



## **A partnership for learning, reflection and evaluation in action: Exploring opportunities for understanding program impact**

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### **1. BACKGROUND TO THE PARTNERSHIP AND THE PROJECT**

The partnership between Plan International Australia (referred to as Plan) and the Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney (ISF) first started in the context of a policy reference group in the area of water and sanitation (WASH Reference Group) in which both organisations have been involved for the last 7–8 years. Through this forum, both organisations were part of community of practice activities such as gender and inclusion.

Building on this existing relationship, in 2012 Plan and ISF began a research partnership for a study on small-scale enterprise involvement in water and sanitation services through an ISF-led research grant from the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) Australian Development Research Award Scheme. Through this grant, ISF has developed a strong working relationship with Plan Indonesia, links with Plan Vietnam and Plan Timor–Leste and ongoing engagement with Plan Australia. At around the same time, the Child-Centred Community-Based Adaptation (CC–CBA) project in the Philippines began.

The CC–CBA is a collaborative project between Plan International, Save the Children, and ISF, with the support of DFAT. Beginning in 2012, the project is being implemented across 40 barangays (villages) in the provinces of Aurora, Northern Samar, Eastern Samar and Southern Leyte. The project areas were severely affected by Typhoon Haiyan in November 2013, as well as Typhoons Utor and Nari in Aurora province, and the project end date was extended from mid-2014 until the end of 2015 to allow for full implementation of planned activities. This case study shares the value of the Plan–ISF partnership and how it was further developed through collaboration on this project.

### **2. OBJECTIVES AND RATIONALE**

The project aims to enhance the resilience of children, youth and their communities to the unavoidable negative impacts of climate and to strengthen the evidence base on child-centred community based initiatives on climate change adaptation. The Philippines is extremely vulnerable to a wide range of climate change impacts including changing rainfall patterns and temperatures, and increased extreme weather events. The provinces of Aurora, Eastern Samar, Northern Samar and Southern Leyte are especially vulnerable given their location on the eastern seaboard and the regular occurrence of climate-related hazards. The Philippines was ranked third on the 2011 World Risk Index (UNU–EHS, 2011) when the project was designed, and remained at third in the most recent report from 2013 (UNU–EHS, 2013).

The Philippines National Climate Change Action Plan (NCCAP) was finalised by the Climate Change Commission in 2011 and has seven strategic priorities: food security, water sufficiency, environmental and ecological stability, human security, sustainable energy, climate-smart industries and services, and knowledge and capacity development.





Involving children, youth and their wider communities will contribute to two key priorities of the NCCAP: (1) *human security*, through working to ensure Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation (CCA), practised by all sectors at national and local levels; and (2) *knowledge and capacity building*, through enhancing knowledge and capacity for CCA at the local level. It will also contribute to the 'Philippines Development Plan 2011–2016', to enhance the resilience of communities to cope with environmental hazards including climate-related risks (Goal 3, Ecosystem and Environmental Stability).

The partnership with ISF is designed to contribute to one of three outcome areas of the CC–CBA project: that 'policy and practice at the local level are influenced by a strengthened evidence base for child-centred climate change adaptation. The inclusion of a research partner was seen as an important addition from the outset of the project; the partnership offers an opportunity to promote best practice in implementation and to conduct evidence-based research on CBA practice models not only to benefit the target communities of the Philippines, but for Plan's climate change programming as a whole.

### 3. RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP IN PRACTICE

ISF and Plan are working in collaboration to develop local indicators of 'successful' climate change adaptation that are directly informed by perspectives from children and their communities. The indicators and the process to develop and analyse them will draw on evidence and practices from this three-year project being implemented by Plan and Save the Children in the Philippines. Both ISF and Plan are interested in jointly developing processes to monitor effectiveness, for accountability as well as learning purposes. We are also interested in continuing to foster the organisational partnership for future joint collaborations.



*Focus group discussion with children and Plan staff in Eastern Samar – Plan International Australia*

From the outset, the partnership between Plan and ISF was designed to be more than just a one-off consultancy delivering the outputs specified in a contract; the intent was that the project should be beneficial to both organisations and help to establish a broader partnership between the two organisations. As above, in addition to the work on this project, ISF and Plan have partnered on other work areas, including WASH and recent project evaluations in South-East Asia and the Pacific.

ISF was involved at the concept note and design phase of the project, providing peer review and input, which helped the researchers to better understand the intent of the project. The research is practice-based and so quite different from much of the research traditionally undertaken during project implementation, e.g. baseline studies, mid-term or end-of-project evaluations. This embedding of the research within the project design from the outset helped to establish the principles of the partnership that included recognising: (1) our mutual interests in working collaboratively with communities to create positive changes to address poverty; (2) reciprocal opportunities to learn from each other; (3) that developing relationships between the organisations is key to future joint collaborations; and (4) that at an operation level, roles would be based



on our respective organisations' expertise and strengths. The relationships that the partnership relies on have been built over the course of the project through regular calls and skype-chats, email contact and field visits.

In addition, the partnership has been built around a new and innovative approach to learning and to integrating research with practical implementation. Results are not based on information collected and analysed by the researchers and presented at the conclusion of the research. Instead, all parties are learning as they go. The openness to research and learning from Plan's part (in-country and in Australia), and the willingness to adjust the approach and to value research enough to 'make the space' for this learning, has been enormously useful and will likely increase the use of the research for Plan.

The partnership is also novel in that because it built on and envisioned an extension of a broader partnership beyond this project, both parties have approached the timing and scope of joint activities with some flexibility rather than being restricted by an arrangement with strictly specified tasks and outputs. This flexibility has also been invaluable for promoting and allowing mutual learning. The partnership therefore is unlike a commercial transaction in this sense, as value and emphasis is being placed on partnership and principles.

Additional, non-project based actions arising from the project to date include a joint presentation at the ACFID University Network Conference in 2013. Several future joint publications are also anticipated, particularly once the research is concluded and the results formalised.

#### 4. RESEARCH OUTCOMES AND UPTAKE

The partnership and the project it builds from are still ongoing. To date, draft indicators have been developed that align to the Philippine Government's NCCAP areas as well as the project's three key outcome areas. These draft indicators each has associated questions to pose to children, young people and community members implementing CBA projects and activities in the Philippines. These resources have been field tested through focus group discussions (FGDs), with the results being incorporated into an updated round of indicators to be further tested in late 2014. The results from the initial field testing were both informative and revealing, and helped to inform the lessons learned as outlined below. They also demonstrated the strong relationships that the two implementing agencies have with their communities on the ground, which was critical for the success of these FGDs. Indicators are currently being developed, but include a focus on children and youth and their:

- Understanding of climate change science and effects and their ability to identify adaptation measures that are relevant in the context of their families, schools and communities
- Opportunities for influencing climate change adaptation actions and being heard by others in their community.

#### 5. LEARNING AND LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE

There are a number of lessons that have been learned through the process of implementing this work that are important both for the development of effective partnerships and for successful practice-based research of this nature.

- **Human relationships are crucial and rewarding, and the time taken to build them is time well spent**



All organisational partnerships are based on human relationships, and these take time to build. As this is practice-based research, many of the connections are established at the implementation level, and the logistics and detail of this take time. Flexibility is vital in the approach in this case, in finding dates, in timing associated activities, and in the delivery of outputs. However, taking the time to build successful working relationships yields strong results and can be considered as reserves to draw on in the future.

In order to conduct this research, ISF needed to develop relationships with Plan Australia, Plan Philippines, Save the Children Philippines and the communities that each organisation works with on the ground and in Manila. The logistics of communicating and working together – arranging Skype calls, face to face meetings, joint visits – can be difficult, both to find times within schedules and because of poor internet connections. Nevertheless, overcoming these hurdles has been necessary for our successful partnership.

In-country visits in particular have proven essential for relationship building and for ensuring that all parties really value the research. Because this research is based on, and designed to influence, action and activities on the ground, ownership is a key consideration. It's vitally important that the research is country-owned, and not (either in practice or perception) driven and owned by the Australian-based organisations. So having relationships on the ground with staff who see and understand the value of the research in their own work is critical.

- **Flexibility in timing joint activities is essential, to align with busy and uncertain project timelines**  
Flexibility of timing partnership activities is vital. Because this research is based on the activities within the project, and because the field-testing requires the availability of the participating communities, the timing of visits to the field is a critical detail. This can be very difficult to arrange, given that all parties (Plan, Save, ISF) have multiple priorities and commitments that are scheduled across many countries and timelines. Furthermore, natural hazards affecting the Philippines need to be taken into account, with many project staff on the ground also acting as humanitarian relief staff during times of disaster.
- **Embedding research within practice provides new pathways for realising and sharing learnings from the ground, to achieve better development outcomes**  
This research falls under the project's overall aim to strengthen the evidence base on child-centred community based initiatives on climate change adaptation. To date, there has been a limited amount of literature or practice-based research in this field, so there is real value, both for this project and for the wider community of development practitioners, to add to this space; it is an important potential pathway of influence. This means that in addition to taking an innovative approach to partnerships, it's the intent that the outcomes of the partnership itself are innovative.

As described above, this has been an embedded research process. In order for this to be effective, the organisations and staff involved need the ability to evolve in order to learn through implementation. For example, flexibility about what the end product will look like is required.

Similarly, in the current aid environment within Australia, there's an increasing focus on partnerships. While exactly what types of partnerships are considered of value within the new Australian Aid Strategy





(2014), there is still a need to continue to develop our collective thinking around what a partnership is or could be, in order to achieve better development outcomes.

## REFERENCES

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