



Partners in Aid

AUSTRALIA

SINANGPAD HEALTHY VILLAGE PROJECT ANNUAL REPORT 2024

Background

The Sinangpad Healthy Village Project (SHVP) began around seventeen years ago. Several years before, AusAID had phased out a seven-year project which had a key component focussing on community health development. This project achieved some significant outcomes. However, once the project was phased out, the province did not have the funds to continue the community development activities that the project had initiated. Much of what had been started during the project faded away.

A donation to Partners in Aid specifically for work in Kalinga enabled the community health development activities funded by AusAID to be resurrected, taking into account lessons learnt. A new NGO, Sinangpad Association, Inc., was established and officially registered, with most of the members being health service professionals who had participated in the AusAID project.

Since its establishment, the goal of the Sinangpad Association has been to achieve sustained health improvements in remote Kalinga villages by enabling the residents **themselves** to identify and resolve local environmental risks to health and well-being, starting with what they consider to be the priority for the community.

The project has been funded in several distinct phases, each phase building on lessons learnt from the previous phase and expanding to new geographical areas. The current phase of the project, Phase III, was approved by Partners in Aid (PIA) just before the Covid-19 pandemic began. However, due to lockdowns of the villages, the need for a number of the Sinangpad Association members who were health professionals to commit all their time to vaccinations and other Covid-related activities, and some health workers linked to Sinangpad contracting Covid-19 themselves, Sinangpad Association was temporarily unable to continue implementing the project.

Virtually no money was transferred to Sinangpad Association during the pandemic. A revised version of the proposal was approved by the Board in 2022, and by July 2023, the SHVP was back in action, although implementation is still temporarily subject to a number of constraints, as discussed below.

Local Context

The Sinangpad Healthy Village Project (SHVP) is implemented in the Province of Kalinga, a northern province of Luzon, the main island in the Philippine Archipelago.

The Province of Kalinga is landlocked. Part of the province is mountainous, with steep slopes, plateaux, and valleys. In the other part, there are foothills with wide areas of flat lands and floodplains along the main rivers. Rice is the key crop across the province, although coffee has grown in importance.

Many Kalingan villages in the mountainous areas have been settled on ground levelled out on steep mountain slopes. The region suffers from frequent typhoons during the typhoon season which, in these mountainous areas, often cause landslides damaging to homes and local infrastructure. A number of sanitary toilets constructed with the help of the SHVP were recently lost in a major typhoon: traditionally, if households did build a toilet, they built pit latrines that smelt bad and therefore were built as far away as possible from the home. This usually meant next to the edge of a steep slope. Despite the fact that the sanitary toilets supported by the SHVP do not smell, families have often continued to build them in areas potentially subject to landslides. Sinangpad is now trying to ensure that households do not do this.

Most of the Kalingan population belong to indigenous tribal groups: there are 6 main tribes and over 30 sub-tribes. In former times, the ethnic tribes of Kalinga were fierce warriors and conflict between different tribes was not uncommon. Residents of villages still tend to all belong to a particular tribal group. Tribal identity and loyalty are still strongly felt. This can be both an advantage and a disadvantage to the implementation of the SHVP. On one hand, tribal conflicts still occur from time to time. This year, the re-emergence of a long-standing land boundary dispute between two sub-tribes in the western part of the province (Tinglayan) forced the postponement of several planned Sinangpad activities. When there is a conflict between tribes it can be difficult for members of one tribe – and Sinangpad representatives - to travel through a nearby village if residents there belong to the tribe with which there is a dispute. On the other hand, members of a community working together to help each other is still a strongly held value of tribal communities. This has contributed to the project being able to help three of the eight municipalities in Kalinga achieve zero open defecation, as a community will organise itself to help disabled or elderly members to construct their toilet with the materials provided.

Women from indigenous are usually involved in handling money in the home and making important family decisions. However, many still adhere to the traditional roles of wife, mother and homemaker. The SHVP community health development training includes sessions on gender equity and women in development and has brought about some changes in women's roles in some of the communities with which it has been involved.

Kalinga is in the middle cluster of Filipino provinces with respect to poverty: in 2020, 26.8% of families were living below the poverty threshold; 8.8% below the subsistence threshold (extreme poverty – insufficient income to meet basic food needs). Most of the villages are still overly dependent on their National Internal Revenue Allocation (IRA) for their developmental programs and projects, which is never enough to meet all of their key needs. Added to the financial challenges facing communities is the limited agricultural production since much of the land from which the villagers source their staple food (rice and crops) are under ancestral domain from “Kaingin” slash and burn method. There is also lack of income generation due to lack of opportunities and lack of capital.

While the percentage of families in Kalinga below the poverty threshold has dropped significantly over the last five to ten years, there is still very much a need for SHVP to provide funds for poorer households to purchase materials for toilets or other simple infrastructure needed to minimise environmental sanitation health risks. Without Sinangpad's support, it would, for example, be almost impossible for most communities to achieve zero open defecation.

As discussed in last year's AGM, major local environmental risks to health still exist in some Kalingan communities, including:

- unhealthy cultural practices and lack of knowledge regarding health and environmental sanitation,
- lack of sanitary toilets – in some villages, a hectare of land is set aside for open defecation,
- poor drainage, at times providing breeding ground for malaria-carrying mosquitoes,
- garbage thrown anywhere, especially over the precipices located at the entrance of villages,
- pigs and dogs allowed to roam around the village where children play in the dirt, often bare-footed,
- basic sanitation facilities not considered a priority due to poverty, and
- some residential lots are not owned by their occupants, so occupants cannot dig the land for any sanitation facilities, e.g., latrines or compost pits.

Sinangpad Healthy Village Project Goals

As indicated above; in keeping with PIA's mission, the overall goal of the Sinangpad Healthy Village Project is to achieve sustained health improvements in remote Kalinga villages by enabling the residents ***themselves** to identify and resolve the local environmental risks to health and well-being that they consider to be a priority*. Members of the Sinangpad Association believe that sustained improvement in health due to a reduction in local environmental risks can best be achieved by bringing about behavioral change, and helping to remove any barriers that stand in the way of this change. This overriding goal has been constant across each phase of the project since its inception.

To achieve this overriding goal, the Sinangpad Association members have a community health development program with the following objectives:

1. to train residents in community health development, thereby stimulating residents' commitment to adopting healthier behavioural practices, particularly with respect to environmental sanitation, and building the capacity, confidence, and sense of responsibility of residents with respect to reducing local and household risks to their health,
2. to help residents in these communities to identify physical barriers to sustained behavioral change with respect to health, and to develop an action plan based on what **they** decide are **their** priorities with respect to removing these barriers,
3. to encourage the communities to each establish a monitoring or action core group to monitor progress in resolving the health and sanitation concerns in the community.,

4. to help residents with technical advice and money to purchase construction materials, to enable them to implement their action plan priorities,
5. to train volunteer barangay (village) sanitary inspectors in each community (the Sanitation Officer of some of the Rural Health Units conduct regular updates in the different villages, involving the volunteer barangay sanitary inspectors to ensure that agreed indicators of a healthy village are being gradually implemented.
6. to help communities monitor and evaluate their achievements by helping them to establish data boards in prominent locations which record their progress with respect to establishing their village as a healthy village,(e.g., construction of sanitary toilets, pig pens, improved drainage, etc.).

Given this approach to working with communities, the goals that different communities seek to achieve as a result of their participation in the SHVP vary from community to community, although the first priority to be raised is the need for sanitary household toilets.

Specific Goals for 2023-2024

1. In 2023-2024 Sinangpad Association planned to introduce the community health development program into three villages that were not yet participating in the SHVP, as well as to follow the progress of communities already involved in project, especially where there were felt to be a need for further mentoring to sustain any initial outcomes.
2. In 2012, an experimental soap-making group had been established in one of the SHVP communities, Barangay Gawaan, with the purpose of both supplying soap to local residents at a cheaper price that could be bought in the shops, and simultaneously enabling those producing the soap to earn a very small income. For a number of reasons, this soap-making group faded away. In 2023, Barangay Wagud requested that soap-making training be carried out in their community. Another part of the Sinangpad Association plan for 2023-2024 therefore was to fully understand why the Gawaan soap-making group proved not to be sustainable, to establish a new group, as requested and monitor this new group with a view to determining its long-term contribution to the community and its financial viability and sustainability and whether replication elsewhere was desirable.
3. Given the priority attached to the construction of sanitary toilets, it was planned to continue working with three municipalities to help all their villages achieve and sustain government recognition as 'zero open defecation level 2' communities (all households have their own sanitary toilet). Two municipalities had already achieved level 1 recognition, namely that all households had their own sanitary toilet or shared one with no more than one other household).
4. The Sinangpad Association also planned in 2023-2024 to continue to join relevant municipal and provincial local government unit meetings to work towards partnerships between these units and the SHVP and/or the incorporation of some of the project's outcomes into the annual plans of government units.

The Current Situation

As discussed in last year's SHVP Annual Report, following the two-year hiatus in Sinangpad's close involvement with communities during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the disruption the pandemic caused in communities themselves, effort is now required to re-energize and re-motivate some of the previously active communities to re-engage with the SHVP. Village sanitary inspectors have come to the Sinangpad office in Tabuk to raise some concerns about lack of community health progress or about the breakdown of some basic sanitation facilities. Simultaneously, other village leaders have come to the Sinangpad office to inquire about the implementation of the community health initiatives in their respective areas, to find out how to become part of the Sinangpad Healthy Village Project, or to request technical assistance with preparing proposals outlining the help their community needs to undertake their pre-determined priority activities. These issues are slowly being addressed, now that the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is fading, and health professionals volunteering for SHVP have more time for SHVP activities.

However, since Covid-19, a lot of activities are currently being funded by government units to provide the indigenous communities with medical and other assistance (e.g. vaccinations). The Universal Health Care Act of 2019 in the Philippines involves a comprehensive effort across all levels of local government units, including the village local government units. The Department of Health has been active in making sure that everyone is informed and involved. However, this process is challenging for some communities requiring them to handle multiple activities simultaneously. At times this can overwhelm their capacity to absorb all the information and participate fully, leading to their sacrificing many priority activities at the grassroots level, including some of those instigated by the SHVP. While very valuable in themselves, the government interventions often do not provide support for the basic environmental health and sanitation issues which are critical to the health and well-being of the communities. Sinangpad Association members have been attempting to overcome this by facilitating frequent visits of village people to their office and whenever a Sinangpad member visits a village, trying to get to talk to the people on the ground or scheduling small group sessions in the villages whenever they have the opportunity to do so.

Further delays to Sinangpad Association initiatives came from the fact that the triennial elections were held in October 2023. For several months before triennial local Village Council elections most activities the villages cease except for the election-related activities. During this time, it is difficult to mobilise communities to become involved SHVP activities

Outputs/Outcomes Against Specific Goals

- i. Initiatives involving communities already participating in the SHVP community health development program or newly involved with the program*

Work had begun in early 2023 on plans to involve two communities into the SHVP program which had not previously participated. This, however, was in the area in which the land dispute referred to above subsequently escalated, leading to postponement of any Sinangpad activities in this area.

Two other communities were chosen, Barangay Wagud and Barangay Dupligan, and after initial consultations with community leaders, community health development training was carried out. These two communities subsequently submitted proposals to help with what they considered to be community priorities. In both cases the proposals sought funding for

the purchase of materials not locally available (cement, re-enforcement bars, etc.) for the construction of sanitary toilets by households unable to afford to purchase these materials themselves. The money requested in these two proposals was released by Sinangpad before the end of June 2024 and the construction is underway. In addition, Barangay Wagud requested soap-making training in their proposal, which as discussed below, has also been implemented and is being monitored.

Monitoring and mentoring on-site visits were also undertaken to 3 communities which were already involved in the SHVP community health development program but whose progress has been slow.

A meeting of a cluster of village representatives was also undertaken to discuss updating community data boards, which are the means by which communities are encouraged to monitor their progress towards becoming a healthy village.

ii. Evaluation of the financial viability and sustainability of soap-making groups

As indicated above, in their grant proposal, Barangay Wagud, requested training in soap making, as well as money for sanitary toilets. Prior to facilitating the formation and training of such a group, the Sinangpad members carried out consultations in Barangay Gawaan where the group established in 2012 had failed within five years. This failure was triggered by the transfer of the local midwife, who led the group, to another municipality. However, this was not the only factor that contributed to the ultimate failure. Lack of financial literacy had led to poor financial management of the group. The Sinangpad Association has now facilitated the establishment of a soap-making group in Barangay Wagud and trained the members in soap-making and the necessary safety precautions that must be taken during the process. However, this time, the financial management of the group has also been included as part of training. As most of those in the group also work on family farms, care will also be taken this time to better match the timing of soap making sessions with the less busy periods in the agricultural cycle. Monitoring will continue to determine whether this new group can be financially viable and sustainable.

iii. Progress Towards Sustained Community Zero Open Defecation

In 2022-2023, it was decided that the Sinangpad Association would collaborate with other stakeholders in the two municipalities that had already achieved level 1 zero open defecation (the Municipal Health Offices, Village Councils, and the People's Organizations) not only to help with rebuilding toilets that had been destroyed in savage typhoons of the previous year, but to collaborate in an effort to help the villages in these and another municipality to reach the point where every household has its own toilet. In 2023-2024, the SHVP released funding for construction materials for 151 households (This includes those built so far in Wagud and Dupligan as part of their follow-up proposal after the Community Health Development training.))

Developing a strategy for sustaining zero open defecation once achieved was also an important activity in 2023-2024. In some communities that have achieved zero open defecation, new houses have been built without the construction of sanitary toilets. Further, some of the sanitary toilets SHVP has helped to fund in the past are now reaching an age where the single- compartment septic tanks are close to becoming full. (The plan was that when this occurred, households would build a new septic tank nearby and divert pipes to this

new tank. By the time this new tank was full, the contents of the first tank would have dried out, and the tank could be emptied and re-used).

In the post-construction phase, the sustainability strategy requires the volunteer barangay sanitary inspectors: (i) to carry out intermittent reminders to community of the importance of checking out how full their septic tank is, and of starting to construct a second tank when first is nearly full; (ii) to check regularly for any evidence of overflow from any tank; and (iii) to review regularly the results of routine water-testing carried out in their community, and in event of an increase in water-borne diseases or of unsatisfactory water-testing results, carefully inspect toilets to ensure there is no evidence of leakage or overflow, etc and that all toilets are being kept clean.

Plans are currently being made to update the training of the barangay sanitary inspectors with respect to the above tasks, and to arrange to pay them a small annual honorarium for their work.

Once the second septic tanks of some households are nearly full, the SHVP will hold a community workshop on how to safely dig out the dried contents of the first tank, when this can be used for fertiliser, and where it should be disposed of if not being used for fertiliser.

Once zero open defecation has been achieved in a community, the Sinangpad members will work with local government units to ensure that zero open defecation is maintained, by: (i) advocating for ordinances to be passed that have a timeline for new households and households who have lost a toilet due to natural disaster, to construct a sanitary toilet, and penalties for failure to do so; (ii) ensuring that barangays are fully aware of any municipal or village ordinances relating to the construction of toilets, and encourage the enforcement of these ordinances, and (iii) developing a funding strategy to facilitate maintenance of zero open defecation, e.g. can funding be made available by any particular agency to cover the cost of materials for any indigent families who lose a toilet during natural disasters?, can funding be sought from SHVP or other organisation to provide two bags of cement as a bonus to households building a second tank in a timely manner? etc.

Working on the implementation of this sustainability strategy will be a key element in the Sinangpad Association's plans for 2024-2025

Future Specific Goals

Although helping the achievement and sustaining of zero open defecation will continue to be an important part of Sinangpad's ongoing annual action plans, with implementation challenges receding, members will also be undertaking more of the broader range of activities that make up the community health development program, thereby helping to enable communities to improve their health status through both their own actions, and through networking with government agencies and other organizations. Sinangpad will also continue seeking to institutionalise into government departments locally based community health development strategies.

Expenditure

The balance of money brought forward by Sinangpad Association in July 2023 was 437,576.81 pesos (approximately AUD11,345). In anticipation of the activities for 2023-24,

126,427.94 pesos (=AUD3,278) was transferred to the Sinangpad Association by Partners in Aid. Sinangpad Association's expenses during 2023-24. Expenditure however only came to 306,980 pesos (approximately AUD7,959) , leaving them with a balance in hand on June 30 of 257,024.80 pesos (approximately AUD6.664).

(Conversion from Peso to AUD was carried out at the exchange way on 20 October 2024. Therefore, there may be some minor inconsistencies due to exchange rate fluctuations.)

Current and Anticipated Risks and Action to Mitigate Risks

<i>Identified Risk</i>	<i>Likelihood (Low/ Medium/ High)</i>	<i>Impact (Strong/ Moderate/ Weak)</i>	<i>Action taken to Mitigate Risk</i>
Lack of time available to Sinangpad volunteers	Medium	Strong	* Now that the pandemic impact is fading, health professionals volunteering for SHVP anticipate having more time for SHVP activities * SA is also currently mobilized more human resources, particularly from among recently retired health workers.
Increases in prices of necessary building materials and petrol prices for transshipment to isolated rural communities	Medium	Moderate	* Reduce funding of construction materials and community visits
For several months before triennial local Village Council elections (October 1-31, 2023) most activities the villages ceasing except for the election-related activities. During this time, it is difficult to mobilise communities to become involved	Medium	Strong	* Accept that planned meetings may not occur, and that it may be difficult to plan other meetings
The triennial elections can lead to a change in in the Village Captain, sometimes resulting in the new Captain rejecting whatever the previous one supported. This requires more time on the part of SHVP to ensure the new Village Captain is fully committed to the implementation of the	High	Strong	* Meet with new Captain and try and motivate him/her to fully support the changes that were taking place as part of the SHVP
If grants or meetings are held by SHVP during the lead up to elections, they can be mistakenly perceived or presented by candidates as being in support of whoever among the candidates joins the consultation, SHVP thus being seen as being politically aligned to a particular group.	Medium	Mod	* No site visits or undertaken or funding provided in lead up to the elections to avoid false perceptions or distribution of misleading information to the effect that the SHVP supports some village officials

Landslides and destruction of bridges resulting from seasonal typhoons, and tribal land disputes can cause problems transporting construction materials into villages	Low	Mod	*. The only solution is to wait until the road is clear. * Some villages still do not have complete vehicular access. In these cases, men will haul goods manually from the final point on the road to the village center
With the hiatus in close involvement of Sinangpad members with communities during the pandemic, some communities now require re-energizing or remotivate to address sanitation issues basic to health	High	High	
Money intended for community facilities is diverted for personal use by Village Captain or other individual	Low	Strong	* Ensure collective decision of the community * Monitoring and supporting community to help ensure that their decision * Withholding funding if problem persist
Inflated prices paid for construction materials purchased, or lower quality goods provided than paid for	Low	Strong	*Sinangpad representative accompanies the community representative when purchasing materials *Three quotes to be sought if expenditure more than ₱30000.
Allocation of money in community for activities other than those for which it was intended	Low	Strong	* Ongoing monitoring during the implementation phase
Volunteer Barangay Sanitary Inspectors may not be willing to carry out their new role efficiently	Mod	Strong	
Building codes requiring the construction of a sanitary toilet whenever a new house is built that contain enforceable penalties may not be passed and/or implemented	Mod	Strong	
Currency exchange rate fluctuations	Mod	Mod	

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