



**CONVERGENCE PROGRAMS' LOCAL ROAD PROJECTS: MANDATE
AND GUIDELINES, IMPLEMENTATION, COMMUNITY
PARTICIPATION AND OUTCOMES**

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ABSTRACT

The descriptive-evaluative study was conducted to describe the mandate and guidelines, implementation, community participation and outcomes of the local road projects under the Convergence Program of the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) in the Municipality of Barotac Viejo. One hundred sixteen respondents answered a researcher-made questionnaire and fifteen stakeholders were engaged in key informant interviews (KII) to gather primary data. The data were analyzed quantitatively using frequency count and percentage. Thematic analysis was used for qualitative data. Findings revealed that the mandate and guidelines were embedded in the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) executed by the DPWH and its partner agencies – the Department of Tourism (DOT) and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). Community participation was poor due to the non-involvement of most program beneficiaries. Program outcomes were evidenced by more infrastructure, an increase in the number of tourists, and an increase in trade and industries (small and medium enterprises). Recommendations were given to heighten the accomplishments of the program.

Keywords: *Local Road Projects, Convergence, Community Participation, Outcomes*

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INTRODUCTION

During the "Build Build Build" Program of the Duterte Administration, various infrastructure projects were implemented by the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) from its Regular Agency Fund and in collaboration with other national government agencies. Among these convergence programs are the Road Connectivity for Industry and Trade Development Roads Leveraging Linkages of Industry and Trade (ROLL-IT) Program of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and the Tourism Road Infrastructure Program (TRIP) of the Department of Tourism (DOT).

The ROLL-IT Program is a convergence program on road connectivity for industry and trade development in the Philippines' priority economic and manufacturing zones. On the other hand, TRIP involves the implementation of tourism infrastructure, specifically road access projects leading to tourist destinations. These convergence programs provide a road network to rural communities with existing industry and trade programs and tourism destinations.

In the Philippines, the development of the highway network is one of the major national programs being implemented by the government to support the country's overall socioeconomic development. Good local road infrastructure is correlated with local economic growth and poverty reduction, as shown by several studies (Llanto, 2011). Rural transport infrastructure and services are not only key components of rural development but also important ingredients in sustainable poverty reduction (Chakwizira et al., 2010).

Roads are a critically enabling condition for improving living conditions and quality of life in rural areas, as in the case of agriculture. This research will dwell on how roads affect the rural communities that are not into the agricultural industry but instead focused on tourism and trade and industry. It will discuss how the local roads leading to tourist destinations and trade and industry help in the development of rural communities.

The researcher, who was formerly employed by the DPWH Iloilo 3rd District Engineering Office and was one of the residents of the recipient communities of the Convergence Program, entertained the idea of examining whether DPWH local road projects under the Convergence Program have indeed had some positive impacts on rural communities

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and whether those projects foster development in the rural areas with the participation of the community and through the convergence of national government agencies.

As a beneficiary, the researcher was concerned about whether DPWH effectively and efficiently implemented the programs and whether the changes and progress already observed in the community were brought about by the implementation of the local roads. Hence, the study was pursued.

The study was anchored on the need to identify, analyze, and describe the mandate and guidelines, implementation, community participation, and outcomes of the local road projects implemented under the Convergence Program by DPWH Iloilo 3rd District Engineering Office for the fiscal year 2018. Furthermore, it aimed to reveal the impact of the local road projects in terms of infrastructure development, tourism opportunities, and support for trade and industries (small and medium enterprises). It also discussed the challenges encountered during the implementation of the local road projects under the Convergence Programs and the proposed recommendations to address these challenges.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Method

The researcher employed the survey method using a questionnaire with closed and open-ended questions. Survey research was utilized as the research design of the study because it best served to answer the questions and the purposes of the study. These data-gathering methods were supplemented by secondary data analysis of documents found in the archives and monitoring reports of DPWH Iloilo 3rd District Engineering Office and by the questionnaires given to the technical personnel of DPWH and barangay officials of the recipient communities.

Research Design

A descriptive-evaluative survey research design was used in the study. According to Shuttleworth (2008), descriptive research design is a scientific method that involves observing,

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identifying, and describing the subject's behavior without influencing it in any way. This design was appropriate to use to analyze the mandate and guidelines, the level of community participation in implementing the local road projects under the Convergence Program, and the expected program impact of the local roads in the recipient communities, specifically in the Municipality of Barotac Viejo.

Respondents of the Study

The researcher purposively selected the recipient rural communities of the 2018 ROLL-IT and TRIP convergence programs in the Municipality of Barotac Viejo. The respondents were chosen, 18 respondents each, from the six identified recipient barangays using a non-probability sampling technique in a purposive and convenient manner to establish an actual sample of respondents. The respondents were taken from whoever was available during the visit in the recipient communities and those willing to participate in the study using the online survey. Likewise, the key informant interviews of the project implementers, including the DPWH District Engineer, Project Engineers, Resident Engineers, Project Inspectors, and other stakeholders such as the barangay officials who were identified as involved in the projects but who were not among the survey respondents, generated valuable data.

Sampling Design

A purposive or deliberate sampling design was used in the research to help in ensuring that quality sample is located without biases so as to increase the reliability and trustworthiness of the findings (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024). A total of 108 residents from the recipient communities in the Municipality of Barotac Viejo were chosen as respondents. However, upon consolidating the data, the results showed that the actual number of respondents had increased to 116 since more individuals had accessed and answered the survey because it was readily available online.

Research Instruments

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A survey questionnaire patterned from the Participatory Khet Assessment Questionnaire (PKAQ) and Village Beneficiary Questionnaires from the Final Report of Beneficiary Assessment of the Poverty Reduction Fund Project Lao PDR were used to generate primary data. Secondary data was utilized from printed documents and the national and local reports of programs and activities of the DPWH, DTI, and DOT. Likewise, key informant interviews with research participants from DPWH technical personnel and barangay officials were used in the study.

The survey questionnaire was administered to the respondents from the recipient barangays (Appendix B). It had two parts: the first part was the personal profile of the respondents, and the second part was the main questionnaire to answer the research problems and identify the outcomes, contributions, problems encountered and recommendations. It also inquired about the level of participation of the people in the communities.

The closed-ended questions were structured as premise questions and were answerable by "yes" or "no". The open-ended questions were probe questions that sought explanations of answers given to premise questions but were confined only to categorically affirmative and negative responses. The survey also included a rating scale for the level of usefulness of the program and the level of satisfaction of the respondents towards the local road projects.

Another set of questionnaires was prepared for the key informant interview. It was composed of questions relevant to the convergence program, its implementing mechanisms, the noted impacts of the local road projects, and the problems or challenges encountered during project implementation.

Validity of the Research Instrument

The research instrument, specifically the survey questionnaire, was submitted for content validation to ensure the validity of the results. The draft of the questionnaire was

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consulted for approval by the research adviser. It was then presented to a jury of experts for corrections, suggestions, and recommendations before the reliability testing was conducted.

Data Gathering Procedures

Before the actual conduct of the study, the researcher sought the approval of the research proposal from the adviser. A letter duly signed by the research adviser asking permission to conduct the study and interview was sent to the respondents and the key informants.

The researcher personally administered the survey questionnaire to the target respondents. The survey questionnaire was also created via Google Forms so the respondents could easily access it. The key informant interview questionnaire was also made available online for easy and fast data gathering of responses from the technical personnel of DPWH since most were out for fieldwork. At the same time, the interview guide for the five (5) barangay officials was handed out and conducted manually.

The researcher explained to the respondents the importance of confidentiality and anonymity of their data and answers. After administering the survey questionnaire, the data was gathered for consolidation, tabulation, and analysis using appropriate statistical tools.

Data Analyses

The data analysis for this research involved descriptive statistics. Descriptive analysis was used to describe the basic features of the data. The data was then summarized and organized to be easily understood and presented in appropriate tables, frequency counts, and percentage distributions with accompanying narrative explanations. The answers to the open-ended questions were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify the common themes that emerged from the answers of the respondents to the open-ended questions and the interviews.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

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The demographic profile of the respondents was taken into consideration. It was found that the majority of the respondents were female and married, and they were mostly college graduates. However, it also showed that most of the respondents were unemployed mainly because a large group was composed of young individuals with ages ranging below 18 to 35 and since most were women who were housekeepers. Notwithstanding that the majority were unemployed, the research gathered intelligent responses from the 116 respondents.

Regarding the mandate and guidelines and the status of implementation of the local road projects, documents and monitoring reports of programs and activities of the DPWH, DTI, and DOT disclosed that the local road projects under the Convergence Program of DPWH Iloilo 3rd DEO commenced in 2018, were funded under a multi-year project, and were completed in 2022.

In terms of awareness of the program, the majority displayed a certain level of knowledge and understanding about it through the exchange of information among neighbors and friends and by attending public consultations. Several of the respondents even tried to explain their understanding of the program.

Meanwhile, with regard to the level of community participation, it was found that most respondents did not participate in any stage of project management. The few who participated were either Project Engineers, Monitoring Engineers, or personnel from the Planning and Design Section of DPWH. Community participation was low due to limited access to information regarding the government's programs. It can also be a result of the low or lack of interest on the part of the recipient communities, as they were occupied with finding means to make ends meet. The idea of participatory governance, wherein the populace is included in the decision-making process, was not present among the respondents. However, at some level, they wanted to be included in public consultations to avoid the problems encountered.

As to the outcomes in tourism and in trade and industry sectors of the rural communities, the respondents agreed that the local road projects positively impacted their community and themselves as individuals. Since the implementation of the local road projects, there has been a significant increase in the number of infrastructures, the number of tourists

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visiting their locality, and the number of trade and industries. Some noted that several gasoline stations, sari-sari stores and eateries were built along the road. Some barangays even developed attractions such as mountain or inland resorts and flower gardens/shops in their locality since the local roads provided access to customers. The local roads even became a tourist attraction themselves. Residents and tourists visited the concreted road in the upland barangays of Barotac Viejo to take photos of the scenic mountain view.

However, the implementation of the local road projects is far from perfect. Several challenges were encountered, such as the issue in the road right-of-way, the lack or absence of cooperation and support from government agencies concerned and the uncooperative community members, to name the most prevalent problems identified.

The above findings support the recent study of Basilio and Rivera (2022), which identified some examples of successful DOT-DPWH and DTI-DPWH Convergence Programs, specifically in the provinces of Bohol and Palawan, showing an increase in the influx of tourists. This finding is also prevalent in the case of the Municipality of Barotac Viejo, based on the result of the study conducted.

As seen in the survey result, it can be deduced that the DTI-DPWH Convergence Program was a success. The local roads are now functional and used by the communities, and benefits have already been noted. The implementers and proponents have predicted that through better road infrastructure connecting the industries, industrial and regional development strategies can be realized, and these will further facilitate balanced development, dispersal of industries away from urban areas towards the rural areas, creating more job and income opportunities to more Filipinos (DTI, 2016).

The transportation of basic commodities from the market to the upland barangays has become faster, and this is the most significant change brought about by the local road projects. One of the social and economic improvements in their locality is the increase in infrastructure. Likewise, more people are engaged in business and various livelihood activities that could provide extra income.

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As suggested in the study of Palarca and Daiwey (2014), it is also important to involve the recipient communities in the maintenance of the local roads not only to preserve and avoid deterioration of the newly constructed roads but also to provide them a source of income from the maintenance works which should be supervised by the LGUs.

Although the World Bank has seen the people as agents of development, the low participation of the recipient communities did not hamper the expected improvement in their localities. Based on the previous assumption, we can now conclude that implementing local road projects leads to the development and improvement of the recipient rural communities.

To address the above-stated problems, the respondents proposed ensuring active participation and consultation with local communities throughout the project planning and implementation phases, seeking community approval and cooperation first, and explaining why the project was needed and beneficial to every community member. That way, the community members could help and adjust themselves to accelerate the progress of the government projects.

Conclusions

The convergence program's mandate and guidelines provided a clear implementing mechanism and legal framework for DPWH to successfully implement the local road projects under the program. It made DPWH a legal authority to improve and develop the local roads, which, as stipulated in the Local Government Code of 1991, were delegated to the respective LGUs.

The implementation of the local road projects under the convergence program was successful, as additional funding was secured until the completion of the roads. The recipient communities were aware of the program. However, their participation was limited to public consultations only, since the proponents and implementers were the main actors in all stages of project management.

The lack of community participation did not hinder the achievement of the goals of the Convergence Program. Rather, it improved connectivity and linkage between the recipient

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communities and nearby areas. The local road projects also led to an increase in the number of infrastructures, the improvement of the lives of the residents by creating business opportunities in tourism, the opening of small and medium enterprises, and providing safe and comfortable travel to and from their workplace and various socio-economic infrastructures.

It can also be concluded that the implementation of the local road projects under the Convergence Program was beneficial to the recipient communities. The Convergence Programs under DOT-DPWH and DTI-DPWH provided better road networks for the recipient communities and alleviated the lives of the people by paving the way to better opportunities, which can thereby reduce poverty in the community. The challenges encountered during the implementation of the local roads were related to the low participation of the recipients. The most common of these was the issue of settling the right-of-way.

Based on the findings and conclusions drawn from the study, the following recommendations were derived.

For the mandate and guidelines, it is recommended that there should be strict implementation of the mandate and guidelines specified in the MOA and other related documents to ensure that the requirements for the identification of the projects were successfully complied with by the proponents (DPWH, DOT, and DTI) to avoid delay during implementation thereby speeding up the completion of the project which will result to rapid improvement of the community.

There should be a feasibility study to identify the problems even before the implementation to determine whether the project is doable so it will avoid delay or slow project implementation. It is also recommended that the implementers provide the recipient communities with proper information dissemination to avoid issues such as settling the right-of-way. If the right-of-way is settled and the communities are more open to the changes in their locality, the implementation of the local road projects will not face a backlog.

Relative to this, there is a need for the implementers and proponents to involve the community in the various stages of project implementation, specifically during survey and

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validation through the conduct of public consultation and before the start of the project through the conduct of pre-construction activities to make them aware of their role in the development of their communities.

With these, it is also recommended that the LGUs implement projects requiring grassroots participation so the community can organize in their ways to be the catalysts of change and bringers of improvement in their respective communities. The LGUs should create tourism-related programs to sustain the existing opportunities in the communities. They must also address the noted negative impact of the local road projects on the environment and health.

The national government should also propose and implement various programs to strengthen community participation in line with the idea of collaborative governance or participatory governance. These activities will foster the active participation of the recipient communities in the programs and projects implemented in their localities by the national agencies.

Since the local road projects made transportation convenient, it is recommended that more socio-economic infrastructures be built in the recipient communities so that development will disperse. If a local market is available in their community, the residents do not need to travel to the town to buy their necessities.

Given the low community participation, it is recommended that the DOT and DTI establish extensive collaboration with LGUs on community participation or engagement.

Furthermore, it is recommended that the recipient communities maintain the local roads. By doing so, they can enjoy the long-term benefits of roads, which will lead to the development of the communities.

Finally, it is recommended that further research should be conducted to cover the whole fifth congressional district of Iloilo using other methodologies to provide a comparison of the study and obtain new findings relevant to the research.

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