



Sustainability Review
2025

The Batangas Project: 10 Years of Supporting Children with Disabilities in the Philippines

2002 TO 2012

Executive Summary

The Batangas project was a Community-Based Rehabilitation initiative implemented by NORFIL Foundation (hereafter NORFIL) in Batangas, Philippines, from 2002 to 2012. Supported by CBM Philippines, the project focused on supporting children and youth with disabilities through local government partnerships, mobilising volunteers, strengthening AKAPIN Batangan (groups made up of parents with children with disabilities, hereafter AKAPIN) and community advocacy. More than a decade after the project phase-out, the CBM Philippines Country Team revisited five of the 17 municipalities where the project was implemented to assess the sustained impact of the project. They found:

The project's advocacy efforts to local government have been sustained:

- **Accessibility:** government infrastructure facilities are accessible with ramps, lifts, toilets, and signage.
- **Budget:** budget is being allocated for people with disabilities, covering the provision of assistive devices, medications, and services. It also is used to support awareness campaigns on disability rights, celebratory events, meetings, and honoraria for community disability focal people.
- **Disability identification cards and benefits:** people with disabilities are obtaining disability identification cards and accessing benefits. The local government, through the Disability Affairs Office, registers people with disabilities to the Philippine Registry of Persons with Disabilities, supporting access to Philippine Health Insurance (PhilHealth).
- **Active Persons with Disability Affairs Offices:** the five provincial/city/municipalities Persons with Disability Affairs Office or assigned focal points visited were seen to be functioning, each with assigned personnel and allocated budget for their planned activities and priorities.

AKAPIN remain active in advocating for the rights of children and youth with disabilities, by:

- **Active membership:** AKAPIN is still functioning with 15 boards and 1,998 members, both old and new. Parents still self-organise.
- **Advocacy:** AKAPIN serves as an advocacy group recognised by the provincial/city/municipal government units through its accreditation. It is represented on the Development Council, local school board, local health board, and Disaster Risk Reduction Council, and has maintained its registration with the Securities and Exchange Commission.
- **Community engagement and referral system:** the groups presence is felt in communities and referral services remain effective.
- **Capacity strengthening:** the group has access to resources and provides capacity strengthening to government officers.

The benefits to individuals who participated in the project continue to be felt:

- Four former participants shared how the project's interventions have positively impacted their lives. Three of them are working and one is finishing their tertiary education.

Front: Group photo taken at Tanauan Social Welfare Office with AKAPIN Board, staff of the Social Welfare Office (former AKAPIN President), staff of the Persons with Disabilities Affairs Office (former AKAPIN Board).

FACTORS LEADING TO PROJECT SUSTAINABILITY

- **NORFIL's Inclusive Approach:** NORFIL's inclusive approach is deeply rooted in the Community-Based Rehabilitation framework. A twin-track approach was used to ensure comprehensive support and inclusion in all aspects of life. This approach has enabled them to effectively mainstream disability within local government, while also providing targeted interventions at the community level to address the unique needs of children and youth with disabilities and their families.
- **Clear roadmap of project handover:** From the outset, it was clear that the project would be transferred to the local government. The project outlined specific actions and accountabilities for each phase, and the partnership was formalised through the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement. This meant that the implementation of the project was secured even if there was change in elected officials. Following the formal handover, the local government unit demonstrated a stronger commitment to continuing the Community-Based Rehabilitation work through the AKAPINs after the project concluded.
- **Multilevel training:** The project was clear on actions and accountabilities during each phase. Multilevel training was provided to permanent government employees and elected officials, covering topics such as disability awareness, rights, and inclusive approaches. Their active involvement in the process fostered a strong sense of ownership.
- **Enabling laws and reward system:** Project interventions support the implementation of national laws, and local governments are incentivised to comply with these regulations through recognition and rewards by the national government. The Seal of Good Local Governance is an award that encourages compliance with accessibility laws, the creation and designation of Persons with Disability Affairs Office, and the provision of budget for the people with disabilities in the annual investment plan.
- **Formation of Committee for Disability Affairs:** A monitoring group called the Committee for Disability Affairs was formed at the provincial/city/municipal level. This committee is trained in disability laws, policies, and mandates, and helps reinforce the local government's compliance with the reward system of the Department of Interior and Local Government in achieving the Seal of Good Local Governance.
- **The formation of AKAPIN:** Parents of children with disabilities united and formally organised through the group. They accessed training to better support their children with disabilities, and prepared them to take over the role of NORFIL when CBM project support ended. To maintain strong leadership within the group, ongoing training is being provided to new leaders, either facilitated by NORFIL or by retiring leaders.
- **AKAPIN registration and accreditation:** AKAPIN is legally registered through the Securities and Exchange Commission and accredited in 11 municipalities government units where its members reside. This recognition has increased the group's credibility and enabled them to secure seats on the Local Development Council and other special bodies, such as the Health Board and School Board, increasing their ability to influence change.
- **AKAPIN as an advocacy group:** Having been handed over to the local government during the project phase-out, the group has become a strong advocate for the rights of people with disabilities. Recognised as an expert in the field, the group is now the go-to organisation for local government units seeking guidance on developing disability-related programs, with focal points regularly consulted by local government units during planning and budgeting processes.

- **AKAPIN leadership formation:** The capacity of parents to take on leadership roles was strengthened through a series of training sessions covering topics such as understanding disability, the role of parents in supporting child development, home rehabilitation programs, holistic approaches to child development, children's rights and protection, personal effectiveness and group development, basic disaster preparedness, first aid, and gender sensitivity training. Over time, the role of the parents was scaled up from recipients of interventions, to volunteers, peer counsellors, leaders, advocates, and training resource speakers.

Additionally, AKAPIN members were also taught how to mobilise resources through training on proposal writing, financial management, local government budgeting system, and ways to source funds to financially sustain the organisation. The impact of these trainings has extended further, with several AKAPIN leaders now employed by the local government, providing them with greater opportunities to influence change.

- **Mixture of old and new leaders:** Ongoing recruitment of AKAPIN members maintains group numbers. New leaders are trained, helping reduce knowledge gaps and maintain processes.
- **AKAPINs role in referrals:** AKAPIN is the leading organisation when it comes to supporting children with disabilities. It is well-versed in available services and is able to refer patients to the appropriate service. It has access to discounted rates and free transport services to medical facilities through the local government.
- **Personal experiences and impact to children and young people:** Current AKAPIN Board members attest to the transformative impact the training provided by NORFIL and AKAPIN has had in broadening their understanding and compassion for people with disabilities. They reflected on their own experiences in raising children with disabilities, and how their love and commitment as parents, coupled with the training provided, continues to fuel their passion and drive to create more supportive environments for children with disabilities in their communities. Additionally, several former project participants (children who are now adults) are now employed by the local government and trained in disability inclusive practices.
- **Continued engagement:** Even after the project's completion, NORFIL continues to support AKAPIN, particularly in training new leaders. They also support with organisational development, financial management, resource generation, and advocacy and influencing.



Above: AKAPIN Board, the Social Welfare and Development Officer and staff, Alvin (former project participant) and CBM Global staff meeting at the Cuenca conference room.

Introduction

From 2002 to 2012, CBM Philippines, with the financial support of CBM Australia, supported the Batangas Project - a Community-Based Rehabilitation program for children and youth with disability. Implemented by NORFIL Foundation (hereafter NORFIL), the project aimed to support children and youth with disabilities in Batangas province, Philippines, by strengthening AKAPIN Batangan (groups of parents of children with disabilities, hereafter AKAPIN) and 19 local governments units (17 municipalities and two cities) to ensure the ongoing basic needs and human rights of children and youth with disabilities are met.

The project faced some initial challenges, including a lack of data on people with disabilities, children being unable to access rehabilitation services or be seen by specialist doctors, and parents struggling to understand their child's disability and how to effectively manage and support them. Although assistive devices such as canes, wheelchairs and crutches were being distributed by the Provincial Social Welfare and Development Office and other organisations, these primarily went to adults with disabilities, with few provided to children with disabilities. Additionally, only two special education classes in public schools were available to support children with disabilities, severely limiting their educational opportunities. Local government programs supporting people with disabilities and their families were limited to the provision of financial assistance through the Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situation and Self-Employment Assistance – Kaunlaran. There was no ordinance in the municipality pertaining to the implementation of accessibility law and awareness on the rights of people with disabilities, and hence it remained unfunded.

SNAPSHOT OF ACHIEVEMENTS:

After a decade of intervention, the project resulted in some significant achievements. These include:

- **9,095 people with disabilities reached:** 2,212 by NORFIL's Community-Based Rehabilitation, 1,289 by AKAPIN, and 5,594 by the local government units.
- **The Provincial Government:**
 - Created a Persons with Disability Affairs Office (RA 10070) to oversee the implementation of programs and services for persons with disabilities.
 - Established a team to monitor compliance of the Magna Carta for people with disabilities (Republic Act 9442), accessibility law (Batasán Pambansa 344) (of which 135 public buildings had been checked to comply), and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
 - Initiated the registration of people with disabilities to vote.
 - Mapped accessible local government units and establishments.
 - Facilitated seminars on Community-Based Rehabilitation and accessibility, with forums attended by the business sector and establishments.
 - Supported the registration and issuance of disability identification cards for people with disabilities.

• **Municipal Committee for Disability Affairs:**

- Passed a resolution for the creation of a Local Committee on Disability Affairs/ Municipal Committee for Disability Affairs in 19 target areas, for the implementation of programs and services for people with disabilities locally.
 - Created and raised awareness of the Persons with Disability Affairs Office.
 - Increased budget allocation for programs and services for people with disabilities.
 - Implemented and complied with Magna Carta for people with disabilities (RA 9442) and accessibility law (BP 344).
 - Registered people with disabilities and issued identification cards enabling access to benefits.
 - Institutionalised 32 new special education classes in public elementary schools, with provision of honorarium/incentives for special education teacher aides and volunteers.
- **Capacity strengthening training was provided** to 186 children on Listong Paslit (Smart Kid Campaign), 314 teachers and school administrators, 662 Community-Based Rehabilitation volunteers, 272 Barangay Nutrition Scholars, and 572 Barangay Officials.
 - **Livelihoods were improved** with 76 youth with disabilities supported to secure employment, 151 people referred to microfinance, and 71 people provided with livelihood training.
 - **AKAPIN was established** and comprised of 19 core parent groups from target areas who were supported to implement Community-Based Rehabilitation in partnership with local government units through a Memorandum of Agreement. **AKAPIN membership reached 2,438 parents of children with disabilities.**

By the end of 2012, the NORFIL Community-Based Rehabilitation program was handed over to the 19 local government units and AKAPIN. It was expected that the program would be owned by the provincial/city/municipal government units, with the Provincial/City/Municipal Committee for Disability Affairs overseeing the planning, implementation, and evaluation of activities supporting people with disabilities, and ensuring access to community services and opportunities. It was also expected that AKAPIN would take over the role of NORFIL in each community, serving as an advocacy group and assisting the local government on the implementation of the Community-Based Rehabilitation program.



Inside the municipal Social Welfare and Development Office in Padre Garcia with (left to right) AKAPIN Board member, Hercules from CBM Global, John, Jose and a staff member from the Social Welfare Office and CBM staff members.

Methodology

This review sought to assess the degree to which local government units and AKAPIN have taken over and continued the work of NORFIL in implementing a rights-based approach to disability inclusion. It looks at sustainability across three key areas and considers:

- ▶ **Government:** whether the outcomes from the project have continued or been improved/built on in government.
- ▶ **AKAPIN:** whether AKAPIN have continued and what has been the impact?
- ▶ **Children with disabilities:** whether the project has had a sustained impact on the lives of children that were involved in the project, who are now adults.

REVIEW PROCESS

A team comprising of the CBM Philippines Country Director, Program Officer, and Humanitarian Coordinator was formed to conduct this enquiry. With guidance from AKAPIN, the team organised and led a two-day field visit to selected municipalities/cities. The evaluation process involved participant observation, focus group discussions, and interviews.

Focus group discussions

AKAPIN Board of Directors

Interviews

Four individuals who were involved in the project as children, who are now grown up

Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office staff member

Persons with Disability Affairs Office staff members

City Social Welfare and Development Office staff member



Above: Accessible winding ramp at the municipal hall of Tanauan City, Batangas.

Findings

Eleven years after the phase-out of the Community-Based Rehabilitation program, the following was found to have been sustained:

- Policy influences to local governments (provincial and municipal) in support of people with disabilities was observed through the **accessible features in government infrastructures and facilities, as well as allocated budget for programs and services for people with disabilities**. Local governments provide direct support for assistive devices for people with disabilities, disability rights awareness campaigns, celebratory events, meetings, and honoraria for community disability focal points. Additionally, people with disability identification cards are accessing a 20 percent discount at participating businesses.
- The Municipal Committee for Disability Affairs was reinforced by the passing of a national law mandating the **creation of Persons with Disability Affairs Office** in all local government units, by virtue of Republic Act 10070 in 2010. Of the five provincial/city/municipality Persons with Disability Affairs Offices visited, **all were observed as functioning, with assigned personnel and allocated budgets for planned activities and priorities**, including registering people with disabilities with the Philippine Registry of Persons with Disabilities and issuing disability identification cards.
- **AKAPIN continues to operate with 15 boards and 1,998 members**, both old and new, with parents still self-organising. The group serves as an advocacy group, formally recognised by the provincial/city/municipal government units through an accreditation process. **As the go-to organisation for families seeking support for children with disabilities, their presence remains strong in communities, and their referral service remains effective**. The group has access to resources and continues to provide capacity development training to government officers.
- The positive impact the project had on four of the children involved remains evident, with three currently working and one completing tertiary education.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Anthony Alvin joined NORFIL at 11 years old. Having cerebral palsy and a hand disability, he was bullied growing up which led him to drop out of school in grade two. His participation in sports and camps supported by the project helped boost his confidence and overcome shyness.

Anthony Alvin now works on-call for a ginger tea company, running errands and travelling to nearby municipalities, earning 400 pesos (AUD 11) per day. While he has not experienced bullying from colleagues or neighbours, he still fears public transportation.

Outside his job, Anthony Alvin makes and sells rugs and trains others. He started this business during the Covid 19 pandemic and is considering expanding to include bags and wallets.

Anthony Alvin is saving for an e-bike for safer transportation and will install a person with disability sign. Once restricted by bullying, he now enjoys an active lifestyle and helps others access disability identification cards when needed.



LOCAL GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP AND POLICY INFLUENCE

The passing of local ordinances continue to play an important role in influencing local governments to implement policies and initiatives that comply with laws that aim to support people with disabilities. This includes:

Improved accessibility: Government infrastructure and facilities are now designed with accessibility in mind, with ramps, lifts, accessible toilets, and signage. The local government takes pride in its commitment to providing accessible public spaces for all.

What happens when the power goes out?

When the municipal mayor first proposed the construction of a new municipal hall in Padre Garcia, an AKAPIN member took the opportunity during a brief conversation with the mayor to emphasise the importance of ensuring the building is accessible. She highlighted that while a lift works well when there is electricity, it is of no use when the power goes out. She emphasised that while they, as people without a disability, do not currently experience accessibility challenges, they cannot guarantee that when they get older, they might not have a disability and need infrastructure like the hall to be accessible. This brief discussion ultimately led to the installation of both a lift and a ramp, providing accessibility from the ground floor to the fourth floor of the building.

Disability data: Through the Disability Affairs Office, the local government facilitates the registration of people with disabilities with the Philippine Registry of Persons with Disabilities, managed by the Department of Health and the National Council on Disability Affairs. Once registered, individuals with disabilities are not only counted and recognised as a person with a disability, but they also become eligible for benefits through the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth).

100 percent of people with disabilities in Padre Garcia registered

In Padre Garcia municipality, it was reported that 100 percent of people with disabilities have been registered, with new applicants promptly added. These individuals are able to access treatment for free through PhilHealth. As of April 2025, the total number of registered people with disabilities in Padre Garcia was 1,747 out of a total population exceeding 30,000. ¹

Disabilities identification card and benefits: Some larger establishments in Batangas provide a 20 percent discount to people with disability identification cards.

Dedicated budget to support people with disabilities: The local government allocates specific funding for programs that provide assistive devices, educations, awareness campaigns on disability rights, celebrations, meetings and honoraria for community disability focal.

¹ The 100% registration is based on people with disabilities who can provide proof, such as a medical certificate. Individuals aged 60 and above are not included in this count - as they are counted as senior citizens by the local government unit for service administration - which lowers the total number of registered people with disabilities. The registry is regularly updated, removing individuals who no longer meet the criteria - for example those who have undergone cataract surgery or rehabilitation. Additionally, the data now includes cancer patients, who were previously excluded.

Program and services for people with disabilities: The Social Welfare and Development Offices visited offer various programs and services for people with disabilities. Social Welfare Officers with permanent positions, along with other staff members interviewed, have **received formal training by NORFIL**.

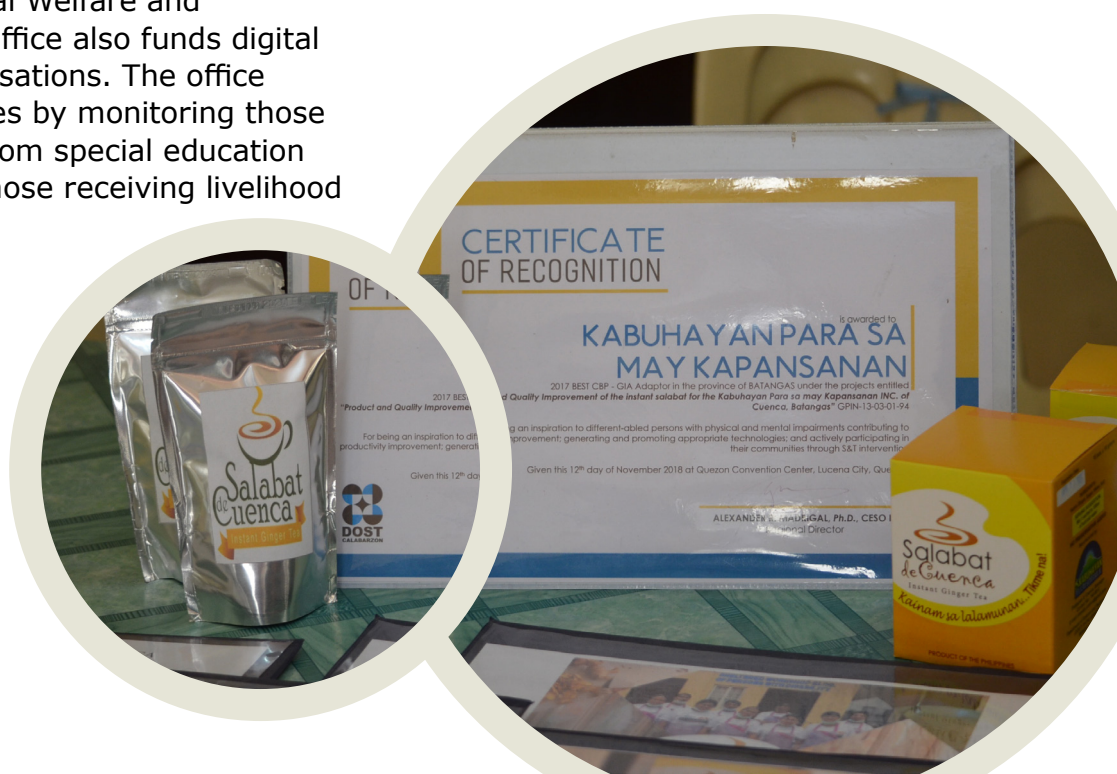
Local government support

In 2023, the local government of Cuenca allocated PHP 700,000 (AUD 19,280) to support activities and programs for people with disabilities. This funding covered training, incentives, honoraria for community coordinators, and the provision of assistive devices. In the municipality of Padre Garcia, the local government is supporting people with disabilities through a range of programs and services, including livelihood and cash-for-work initiatives that promote independence for individuals with disabilities and their families. Medical services are also provided to identify and assist those with disabilities, while efforts are underway to enhance accessible communication through sign language programs.

The Social Welfare and Development Office of Cuenca employs 17 staff members and three social workers. Through a pilot initiative involving the Barangay Nutrition Scholars, the office has compiled a database of 886 individuals with disabilities. In 2023, the local government allocated PHP 700,000 (AUD 19,280) to support activities and programs for people with disabilities. This funding covered such things as incentives and honoraria for community coordinators, training for mothers and local officials on supporting children with disabilities, financial and livelihood support to people with disabilities, with educational and medical assistance considered a priority, and the provision of assistive devices (with devices such as wheelchairs being managed at the town level, while cases requiring more specialised management are referred to other services).

Supporting livelihoods: To support livelihoods, people with disabilities can access financial assistance of PHP 25,000 (AUD 690), sponsored by Rotary Club. They also have access to livelihoods training in areas such as rug making and ginger tea production (salabat), managed by the Department of Science and Technology, with products sold through trade fairs and bazaars.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development Regional Office also funds digital printing for youth organisations. The office tracks program graduates by monitoring those who have transitioned from special education to regular classes and those receiving livelihood assistance.



Right: Ginger tea products and a certificate of recognition from the Department of Science and Technology.

Local government ready to take over

Jellen, the Municipal Social Welfare and Development Officer at the local government unit of Cuenca and proud trainee of NORFIL, credits her preparedness for disability inclusive programming to the extensive training she received through NORFIL during the project. She noted that when it was time for NORFIL to phase out, the office was fully prepared and all they had to do was to continue the program.

“Tumatak sa aking puso ang mga itinuro ni NORFIL.”

(“What NORFIL taught me has left a mark on my heart”).

- Jellen, Municipal Social Welfare and Development Officer of Cuenca

She explains how the Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office provides training to parents of people with disabilities on what to do during disasters.

“What is good about Cuenca is that our evacuation centre is ideal. It was built as an evacuation centre with different facilities like breastfeeding facilities. People with disabilities are trained in responding to disasters. We are complete with master lists. So, when a person arrives in our centre, they already know where to go.”

- Jellen, Municipal Social Welfare and Development Officer of Cuenca

Additionally, the Social Welfare Officer of Padre Garcia has been managing programs for people with disabilities since 2003. She is supportive of the sector and relies heavily on its program management to the Person with Disabilities Affairs Officer who is a person with a disability that was involved in the NORFIL project as a child.

Right: Jellen, the Municipal Social Welfare and Development Officer of Cuenca, credits her commitment to disability inclusion in government programming to the training she received through the Batangas project.



The Persons with Disability Affairs Office: A national law was passed to establish a Persons with Disability Affairs Office by virtue of Republic Act 10070 in 2010. This put in place the structure for a Persons with Disability Affairs Office in every province, city and municipality, to ensure programs and services for people with disabilities. Among the five provincial/city/municipality visited as part of this enquiry, the Persons with Disability Affairs Offices were seen to be functioning, each with assigned personnel and allocated budget for their planned activities and priorities.

NORFIL's training leaves a lasting impact

Jose, the current Persons with Disability Affairs Officer of Padre Garcia, draws on what he learnt through NORFIL to advocate for the rights of people with disabilities. Emphasising the importance of disability inclusion and promoting independence, Jose manages the Disability Affairs Office funds for capacity strengthening, skills development, support services and regular meetings of community coordinators.

“NORFIL's training impacted me in such a way that when we visited persons with disabilities, I saw that they just stayed at home and the parents were hiding them and were embarrassed. Now, when I go to the communities, I talk to the parents and explain to them what they ought to do with people with disabilities, that they should go out and experience the beauty of our world. And it is not enough for us to stay at home. We need to go out so we can have friends. It's easier for people with disabilities to adapt if they go out into the world. The training that we attended was seeing how persons with disabilities lived.”

- Jose, Persons with Disability Affairs Officer of Padre Garcia



Above: Jose (left), the Persons with Disability Affairs Officer of Padre Garcia, with John (right) from the Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office standing in front of an accessible ramp at the municipal hall.

Awards and Recognitions: In the Philippines, people, organisations, establishments and government are often awarded in recognition of good performance.

In 2003, the local government of Cuenca received an Apolinario Mabini Award for their program on disability. Launched by the Philippine Foundation for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled, the awards recognise outstanding contributions to people with disabilities. The local government of Cuenca received awards in four categories, including outstanding Persons with Disabilities Affairs Office.

All five local governments visited received the Seal of Good Local Governance, implemented by the Department of Interior and Local Government. One of the criteria for this seal is the functionality of the Persons with Disability Affairs Office. This includes the establishment of the office, appointment of officers or focal persons, development of programs, plans, and budgets, creation of ordinances or executive orders for people with disabilities, passing the accessibility audit of public buildings compliant with BP 344 accessibility law, allocation of resources for assistive devices, regular meetings, and partnership initiatives with Organisations of People with Disabilities.

As of 2024, only two out of the 34 municipalities and cities in Batangas have not reached the ideal level of Persons with Disabilities Affairs Office functionality. In addition to the Seal of Good Local Governance evaluation, the province of Batangas facilitated accessibility audits of local government unit offices, with 31 passing the audit.

Special Education: NORFIL played a pivotal role in developing special education in the Batangas and empowering parents to become advocates and volunteers. Before NORFIL's involvement, special education classes were scarce and infrequent. Through collaboration with parents, volunteers and educators, NORFIL helped expand the number of special education classes and schools. Today, Batangas has 60 public and five private special education schools - marking significant progress towards inclusive education. Parental training is a requirement for enrolment, underscoring the vital role of family involvement in supporting children with disabilities.

An AKAPIN member shared how NORFIL's training empowered them to welcome children with disabilities into their school, shifting focus from limitations to inclusive possibilities:

"It was a really big contribution to our lives being trained... If I had not been a part of NORFIL and AKAPIN Batangan, I would not have admitted children with disabilities to our school because I know we couldn't cater to what they need. But since then, I have not looked at what we can't do, even if our staff would get worried about other kids going after those with disabilities, I would say that we can take care of all these children, that there is a proper way of doing it."

- AKAPIN member

It is important to note that NORFIL is a staunch advocate for inclusive education. However, they acknowledge that not all children with disabilities can thrive in such settings. To address this, NORFIL has championed the creation of special education classes and invested in training special education teachers to develop specialised skills and methods tailored to diverse learning needs. This approach supports the development of individualised education plans, ensuring each child receives appropriate support and learning opportunities.

For children with disabilities ready to transition into regular classes, NORFIL provides training for receiving teachers to ensure a smooth and supportive integration. Given the context of rural public schools - where class sizes are often large and teachers may lack specialised training - establishing dedicated special education classes remains essential to accommodate children whose needs are not yet suited to mainstream settings.

"The special education pilot happened in Cuenca. I taught there. We started being hands-on with children, and we underwent assessments and training. Little by little, the Department of Education increased the rooms and schools for special education."

- Mother of a child with a disability



Right: Christine and Diane, pictured with their mother at their high school graduation ceremony, were supported by NORFIL when they were six and seven years old and attended regular classes. Both are now proud graduates who have not let their visual impairment stand in the way of achieving excellence.

AKAPIN BATANGAN

AKAPIN (**AK**bay ling**AP IN**corporated) Batangan, a registered organisation with the Securities and Exchange Commission, has sustained its programme of supporting parents and individuals with disabilities in Batangas province. The group now facilitates parent support groups across 19 municipalities and two cities, fostering a sense of belonging and connection, while raising awareness and advocating for disability rights.

AKAPIN works closely with healthcare providers to develop awareness strategies for rural communities, utilising various channels to disseminate information. The group secures funding through membership fees, donations, and partnerships, and actively influences policy through representation in local councils. Additionally, AKAPIN works with local government units to support disaster preparedness for people with disabilities.

AKAPIN maintains a strong membership base of 1,998 members (as of 2023), following a higher count of 3,000 during the period of NORFIL support. The group is governed by 15 board members elected from among its members, including new joined individuals.

The organisation is accredited in 11 municipal government units, with the accreditation process ongoing in the remaining municipalities. It is also registered under the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), enhancing its credibility and transparency in financial management.



1,998 members



Working across 19 municipalities and two cities



Registered under the Securities and Exchange Commission



Accredited in 11 municipalities

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Born with clubfoot, John Carlo faced challenges from a young age, including bullying at school. At nine, he became involved with the Batangas project, where he learned the value of social interaction and equality. Alongside strong family support, this experience drove his determination to succeed.

As an adult, John Carlo served as a Sangguniang Kabataan (youth council) representative, contributed to the Nasugbu editorial team, and joined the ALERT emergency response team. He credits NORFIL for providing training that improved his awareness around disability and helped strengthened his skills. He later pursued studies in Alternative Learning Systems and computer hardware servicing at ATRIEV, which led him to work at the Nasugbu Tourism Office.

Currently, John Carlo works at the Persons with Disability Affairs Office, handling the Philippine Registry for Persons with Disabilities and assisting in drafting reports and creating identification cards.

He remains a strong advocate for disability rights, encouraging people with disabilities to access government services and assistance and to not be ashamed of their disability.



Right: John Carlo showing some medals he earned through the project.

Registration and accreditation: AKAPIN is legally registered through the Securities and Exchange Commission and consistently complies with annual reporting requirements. The organisation demonstrates a strong sense of accountability among the board and officers, as reflected in their statement: “Ayaw naming mapahiya sa NORFIL” (“We do not want to cause shame to NORFIL”).

As mandated by the local government code, local government units must accredit representative organisations and engage them in the Development Council and local special bodies for planning and budgeting of development programs. Being accredited gives organisation's like AKAPIN the benefit of being part of crafting development plans and incorporating their agenda in the planning processes of the local government. Accredited organisations are invited and become signatories to the approved plans and budget. This also gives them credibility and recognition within the local government unit.

Training and collaboration: AKAPIN trains new staff on disability inclusion in private offices and local government units, sometimes receiving token gestures or honoraria in return. Members donate one percent of the honoraria they received back to the organisation to support its continued work. AKAPIN not only shares experiences and learnings among its own members but also extends its reach to other areas where NORFIL work, including the provinces of Mindoro, Bulacan, Cebu, Ilocos, and recently in North Samar.

“AKAPIN board and officers are trained. Sometimes we do it ourselves, sometimes we still ask NORFIL for assistance, especially when training new leaders. At times, some leaders are tapped to act as resource speakers.”

- AKAPIN member

Referral pathways: As AKAPIN gained recognition and credibility, it started receiving a warm welcome from local government units and partners. This growing recognition led to an increase in partnerships, with organisations reaching out to AKAPIN for its services. Acting as a vital bridge, AKAPIN connect people to necessary resources, including doctors from Manila, partner organisations, and transportation. Rather than directing people to a specific agency, AKAPIN play a facilitative role, offering support and necessary connections.

“There are social welfare officers who call us whenever there are referred cases of children with disabilities. We assist in the referral process.”

- AKAPIN member

Advocacy and Influence: AKAPIN actively advocates for the rights and inclusion of people with disabilities by representing them in Provincial and Municipal Development Councils, as well as the Disaster Risk Reduction Management Council. Although not a member of the provincial and municipal umbrella Organisation of People with Disabilities, AKAPIN has become the go-to organisation for local government units seeking guidance in developing disability-related programs. It is recognised as an expert in the field, with focal points consulted by local government units during planning and budgeting processes. Additionally, AKAPIN also has a seat on the local school board and local health board, which together with its involvement with local government, is able to voice concerns, offer valuable input, and influence policies and programs to the benefit of children with disabilities. In doing so, AKAPIN contribute to raising awareness, challenging discriminatory practices, and fostering a more inclusive society where people with disabilities are valued and supported.

AKAPIN also advocates for the creation of accessible infrastructure by working with local authorities and community leaders to promote the construction of ramps, accessible toilets, and other necessary features at key facilities, such as the municipal hall. Through these efforts, AKAPIN strives to improve physical accessibility, creating an inclusive environment where people with disabilities can participate fully in community life.

Disaster preparedness: The province of Batangas is home to one of the Philippines' most active volcano's, Taal, which has several eruption points and poses significant risk to people residing in the danger zone. With that in mind, AKAPIN places a strong focus on disability inclusive disaster preparedness and response. The organisation works closely with local government units to develop inclusive disaster response plans. These efforts include mapping households with disabilities, implementing colour-coded systems to identify where people with disabilities reside, and conducting training sessions for parents and caregivers on how to manage different situations during emergencies. By addressing the unique needs of people with disabilities during emergencies, AKAPIN contributes to the overall safety and well-being of the entire community.

“During Taal eruption, we saw on the television that wheelchairs were left behind during the evacuation. Rescuers were hard up in evacuating children with down syndrome. The Disaster Management Council recognised AKAPIN’s role because we know how to manage people with disabilities, and place importance on what matters to people with various forms of disability.”

- AKAPIN President

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Born deaf, John Patrick became involved in the Batangas project through NORFIL's training and camps. Despite experiencing discrimination from a young age, he completed his primary and high school education, before taking up computer programming.

He currently works for the Persons with Disabilities Affairs Office of the local government of Padre Garcia, where he encodes data and creates identification cards for people with disabilities and senior citizens. He also participates in on-the-job training at the local government, where his positive attitude and smile earned recognition from the municipal mayor who favoured him to work at the Social Welfare and Development Office.

Having experienced bullying in the past, John Patrick has trained in mental health and is involved with the Philippine Mental Health Association, with efforts made to support his mental well-being. Now married with a child, he is focused on providing for his family.



Above: John Patrick with his mother.



Right: John Patrick working at the Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office of local government unit of Padre Garcia.

Personal experiences driving change: A key motivator for AKAPIN members is their personal experience raising children with disabilities. Parents shared how training deepened their understanding of disability and their role in supporting children with disabilities. Once seeing themselves as mainly homemakers, they came to recognise their potential as advocates and volunteers.

“Before, we were plain housewives... Our job was just to nurture, and then we were selected by barangay (village) officials. We were asked to attend meetings and were trained by NORFIL. We realised that we were not just homemakers. We then became volunteers.”

– AKAPIN Board member

With training and support, families gained a deeper understanding of their children’s disabilities and learned effective strategies to aid their development. The project team emphasised the importance of parental involvement and shared decision-making in the overall well-being of children with disabilities. As a result, parents became more actively engaged in addressing their children’s specific needs and ensuring inclusivity. They also committed to providing the necessary support, including referrals and coaching, and ensuring children received appropriate therapies based on medical assessments.

Challenges and coping mechanisms

Financial challenges: Although AKAPIN are successful now, the first few years following the project phase out were challenging, with financial difficulties being the most significant.

Recounting the first years of phase-out, a leader recounts:

“With NORFIL before, we had an allowance. When we attended training and seminars, they provided food, accommodation, and transportation. When NORFIL phased out, we were no longer financed. For our meetings, the local government units funded the cost of food. Our challenge was really on transportation. We live far apart, so what we spent on fares, we could have used to buy half a sack of rice. We also used to depart early in the day to get on the service vehicle the local government unit lent us. Of course, we had to leave our children in the care of other people. So, we really went through a phase of diminishing numbers due to these challenges.”

- AKAPIN Leader

After NORFIL phased out, AKAPIN secured some funding through another organisation which started at PHP50,000 (AUD 1,370) and grew to P500,000 (AUD 13,690). With this, AKAPIN began distributing assistive devices, which extended beyond its capacity. Funding became inconsistent and AKAPIN eventually depleted its internal funds. This led the Board to reassess their approach, and reaffirm their commitment to their core mission, and focus on what they do best - advocacy and referral.

AKAPIN experienced another challenge during the Taal volcanic eruption when they were advised to distribute assistance using funds provided by NORFIL. However, the funds were insufficient to support all AKAPIN members and with the Board also affected by the disaster, they were unable to deliver on their intended commitments. As a result, the organisation returned the funds.

Today, AKAPIN sustain its operations through membership fees, income-generating activities such as raffles, and by accessing grants. They also collaborate closely with local government units, particularly for transporting and financing activities. This partnership helps AKAPIN to influence planning and budgeting processes in their favour.

Maintaining AKAPIN leadership: The efficiency and effectiveness of AKAPIN leadership relies heavily on the Board. However, challenges arise when long-standing Board members step down, leaving successors in need of guidance and training. To address this, several former leaders have returned to mentor both new and old Board members. It has been recognised that a mix of experienced and emerging leaders is essential for the organisation's continued stability and growth.

"We old leaders want to turn-over the responsibilities to new leaders. I once declined to be part of the Board, but look what happened. The new ones cannot fully perform their tasks. So, among us, old ones, there are those who remain and take it on as responsibility to stay in leadership to lead while new ones are being trained. We will step down ones they are capable enough."

- AKAPIN member

Challenges in Parenting: Parents of children with disabilities face a range of emotional, physical, and financial challenges in raising and caring for their children. These demands often require comprehensive support systems to help families navigate the complexities of daily life. It is precisely these challenges that drive AKAPIN to continue its work.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Kim, who is blind, became involved in the Batangas project when he enrolled in Special Education classes as a child. Through these classes he learned how to use Braille and a white cane - skills that improved his independence and shaped his future. Growing up, Kim excelled in school, serving as class president and participating in youth organisation and sports. Now in his third year of elementary teachers education, he aspires to become a teacher and plans to establish an Organisations for People with Disabilities to strengthen his advocacy for disability rights. He credits NORFIL for providing him with the tools and support needed to navigate life as a blind person.

Right: Kim (right) pictured with Hercules from CBM Global (left) and John Carlo, another former participant of the Batangas project (centre).



The future of AKAPIN

What AKAPIN continues to do: AKAPIN remains committed to maintaining regular peer counselling and sharing sessions for parents, particularly mothers. These meetings foster a sense of community, helping members realise they are not alone in the challenges they face. Through the exchange of experiences and good practices, members provide mutual support and encouragement to one another.

What AKAPIN hopes for: AKAPIN hopes for continued support from NORFIL, recognising the significant and lasting impact of their partnership. Members have expressed deep gratitude for the assistance, allowances, and services provided during training and seminars. AKAPIN hope for a strengthened support system that offers holistic care and assistance to individuals with disabilities and their families. The presence of NORFIL is still felt, especially through its ongoing support for specific activities such as funding training proposals - efforts that continue to empower AKAPIN in fulfilling its mission.

Conclusion

The Batangas project is an example of how a project, when well-designed, can be handed over and sustained by local stakeholders. Its success was highly dependent on the twin-track approach and processes used by NORFIL, which involved close engagement with local government units to mainstream disability inclusion and ensure a smooth transition of project ownership. At the same time, NORFIL focused on strengthening the capacity of AKAPIN to continue delivering targeted interventions at both the individual and community level following phase out.

As a result of such efforts, AKAPIN remains a strong advocacy group with active membership recognised by local government units. Their continued engagement in community advocacy and capacity strengthening is driven by a strong desire to improve the lives of their family members with disabilities. It builds on the successful project design and implementation, which had a clear intent from the start to strengthen the capacity of AKAPIN through training and support, enabling them to successfully take over the role of NORFIL once the project funding ended. NORFIL's continued support for AKAPIN (post phase out), particularly in training new leaders and organisational development and management, has further helped ensure the group's ongoing effectiveness and sustainability.

Similarly, efforts to promote disability inclusion within local governments remains strong, encompassing accessible infrastructure and facilities, dedicate budget allocations, and tailored programs and services for people with disabilities. As with AKAPIN, this progress is the result of strategic project planning, where it was clearly established from the outset that the project would eventually be transferred to the local government who would work in partnership with AKAPINs to implement community-based interventions. This process was formalised and secured through the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement and supported through multilevel training to both permanent government employees and elected officials. These trainings focused on disability awareness, rights, and inclusive approaches. Government commitments to disability inclusion were reinforced further through the passing of a national law mandating the creation of a Persons with Disability Affairs Office in all local government units, ensuring programs and services for people with disabilities.

Additionally, the formation of the Committee for Disability Affairs, coupled with the awards and recognition given to people, organisations, establishments and government units in the Philippines for exemplary performance, continues to serve as a strong incentive for local compliance and active engagement in disability inclusion.

Overall, the Batangas project has created a lasting impact by fostering a supportive environment for people with disabilities, ensuring their inclusion and access to essential services. The project's comprehensive approach and sustained efforts have set a strong foundation for continued advocacy and support for disability rights in the region.

Right: Jose (left) and John Patrick (right) at the municipal Social Welfare and Development Office in Padre Garcia.



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