



SAILING BEYOND THE SUNSET

COSE's Journey Towards Dignified Aging in the Philippines

The Coalition of Services of the Elderly, Inc. (COSE) envisions an equitable society for all ages where older persons live in dignity, remain healthy, self-reliant, secure and free to commit themselves to others and society. For 30 years now, COSE has worked with older persons—especially the poor and marginalized—in upholding their rights; enhancing their potentials; recognizing them as a significant sector and ensuring their participation in matters affecting their lives. COSE, in a way, shares the sentiments of the great Roman politician, Cicero: “Old age will

only be respected if it fights for it, when it asserts its rights, when it comes into bondage to no one, and maintains control over its own to its last breath.”

On the occasion of COSE's 30th founding anniversary, we are encouraged to report, in all modesty, the results of our endeavors—from community organizing and capacity-building to the humble fruits of our advocacies, as we craft a better world for the nation's senior citizens.

MAIN ACCOMPLISHMENTS



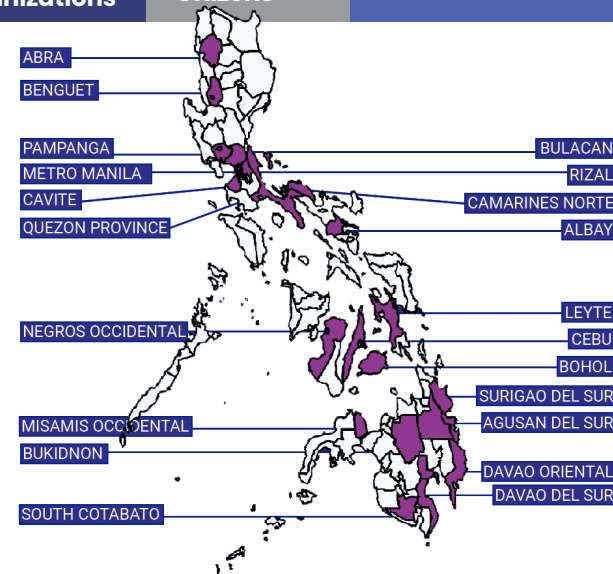
COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

COSE has engaged the older persons to form and strengthen organizations so that, in turn, they can create, advocate, and demand more age-friendly policies and programs. Apart from this, COSE believes that Older Persons Organizations (OPOs) can initiate, manage, and sustain programs and projects that are more responsive to their specific needs and aspirations. To date, COSE has partnered with at least 850 OPOs or Barangay Senior Citizens Associations (BSCAs) and 65 Federations (at the municipal or city level) in select provinces in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao.

COSE was also instrumental in the establishment of the Confederation of Older Persons Associations of the Philippines (COPAP) in 2006.

COSE has witnessed that older persons can work together and harness their collective potentials.

850 Older Persons Organizations
65 Federations of Senior Citizens
1 Confederation of Older Persons Associations of the Philippines (COPAP)



CAPACITY BUILDING

Older Persons Organizations (OPOs) were trained on how to manage Community-Based Programs of the Elderly (CBPE). Constantly, we have provided trainings and other related capacity-building activities on the following areas or domains: organizational management; meeting facilitation; parliamentary procedures; leadership camp for second-line leaders; visioning exercises; livelihood management; financial management; documentation; policy advocacy and lobbying; policy development and writeshop (e.g., formulation of the draft of Senior Citizens Code); citizen monitoring; project proposal-making; project management; basic computer and social media; and strategic planning workshop, to name some.

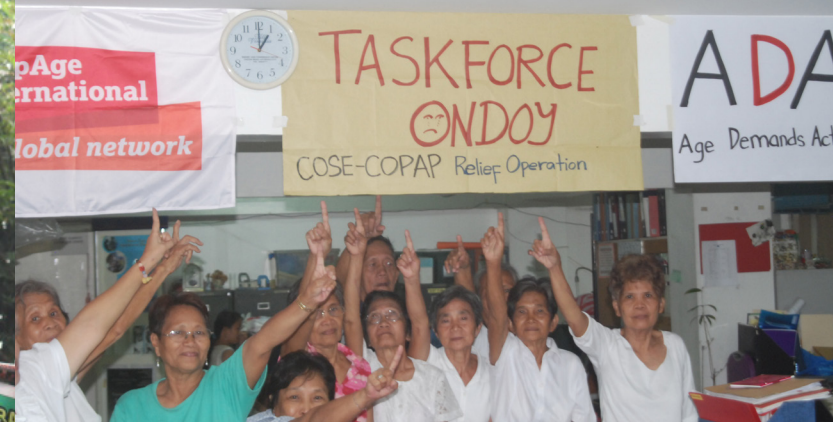
We have also raised the capacities of older persons to prepare and endure the shocks of disasters and calamities and highlight their vital role in fostering disaster-resilient communities through a series of disaster risk reduction and management (DRRM)-related projects.



NETWORKING and LINKAGING

COSE has cooperated and collaborated with various branches and agencies of government (both national and local); private organizations; corporate foundations; advocacy networks and alliances; multi-sectoral cause-oriented groups; colleges and universities; community support groups; and volunteers. Local government agencies such as Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (MDRRMO), Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office (MSWDO), and Municipal Health Office (MHO), the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), COPAP, and academics, among others, were tapped to give knowledge and information and linked OPO programs to their respective services and resources.

COSE has maintained partnership with various international donors and funders and other international non-governmental organizations. It has also international engagements where COSE represented the older person sector and global network of non-profit and non-government organizations working on aging and with older persons.



ADVOCACY

COSE, along with various senior citizens organizations, actively took part in the enactment of Republic Act No. 7432 (An Act to Maximize the Contribution of Senior Citizens to Nation Building, Grant Benefits and Special Privileges and for Other Purposes, April 1992); R.A. 9257 (February 2004) and R.A. 9994 or the Expanded Senior Citizens Act (2010), which institutionalized the granting of social pension to indigent senior citizens, among other additional benefits; R.A. 9502 (Cheaper Medicines Act, 2008); and R.A. 10645 or Mandatory PhilHealth Coverage for All Senior Citizens (November 2014).

COSE has also moved for the adoption of Help Desks, both at the barangay and municipal levels in select areas; the Mobile Health Care Service; and Home Care program, which the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) supported through its Administrative Order No. 04, series of 2010. Also, COSE originally advocated for the establishment of a National Council for Senior Citizens, which was sponsored by the late Ako Bicol Party-list Representative Rodel Batocabe.

COSE continues to advocate for:

- Exposing or standing up against ageism
- Healthy and Active Aging
- Long Term Care
- Advocacy against Elder Abuse
- Comprehensive Anti-Discrimination Law
- Universal Social Pension
- Full representation of older persons in local planning and policymaking bodies
- Establishment of a National Geriatric Hospital / National Center for Geriatric Health
- Senior Citizens Registration and Information System (SCRIS)
- Promotion of Age-Friendly City and Community (AFCC)



HUMANITARIAN WORK

COSE had participated in several humanitarian response initiatives, among them:

- Typhoon Ketsana (Tropical Storm Ondoy) recovery project (2010-2011, Metro Manila, Camarines Norte, Davao City and Agusan del Sur); Emergency relief for older people affected by Tropical Storm "Saola" (Gener) (2012, Metro Manila, Northern Luzon, Camarines Norte);
- Emergency relief to older people and families affected by Typhoon Bopha (Pablo) (2012-2013, Compostella Valley/Agusan, Mindanao); Typhoon Haiyan joint response project with HelpAge International (2013-2016, Eastern, Western Leyte and Medellin, North Cebu), including provision of shelter support, construction of barangay senior citizens center/office, and livelihood assistance;
- Construction of 3 Foot Bridges in Jalas, Villaba (2015 – 2016, Leyte);
- Assessment and Response to the victims of Typhoon Ompong in Benguet, Abra and Kalinga (2018-2019).



GROUP HOME

Since 1992, COSE has maintained a Group Home (situated in San Jose Del Monte, Bulacan) for abandoned and neglected older women. It is a testament that a community-based domiciliary care is feasible. It has been sustained through in-kind/material, professional services, and financial donations of various benefactors: the host local government unit, schools, students, corporations, individuals, geriatricians, volunteer caregivers, and other health professionals.

IMPACT OF COSE'S PROGRAMS, PROJECTS, AND INTERVENTIONS

What follows is a summary of COSE's social impact and advocacy gains—mainly in qualitative terms—for the past three decades.



COSE has contributed to bolstering the morale, confidence, and motivation of older persons in the project areas, apart from reinforcing their level of social, economic and political awareness.

With their eagerness to learn and their thirst for new information, older persons are highly motivated and have actively participated in every COSE-initiated activity, not only by attending meetings and trainings but also by sharing their own experiences, observations, and insights. The broader knowledge and deeper understanding of their rights and entitlements have fueled their confidence to interact with various government agencies and private organizations.

Positive view on aging and on older persons, which boosted the “community confidence” accorded to older persons in COSE project areas.

The communities and the older persons themselves now treat the senior citizens fairly. Older persons now feel that their sector is being given due attention and their needs taken into consideration. Regarded as a force for good, older persons in the project areas are now more active and

are consulted by local government units to expound on their concerns. Some are called upon to participate in local community development processes, such as local development planning and program implementation (through the Office of the Senior Citizens Affairs or OSCA). Older persons are now considered as a vital community resource, whereas before, they were seen as weak and insignificant. They now have a venue to actualize their intent to give something back to their communities.

OPOs in COSE project areas are operational or functional.

- OPOs have clear Constitution and By-Laws (CBLs), clear Vision-Mission-Goals (VMG). For some time, the "copy and paste" approach in VMG formulation had been the norm. OPOs are now able to formulate their own.
- OPOs can perform on their own an Organizational Capacity Assessment Test using COSE's "OPO Assessment Tool." In turn, they formulate an improvement plan based on the results of the SWOT Analysis.
- They now have active committees: Education and Training Committee; Livelihood; Health; Advocacy; Older

Citizen Monitoring Committee; DRRM Committee.

- OPOs are able to manage their funds/ finances systematically and diligently (e.g., maintaining bank account and financial record books; expense tracking; financial reporting);
- OPOS and federations are able to formulate work plan, organizational improvement plan, strategic plan and draft policy proposals and resolutions.

COSE's capacity-building activities have fostered collaborative, experiential, and action learning; self-reflection; and facilitated problem-solving and decision-making in OPOs covered by COSE projects.

Said capacity-building measures have improved the competence, performance, and quality of service delivery of the partner organizations, whether modestly or greatly. Though, admittedly, capacity development has to be reinforced in many respects.

OPOs are offering various programs and services to their members through their

own Community-Based Programs of the Elderly (CBPE)—a testament to their self-reliance and resourcefulness.

The partner OPOs have the following programs and services (although there are some variations):

- Community Gerontology
- Healthy aging, wellness, and physical fitness; Home care / Home Visitation
- Feeding Program
- Help Desk and case resolution or referral pathways
- Peer Counseling
- Knowledge and Information Sharing Activities
- Botika Binhi (community drugstore for senior citizens)
- Income-Generating Projects/Fundraising/ Resource Mobilization/ age-friendly, disaster-resilient livelihood programs (e.g., banana chips making, meat processing, and plant propagation; lending or the Community Managed Enterprise

Development (CMED) program; water refilling station; innovative and diversified farming techniques; bean sprout growing; chairs and table rental; handicraft; sardines making, etc.)

- Older Citizen Monitoring, which led to increased vigilance of older persons concerning the implementation of social protection programs, especially social pension; some OPOs are even drafting resolutions to form a local Screening Body for verification and validation of social pensioners
- Mortuary aid / burial fund

In turn, such OPO-level initiatives have led to improvements in social consciousness, social connectedness, social cohesion and resulted in an increase in the level of social engagement, sense of community and sense of belongingness among older persons.

There has been an appreciable increase in the “political capital” of older persons and their organizations in COSE project areas.

Although some OPOs and Federations still face an uphill battle with regards to pushing for their rights and demands at the local government level, most of COSE’s partner OPOs have beneficial working relations with their OSCA (Office of Senior Citizens Affairs) and LGUs.

The linkages with the local government units placed the older person sector among their priorities. Local government councils now put more emphasis on the issues of older persons and extend support to their advocacies.

The following are the common issues and concerns that are being raised by OPOs (although not adequately or equally addressed in some COSE areas):

- a) proper selection and appointment of OSCA Head as per Republic Act No. 9994 (Expanded Senior Citizens Act);

- b) inclusion of federation work plans in the LGU budget and access to other local resources;
- c) representation of older persons in local special bodies and participation in local development planning processes;
- d) transportation and honorarium of older person leaders and volunteers;
- e) implementation of RA 9994;
- f) access to essential medicines and health care services;
- g) social pension implementation issues.

More importantly, OPOs are now able to draft their own resolutions, policy proposals, program of work. Notably, five OPO Federations in Leyte—Tolosa, Merida, Isabel, Matag-ob, and Villaba—were able to shepherd their own Senior Citizens Code. Most OPOs in COSE project areas were able to access funds / resources from the government (e.g., BUB process; SEA-K; LGU grants; share from internal revenue allotment (IRA) in their respective barangays).

They are now also being recognized as rightful participants in the policymaking and development planning processes. Some of them have a seat in Local Development Councils and other local bodies. In some COSE project areas, for example, older persons are now being recognized as a significant sector in community-based disaster risk reduction and management (DRRM) and climate change adaptation initiatives. Older people are now part of the Barangay DRRM Committee (BDRRMC) structure and some of them even take the lead in different preparedness-related committees such as the early warning system committee and the relief committee.

OPO leaders and their members and other civil society groups now have deeper knowledge and understanding of critical issues surrounding aging. As a result, cooperation and linkages between various advocates were

enhanced. OPOs are now taking the lead in forging and strengthening partnerships with the City/Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office (C/MSWDO), PhilHealth, religious and civic organizations as they pursue the effective implementation of their programs and projects.

Moreover, through their own Older Citizen Monitoring Committees (OCMC), OPOs now have a tool and mechanism to exact accountability from duty-bearers and program implementors.

Through COSE’s Sampung Ulirang Nakatatanda (SUN) Awards Program (launched in 1991), we have also seen that older persons fulfill the following roles and functions in society:

- Human Rights Advocates / Activists
- Women Leaders
- Religious / Spiritual Leaders
- Urban Poor Champions
- Youth Welfare Advocates
- Poets, Writers, Artists, Literary champions
- Defenders of the Environment
- Indigenous People Leaders / Preservers of Indigenous Culture and Heritage
- Farmer / Fisherfolk Leaders / Agriculturists
- Scientists, Architects, and Engineers
- Emergency and Rescue Volunteers

Older persons, truly, are exemplars of responsible citizenship, servant leadership, heroism, and sacrifice. They continually remind us that genuine service, dedication, and compassion knows no boundaries or limitations.

HOW WE CONDUCTED THE STUDY

The study is an initial attempt to capture the contributions of COSE in effecting societal change for the benefit of the nation’s older persons. Mainly qualitative, this paper relied heavily on self-reported outcomes and testimonials of older persons who have participated in its various endeavors and those who have directly benefited from COSE’s projects and community interventions. Owing to limited resources, data gathering was primarily through key informant interviews, focus group discussions, small group discussions with select leaders in the various COSE project areas such as Quezon City, Davao City, Provinces of Bulacan, Pampanga, Leyte, Agusan del Sur, and Bukidnon--apart from the usual review of primary and secondary documents, including COSE strategy papers, project documents, project implementation and assessment reports, and project narrative reports.

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Much work remains to be done. Yet, we are emboldened by the words of the eminent English poet, Lord Tennyson:

“Come, my friends, it is not too late to seek a newer world...for my purpose holds to sail beyond the sunset. Tho’ much is taken, much abides; and tho’ we are not now that strength which in old days moved earth and heaven, that which we are, we are; one equal temper of heroic hearts, made weak by time and fate, but strong in will—to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.”

To, for, and with the older persons, COSE will carry on.

Coalition of Services of the Elderly, Inc. (COSE)

a non-government organization that works with and for older persons in advocating for dignified aging.

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