears of bacteriological contamination of beaches, which would undermine the municipality's tourism economy. This also became a cause of concern to environmental groups due to the community's close proximity to a highly sensitive marine biodiversity area, i.e., the Verde Island Passage.

The sewerage project was not a new idea; collecting user fees was not a new approach; and private sector participation in water supply and sanitation services was not a new mechanism. However these were 'innovative' options for a small municipality like Puerto Galera. People tended to see the innovations in different ways – a breakthrough, a transformation, a leap of faith. They also acknowledged the innovative approaches' close ties with risk, hence the hesitancy to move forward. It was therefore imperative to pay more attention to the prevailing institutional environment, including the legal, political, financial and social challenges – which could make or break the sewerage project.

The paper will address how Puerto Galera overcame the many challenges, and was able to engage the private sector as a partner in the development, implementation and financing of the project.



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