ACCELERATOR LAB PHILIPPINES
The UNDP Accelerator Labs were created in 2019 to re-imagine development for the 21st century – and to do so at an unprecedented scale by tapping into the relationships, resources, and expertise of UNDP and its partners.

With the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany and the Qatar Fund for Development as founding investors, and support from Italy and UNDP core donors, UNDP Accelerator Labs now consists of 91 Labs covering 115 countries. Our mission is to catalyze positive change by finding and sharing solutions that fit the times we live in and generating new ideas for the times yet to come.

UNDP Accelerator Lab teams help UNDP and partners close the gap between the current practices of international development and the need for an accelerated pace of change. To do this, the Labs create new service lines in development that are open-ended and safe to fail. The Lab network does this by iterating in a cycle of sensing, exploring, testing and growing.
UNDP ACCELERATOR LABS’ LEARNING CYCLE

The Accelerator Lab continuously circles through four key activities:

**SENSE**
This is about understanding emerging challenges and opportunities in the local context and determining where we need to focus our attention.

**EXPLORE**
This is about understanding emerging challenges and looking for solutions, particularly by looking at how citizens are already addressing these challenges and opportunities.

**GROW**
This is about handling over the portfolio of solutions, enabling policy change or spinning solutions off as private ventures.

**DESIGN & TEST**
This is about designing a portfolio of potential solutions to intervene at multiple points in the system and continuously testing them until we are confident they can work.

Graphic: UNDP Accelerator Lab Investment Proposal
This learning cycle defines how UNDP Accelerator Labs collaborate with local partners in addressing issues to accelerate sustainable development.

Bridging these phases of the learning cycle are the three functions embedded within each lab:

**EXPLORATION**

Developments, and partnerships, to inform the context for pipeline development

**SOLUTIONS MAPPING**

Identifying potential local solutions through mapping of grassroots innovations and co-design sessions

**EXPERIMENTATION**

Deploying data innovations and designing experiments to test assumptions to generate insights

Ultimately these aim to elicit learning before going big with solutions, especially in the volatile conditions that can dominate development settings.

Understanding gaps and the fit between current investments and the changing environment can inform pathways to increasing the impact of existing programmes and pipeline development. This aims to move away from pilot programmes towards a coherent portfolio approach to development, where certainty of outcome is a rare commodity while accelerating learning in months rather than years.
ALAB PH: UNDP ACCELERATOR LAB IN THE PHILIPPINES

The UNDP Accelerator Lab in the Philippines, also known as ALab PH, was founded in 2019 with the initial mandate to work on three frontier challenges: circular economy, cities, and local convergences for poverty reduction.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, support extended to pandemic response to look at how digital solutions can promote the inclusion of marginalized groups amid lockdowns. This included deploying chatbots and machine learning to understand the impact of COVID-19 on households and enterprises, as well as piloting digital initiatives such as a platform to promote inclusive supply chain for PPEs and digital cash transfers. Altogether, these have sprung forth a comprehensive portfolio of work, where synergies and complementaries between each are constantly explored towards integration.

ALab is also dedicated to capacity building to promote advocacies around innovation capabilities, notably:

- Inclusive Innovation in the Philippines through research and network building
- Policy advocacies backed by data experiments
- Support for facilitating discussions on participatory futures to inform strategy
SERVICE LINES

In driving this portfolio, ALab PH supports local partners by applying social innovation tools towards the following aims:

Facilitating strategic change

ALab PH facilitates systemic and participatory processes to enable local governments to build a strategic agenda that combines tangible interventions for both short- and long-term impact. These aim to mobilize local multi-stakeholder networks and align relationships to design and activate systemic change in addressing climate change, inequality and public service delivery.

Learning for scale

Together with partners, ALab PH co-develops a framework for systematic reviews, meta-evaluations and analysis of the existing knowledge base to baseline and grow initiatives. Through rapid ethnography, sensemaking and surveys, rapid impact and needs assessment for initiatives may surface contextual insights to complement evaluations towards iterative implementation.

To this end, ALab PH works closely with programme units of UNDP Philippines to leverage its technical expertise and identify pathways for sustainability of initiatives while engaging its external network, both locally and globally, to expand prospects for cross-pollination.

This has brought forth three integrated portfolios upon which ALab PH applies the approaches above: climate & circular economy; poverty & inequality; and public service transformation.
Climate and Circular Economy

Coastal and marine ecosystems have consistently been threatened by climate change, overfishing, habitat loss, and other stressors, and one of the most pressing threats is marine litter. While situated at the apex of the Coral Triangle, the Philippines boasts of being one of the mega-diverse countries in the world and has millions of Filipinos relying on its waters for livelihood. With the majority of the Philippines' population living near rivers and coastal lines, the...
Marine litter is one of the most pressing threats to the coastal and marine environment, in addition to climate change and unsustainable fishing. In 2019, the Philippines contributed 356,371 tonnes of plastic waste into the ocean accounting for 36% of the global total.¹

Marine litter is a systemic problem that requires a solution with a holistic lens. Circular Economy (CE) is considered by world organizations as a key strategy to drastically reduce waste problems and provide significant environmental, economic, and social benefits.²

Under its strategic change service line, ALab PH works on the thematic area of climate and circular economy to support the country’s response to the climate crisis and transition to more inclusive and resilient economies. Starting with the Circular Economy initiative in Pasig City, ALab PH supports the national and local government units, all stakeholders, and people, particularly the vulnerable sector, to find synergies that will demonstrate and accelerate the transition of cities from a linear to a circular economy.

The project has adopted a portfolio approach that encompasses data, policy, advocacy, investments, and behavior interventions needed to address this complex challenge.

1 Hannah Ritchie and Max Roser, “Plastic Pollution”, Our World in Data, April 2022. Available at https://ourworldindata.org/plastic-pollution
2 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, “68% of the world population projected to live in urban areas by 2050, says UN”, 16 May 2018. Available at https://www.un.org/development/
POVERTY AND INEQUALITY
Despite the gradual reduction of poverty in the Philippines over the past decade, three million families still live below the poverty line, according to the poverty estimate in 2018. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic stunned humanity and developments in poverty reduction have been put to a stop. In the Philippines, the impact was felt most by those in the vulnerable sectors, such as farmers, fisherfolk, and small entrepreneurs, making it more difficult for them to rise from poverty.

ALab PH’s campaign to reduce poverty and inequalities is pushed by both its Local Convergence for Zero Poverty and Inclusive Local Value Chains portfolios. Through the #TawidCOVID challenge, citizens identified and nurtured local solutions to poverty in the context of the pandemic. Data innovations were also pursued through the COVID Pulse PH chatbot surveys and machine learning for poverty estimates.

ALab PH partnered with Zero Extreme Poverty 2030 Philippines (ZEP) to build and strengthen local coalitions that tackle poverty issues through collective impact. ALab PH and ZEP hope to reach more local convergences and local government units (LGUs) through the AAA Recovery Project focusing on COVID-19 recovery and the government devolution of services to LGUs initiated by the Mandanas-Garcia ruling.

MSMEs play a crucial role in the Philippine economy and employ two-thirds of the population. ALab PH captured MSME behavior and perceptions by conducting rapid response surveys and collaborated with enterprises that continue to push for social good despite economic constraints.

ALab PH is in the course of surveying the value chain situation in both BARMM and Malay, Aklan, and through rapid ethnography and co-design sessions, has come up with proposed solutions to build more inclusive value chain networks. The experience and lessons learned from working with local stakeholders have helped ALab PH fine-tune its Inclusive Local Chain, which the lab envisions for other localities in the Philippines.

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Philippine Statistics Authority, “Proportion of Poor Filipinos was Recorded at 18.1 Percent in 2021”, 15 August 2022. Available at https://psa.gov.ph/content/proportion-poor-filipinos-was-recorded-181-percent-2021
PUBLIC SERVICE TRANSFORMATION
Globally, urbanization has been established as a strong propeller for economic growth and poverty reduction. In the Philippines, 65 percent of the population is expected to live within cities by 2050, a number that is twice the size it is today. Urbanization can bring about job creation, improved services, and innovative solutions; while a reckless approach to attaining an urban society can lead to congestion, pollution, and more inequality.4

Because cities must adapt to fast-changing technology, governments are compelled to engage in strategic systems change so that public services such as waste removal or disaster response are delivered. Public service transformation has been at the core of ALab PH’s advocacy. ALab PH aspires to support local governments by using innovative tools to address gaps in their capacity to deliver services to the community. In strengthening the government units’ and agencies’ capacities, citizen participation must be reinforced through online channels and new local coalitions.

The NextGenCities portfolio is a convergence of UNDP’s existing work and has been evolving into a robust and consolidated offer. Support to promote urban innovation for agile and anticipatory governance can be done through building participatory platforms, providing portfolio insights, and making use of digital assets to inform decision making.

As a support to the UNDP Philippines’ COVID-19 response efforts, ALab PH initiated its Digital Financial Inclusion portfolio. The lab has implemented policy research and webinars to stir discussion at the policy level while a solutions mapping guide called the Saliklakbay has been designed to take advantage of innovations perceived at the grassroots level.

IN THREE YEARS, WE HAVE ACCOMPLISHED THE FOLLOWING WITH OUR LOCAL PARTNERS:

- Identified and archived 262 Grassroots Innovations in the Davao Region through DOST’s GRIND, which will also adopt Alab PH’s SalikLakbay Solutions Mapping to identify locally-sourced solutions with the view of improving local communities across the country.

- Facilitated an innovation challenge to support local service delivery and sessions for human-centered digital service delivery.

- Prototyped and co-designed proposed solutions to address barriers to waste management and financial technology adoption to find novel ways to implement a COVID-19 response, to utilize cultural assets for socioeconomic growth, to support coalitions achieve collective impact, and to promote inclusive food systems and value chains.
Designed and initiated 18 experiments, such as data experiments, pilot studies and behavioral nudges across portfolios, eight of which helped advance the Circular Economy portfolio into finding innovative solutions to waste detection (Satellite remote sensing, Citizen Science) and management (ICE Hub). In driving digitalization, a total of five experiments focused on increasing financial literacy and adaptation of digital cash transfers and creating an inclusive Fintech ecosystem.

Institutionalized 21 solutions through our partners, building their capacity towards institutional sustainability. Alab PH’s innovative approaches to data collection and application (e.g., chatbot survey, machine learning, remote sensing, Pintig Lab), knowledge platforms (Empower, Kai) and solutions mapping (Saliklakbay) were adopted by government and civic partners while contributing to UNDP programming.

Mobilized over 3 million USD from both internal and external funding resources to grow learning on financial inclusion, local innovations, circular economy, informal economy, and food systems. As our work matures, so does the opportunity to consolidate ALab capacities and strengthen synergies between thematic areas, as learning gained from each focus area has paved the way towards an integrated portfolio approach. The Lab continues to be a resource for integration, interrogation, and iteration of innovation in development work, opening up channels to harness the capacity of the global learning network.

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The Lab continues to invest in capacities to bridge different parts of the learning cycle, such as coordination, knowledge management, platforms, and storytelling. This includes the launch of the KAI portal, which is accessible via www.undp.ph.
Interested to learn more?

We invite you to take a look at our digital assets surrounding policy advocacy, research, webinars, blogs, published reports and articles. Get in touch with us by visiting our social media platforms.

Have you spotted grassroots solutions or emerging trends and signals of change that you would like to share? Do you have related initiatives to complement experimentation or insights you would like to share during our stakeholder consultations? We would love to hear from you!

Let’s work together!
Fill up the form or contact us at acceleratorlab.ph@undp.org

Co-building the Accelerator Labs as a joint venture with: