



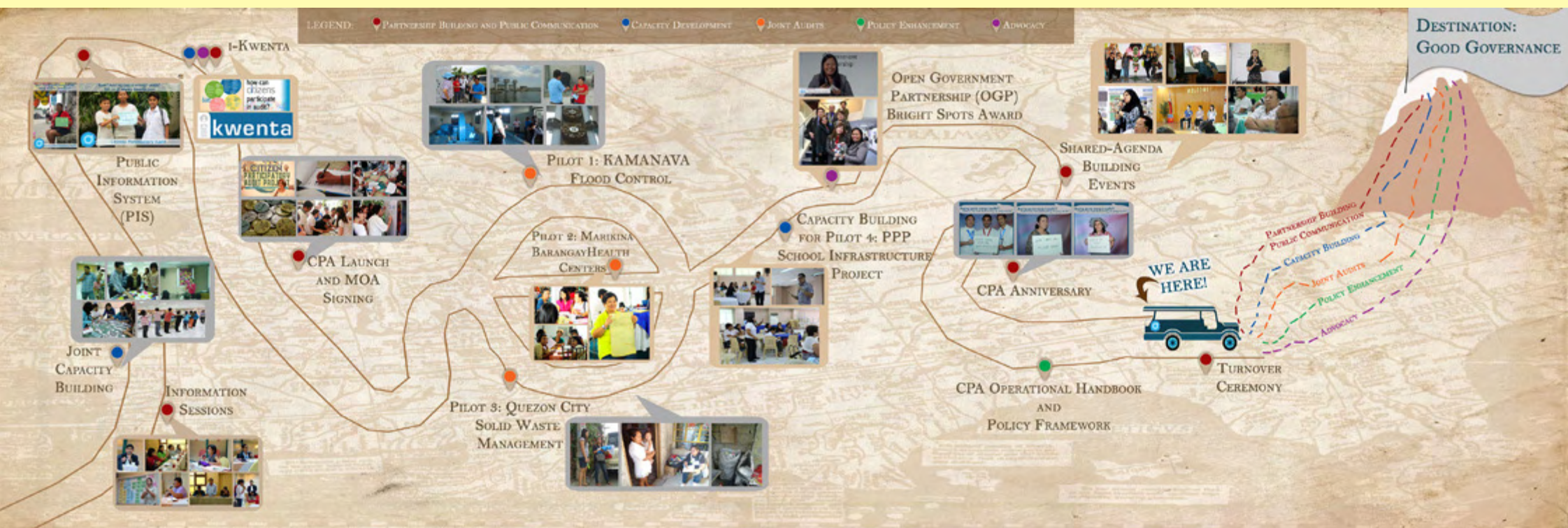
T H E J O U R N E Y O F

# CITIZEN PARTICIPATORY AUDIT



# THE CPA ROADMAP

APRIL 2012 TO JULY 2014





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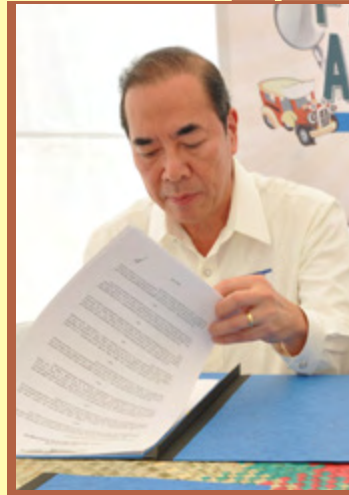
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- o Social Action Center of Pampanga, Inc. (SACOP)

Thank you very much for sharing the vision and making CPA a reality.

# message from the Executive Director

It's officially open!

That's how we at the ANSA-EAP Foundation see the Commission on Audit (COA) of the Philippines as its joint undertaking with civil society groups concludes its first phase.

And that's how we see the public audit process itself after we have pilot-tested citizen participatory audits of various government projects. The Citizen Participatory Audit (CPA) project has indeed presented many opportunities for engagement and learning, and we at ANSA-EAP are proud to have been part of the mission to carry it out.

We have shared the story, time and again, of how the opening up process has not been that easy. In fact, it continues to present new challenges. Two years of partnership for the CPA project is testament to the time and energy that both government auditors and CSOs have invested into efforts to address their sometimes-opposing views and varying interests. It was a bold move on the part of COA to open the audit process to ordinary citizens in the first place! Civil society is equally courageous in accepting the audit challenge.

It is perhaps worth noting here a few lessons we learned that made the project work: 1) partnerships between COA and CSOs strengthened both parties' oversight functions; 2) beyond consultation and joint audits, active exchange of knowledge and skills brought out more areas for collaboration; and 3) conversation with citizens helps to effectively articulate a collectively shared audit agenda.

If there's one thing that the CPA project experience made us realize about government-citizen relations, it is that the openness of government,



even of CSOs, cannot be automatically expected. It is an evolving process. From the kind which could be described as guarded openness, where everything had to be scrutinized and filtered according to certain persuasions, we saw how the relationship became structured, governed by agreements and protocols. There were moments when it became exploratory, seeking new ways to understand the whole arrangement and its future directions.

Best of all, everyone, at one point or another, also eventually became dynamically and spontaneously open like friends who share common dreams and aspirations. But these experiences alone in our effort to contribute to good governance tell us how fruitful those two years of CPA had been for both COA and the civil society.

The constructive engagement framework has truly resonated in the

CPA project. Perhaps true and lasting reforms ideally happen that way. We should actually acknowledge and thank the Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government (CCAGG) for paving the way for this. Their generosity in sharing knowledge from their pioneering work on participatory audit has provided a model for an open atmosphere in the audit process. Their lessons pushed us to innovate and improve.

As we conclude the pilot phase of the CPA, we carry the lessons of openness with us. Over the next few years, we will confront the challenge of sustainability and institutionalization. We start a new chapter with big hopes, open to many possibilities.

## **REDEMPTO PARAFINA**

Executive Director  
Affiliated Network for Social Accountability  
In East Asia and the Pacific (ANSA-EAP)



# ENHANCING ENGAGEMENTS

## THE FIRST TWO YEARS OF THE CPA PROJECT

Public audits are seen as the cornerstone of good governance. They ensure that decisions made in government are aligned with people's needs and that public money is spent using sound financial systems and standards. They also evaluate government programs by determining whether these indeed achieved objectives and contributed to improve people's lives.

This function is normally taken on by Supreme Audit Institutions— in the case of the Philippines, the Commission on Audit.

The COA however faces some challenges in performing its mandate. Foremost is the huge number of agencies that need to be audited, given the small number of state

auditors. In 2014, for instance, there are only 8,734 auditors against the 19,081 agencies subjected to public audits every year.

As a result, audit reports are dated and the monitoring of the agencies' actions on the COA recommendations is limited. The public has only little awareness of COA and its work, can barely make sense of the technical language of audit reports,

and cannot understand why there is only a limited number of audits on program results.





### **FILLING THE GAP THROUGH CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT**

There have been attempts to address this gap. In recent years, international groups, donor agencies, civil society organizations, and experts have suggested that tapping ordinary citizens in the public audit process could help address some of these problems.

For instance, individuals and citizen groups can provide valuable input to the audit process. They can identify audit areas that matter to them. They can give on-the-ground data regarding implementation and results of public programs and services. They can

provide feedback about actions taken by government agencies on audit reports.

On a more basic level, organized citizens can help raise public awareness on what audit institutions do.

### **GOING ONE STEP FURTHER**

There is a more direct way of involving citizens in public audits, and perhaps it is one that could give more teeth to audit reports. It is getting citizens to join state auditors in conducting the audit process.

In the Philippines, the current administration's strategy to curb corruption involves sustaining the

engagement with citizens in governance work. In fact, the government made a nineteen-point commitment to the Open Government Partnership (OGP) – a global platform for reforms aimed at more open and accountable governance, and part of this is deepening citizen participation in COA's work and institutionalizing such involvement.

### **PARTICIPATORY AUDIT IN ACTION**

Participatory audit is not new to COA. In 2000, it partnered with the Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Governance (CCAGG) to conduct joint audits of some public projects in the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR). CCAGG is one of the pioneers of social accountability in the country,

starting its citizen monitoring work in 1987 and quickly gaining recognition for its fearless reporting of anomalies in local infrastructure projects.

But while these joint audits between COA and CCAGG resulted in the publication of a manual of operations, the practice was not sustained, given changes in COA's leadership in succeeding years.

The Citizen Participatory Audit (CPA) project, initiated by COA with the Affiliated Network for Social Accountability in East Asia and the Pacific in 2012, builds on lessons gained from this earlier engagement.

At the outset, the project sets its sights on putting in place relevant

policies and systems within COA that would help ensure the continued use of CPA approaches. It is grounded on the COA's constitutional mandate to develop audit methodologies to help the commission perform its work better. COA and ANSA EAP also tried other ways of doing joint audits and aimed to enhance COA's existing citizen feedback mechanism.

### **DOCUMENTING THE FIRST TWO YEARS**

This e-book reports on the CPA Project's key accomplishments during the past two years. It shares stories on the initial changes in the views practices and relationships of the CPA actors that have resulted from project interventions. The actors themselves tell these stories.



Chapter 1 talks about giving greater voice to citizens through public sector audits. How have ANSA EAP's facilitation and capacity building interventions among citizens groups helped in enhancing their appreciation of the value of public sector audits and their partnership with COA? Have these provided them with a framework and process for influencing COA's agenda and plans?

Chapter 2 discusses how the enabling framework for CPA in COA was enhanced. These are the stories of struggles and gains of both the COA and its partner citizen groups in moving from a mode of participation that is largely consultative to one characterized by active exchange and dialogue.

The chapter also highlights how the COA, through the CPA project, has broadened its mechanisms for constructive engagement with citizens. The key outputs that have

contributed to these changes are the CPA learning modules, the enhanced public information system, and the CSO profiling, databasing initiative.

Finally, Chapter 3 talks about the greater COA-citizen partnership to institutionalize participatory audit. How have efforts ensured continuity of the practice within COA and among CSOs? What are the various participatory audit models developed and piloted under the project, and what is the overall policy and framework crafted as a result of the enhanced engagement?

ANSA EAP's project team hopes, through this e-book, to chart the status of current efforts to achieve more relevant and effective public audits through citizen involvement in COA's work. This is the team's small contribution to the clamor for the sustained use of CPA as an approach to social accountability and good governance.





# CHAPTER 1

ENGAGING CITIZENS



# ARTICULATING CITIZEN AGENDA FOR PARTICIPATORY AUDIT

Every time he speaks before citizen group representatives like himself, Anthony Septimo identifies the important phases for citizens' engagement with the Commission on Audit for the CPA project.

The following have to be clear, he says: The terms of engagement, the levelling of expectations, planning and implementation of the audit, and post-implementation reflections.

He always closes his talk by sharing his experience on how it is to be part of the team that conducted the pilot audit for the KAMANAVA Flood Control Project.

Tony uses these adjectives to describe his feelings: He is HAPPY to have a complete appreciation of audit; GRATEFUL for his better understanding of how the COA does

its job; ELATED to see that recommendations are accepted and heeded, and FULFILLED to know he is contributing to the practice of good governance and constructive engagement.

The women who participated in the pilot audit for the Quezon City solid waste management program — they call themselves Diwatas, collectively — also take pride in their participation. It is always good to be part of something big and something noble, they say. Their learning experience is invaluable.

These are people who have had first hand experience of the CPA.

The engagement with citizens does not end there, however. Part of the process is the building of a shared

agenda — issues “close to the people’s hearts” — in determining what areas should be audited in the next phase of the CPA, and on to its succeeding years.

This chapter thus also includes stories of participants in the Shared Agenda Building workshops held in Baguio,

Iloilo, Davao and Metro Manila in late 2013 and early 2014.

The citizens and citizens groups that have expressed interest in participating in the next audits — and in other PA activities, in general — come from diverse backgrounds and places. Some have been active in CSO









work, engaging national offices and LGUs for greater transparency and accountability. Some have retired from their professions but are actively seeking ways to stay involved in their country's — and communities' — affairs. Still some are in their 20s, barely having started their careers and guided only by that nagging feeling to do something and help make a difference.

These stories tell us that citizens are now more aware of the role of public audits as a way to attain social accountability and good governance. They do know that they can now help shape the audit agenda of the commission.

Citizens are brought into the conversation, enhancing their capacity to articulate their concerns without having to resort to angry confrontation or sensational accusations. This is possible, not just through the CPA project in particular but citizen participation in general.

The stories in these chapter are by no means final accomplishments. Instead, these are beginnings — tentative but spirited, experimental but resolute.

After all, every one of us, wherever we come from, whatever institution we represent or orientation we bring to the table, is first and foremost a citizen.

## **These are beginnings – tentative but spirited, experimental but resolute**





## ON THE ROAD TOWARDS A SHARED AGENDA

We went to Baguio, to Iloilo, to Davao, back to Pasig, and we brought everything together in Quezon City.

The Citizen Participatory Audit project reached out to more citizens and state auditors alike through its Shared Agenda Building sessions, which sought to create awareness of — and clamor for — participatory audit in key cities all over the country.

The CPA Team also brought materials on existing pilot audits to inform the audience about what it really means for citizens and COA employees to be part of the same audit team.

So what really went on during these road shows?



## PHOTOBOOTH

Who does not love to have his or her photo taken?

This was not a regular photo booth, however. Sure, there were no fancy wigs or crazy hats. More than that, was a theme, and a nagging question: “Ano ang gusto kong i-audit (What do I want audited)?”

One simply took a piece of paper and wrote the audit area one believed needed looking into. One held up the piece of paper, just like a fansign, and smiled for the camera.

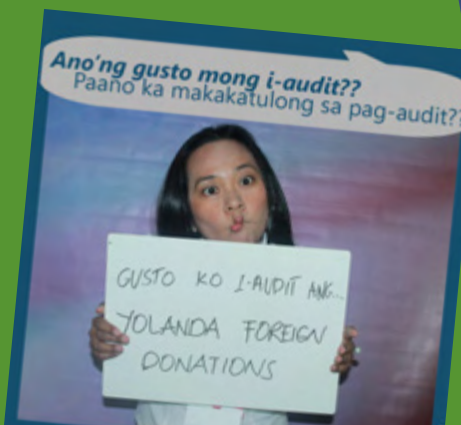
**Ano'ng gusto mong i-audit??**  
Paano ka makakatulong sa pag-audit??



**we are 1**  
The CITIZEN PARTICIPATORY AUDIT PROJECT  
1st Anniversary Celebration

**#1CPA**

**Ano'ng gusto mong i-audit??**  
Paano ka makakatulong sa pag-audit??







## SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY 101

“Bakit ka nandito  
(Why are you here)?”

This was one of the first questions that participants in the Shared Agenda Building Workshop had to ask themselves. Learning manager Adelfo Briones opened the workshop with a brief talk on Social Accountability to put CPA in the context of SAc and good governance.

The participants gave a host of reasons why they were present in the event: some were complying with office orders, some were curious, some were eager to learn what Citizen Participatory Audit was all about.

Some wanted to voice out their concerns about projects in their area that they believe needed to be looked into.

When somebody dared say it was “para sa bayan (for the motherland)”,

“Social accountability is the constructive engagement between citizens and government in monitoring government’s use of public resources to improve service delivery, protect rights, and promote community welfare,” he said.

## **There is no theory that captures the essence of social accountability than actual practice**

many could not help smiling. Was it just lip service?

Good governance, according to Mr. Briones, is the process of decision-making that should result in desirable and beneficial results both for those who govern and those who are governed.

He added that social accountability thrives when the following conditions are present: responsive and open government, organized and citizen groups, access to information and social and cultural appropriateness.

“But there is no theory that captures the essence of social accountability than actual practice,” Briones added.







### **“CLOSE TO THE HEARTS”**

In each of the workshops, citizens and state auditors were put together in groups and made to discuss among themselves the government projects/ programs they wanted audited. They were also made to define the scope of the audit.

Results from each of the Luzon, Visayas, Mindanao and NCR workshops were consolidated in the National Workshop held at the COA premises.

For Luzon, the audit areas identified were: national road projects of Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), school buildings, Bottom-Up budgeting, local government units (LGU) budgets' share from PCA permits and fees, and National Government Projects (NGP) projects by Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

Participants from the Visayas stressed that they wanted the audit the distribution of donations to Yolanda victims, as well as the reforestation

program of the DENR,utilization of the Special Education Fund (SEF), the organic agriculture fund, and the 20% development fund.

In Mindanao, the participants wanted the PAMANA (Payapa at Masaganang Pamayanan) Project, the DENR Environmental Compliance Certificate (ECC) Project, and the LASURECO in coordination with the National Electrification Administration (NEA) and National Power Corporation (NPC).

For the National Capital Region, the areas were the implementation of the senior citizens law, and alternative learning system. Thise in the capital region also wanted to see how the rehabilitation of Yolanda-stricken areas was being implemented.

At the outset, the guideline has been to identify audit areas that are close to the people's hearts. And indeed, the issues that surfaced were those for which citizens cared about the most, because they affected them more closely.

## ALL TOGETHER NOW

In the end, it became clear to the participants that the CPA is not just a project that had a distinct beginning and end. It is instead an initiative with the great potential to highlight the best of participatory government. It could be sustained as more and more citizens engage government, not in any adversarial or confrontational encounter, but in working toward a shared agenda.

Soon each participant realized that his/her presence was more than compliance with some order, a reply to some invitation, a satisfaction of curiosity, even an accident. Everybody was there because everybody had something — even just a little insight, a simple question, or a gentle reminder — to contribute to the common agenda that the COA and the CSOs are building.





# AUDIT FOR ALL AGES: THE NCR SHARED AGENDA BUILDING WORKSHOP

Yes, walk-ins are accepted here.

Twenty-two year-old Amor Mendoza only saw the invitation to the Shared Agenda Building workshop for the Citizen Participatory Audit project, shared and re-shared on Facebook. The political science graduate from UP Diliman did not know anything about the project at that time, but she was definitely intrigued.

She wondered: “Can citizens really do something about governance without becoming a public official?”

And so she took note of the date and venue – February 5 at the Astoria Plaza Hotel – and made it a point to show up.

Mendoza’s interest shows that involvement in participatory audit does not require one to be a member of an established, long-existing citizen organization.

While the first phase of the CPA project – a project of the Commission on Audit and the Affiliated Network for Social

Accountability in East Asia and the Pacific, – brought together citizen groups and their COA counterparts in the conduct of pilot audits, individuals are also welcome to share their own expertise to advance the project’s goals.

“But for citizens to do our part, we have to be informed of the ways in which we can help,” Mendoza said when she

returned for the national workshop – with a friend in tow – held the following day at the COA compound. She is currently pondering whether she should start a career or enroll in law school.

And who says dynamism is just for twentysomethings? While Mendoza brings the idealism of the youth in the citizen engagement process, retired auditor and bank executive Arsenio

**for citizens to do our part, we  
have to be informed of the  
ways in which we can help**

Cuadrante Jr. – who heads the senior citizens association in his city – is just as enthusiastic about the CPA, about which he also learned through a friend’s Facebook post.

Cuadrante soon made inquiries about the project, exchanging emails with no less than the head of the CPA project management office, COA Auditor Aida Maria Talavera. He raised some questions about the financial statements of LGUs as published online. He also brought a specific area of audit interest – whether the senior

citizens law, particularly the provisions on discounts and the 1-percent allotment, was being implemented consistently.

Cuadrante wants to change how senior citizens are seen by the rest of the population.

“Seniors should be seen as a resource and not a burden to the community. This is because of their wealth of

experience and expertise. Moreover, since seniors no longer have careers or family responsibilities to worry about, they can devote their attention to nation building, particularly good governance.”

Mendoza and Cuadrante were just two of the dozens of participants in the Manila roadshow that yielded several potential opportunities for citizens/citizen groups and the government, through the COA, to work together.





gusto kong i-audit ang...

SILYA at  
KLASRUM

MARTY, JETTRO, JOHN



# HIS GREAT DETOUR

Bienvenido “Bobo” Narciso had other plans – until he realized he was being set up for something else.

Upon graduating from Xavier University in Cagayan de Oro in the early 1980s, Bienvenido “Bobo” Narciso found himself at crossroads.

He was then looking forward to a business career with a big multinational agricultural company in Bukidnon. He had known this company; some of his classmates’ parents worked there. He had seen the comfortable life it gave them. The executive houses provided for the families were something to be envied.

Bobo told himself that he wanted that kind of life for his future family. A research project with the Institute of Marketing Analysis gave him the

opportunity to study the effects of this company’s expansion into several barangays. And it was then his entire perspective changed.

## A BIG DECISION

In the course of his research, Bobo found out that the expansion into five barangays took a heavy toll on these local communities’ economies and culture.

Small farmers were especially hit hard. How could they compete with the acres upon acres of land owned by the Multinational Corporation (MNC)?

There was also cultural disintegration. Households which lived close to one another before had to be dispersed and were now living on the fringes of the big property.

And then, the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program was enacted by the government. Somehow this law, supposed to be for the poor farmers, turned out to be in the advantage of the MNC.

This first-hand knowledge of the injustice led Bobo to decide on a life away from the corporate trappings of high income and fancy house. Something else beckoned to him, and he joined non-government organizations championing the causes of the under-privileged.



That was thirty years ago, and now he is executive director of Abag Kalambuan.



## GETTING TO KNOW THE CPA

In the past 30 years, and through the various groups Bobo has joined, he has had a wealth of experiences dealing with government. In his view, true constructive engagement happens at the local level.

But they deal with local government units, not local personalities. Bobo believes this is an important distinction. This approach has allowed them to build their credibility and maintain objectivity through the years.

Participating in the shared agenda building workshops in Davao and Manila, Bobo is happy to hear that those behind the CPA project are going around asking citizen groups like his what they think should be audited or looked into.

The CPA is a good opportunity to continue the initiatives of citizen groups who want to help correct injustices without resorting to an adversarial stand. “We are ready and willing to work with government,” Bobo says.

For their part, citizen groups should take it upon themselves not just to avail of funds for projects, but help see to it that public funds are used as envisioned. “We should not compete with each other but find ways to synergize so we can contribute better. It’s a way of giving back.”

Bobo’s advice? “We should be aware of what is happening around us. Let us be empowered. Demand to know if the people’s money was spent well. But we must also be realistic with our expectations. We have to be focused

and practical so that we can see the impact and influence of our decisions, even in little doses.”

## A LIFE LESS ORDINARY

Being part of citizen organizations has given Bobo a life quite different from what he imagined. But he has had no regrets. Somehow, he still managed to provide for his family.

And even though he lives a much simpler life than what he had thought he wanted, Bobo is proud and happy. His children know that not everything can be measure in pesos and cents.

Bobo likes to say he is the smartest Bobo you will ever meet. His experiences have made him wise.



# CLOSING THE LOOP

Darlene Casiano realized she could not shake off the public servant in her.

Darlene Casiano spent 30 years with the Department of Budget and Management – Manila office. She built her knowledge in budget support and performance budgeting. She is a veteran of countless workshops, meetings, seminars and other gatherings at the national level. These all sought to improve the way we do things.

However, Darlene also knows that nothing much happens in these meetings even if everybody has good intentions to begin with.

“It’s frustrating, but that’s just how it is.”

She retired in 2010. She decided to go back to her hometown Bacolod for a while, just to rest and reconnect with family and old friends. As Darlene settled back into familiar territory, she

became acquainted with the problems hounding her hometown. It was then she realized that all governance is really governance at the local level.

She had planned on taking a vacation to recharge and to plan the next phase of her life. And then she ended up staying and starting a new phase right away. Darlene campaigned for a candidate whom she felt personified change and good governance. She joined the University of Negros Occidental-Recoletos Alumni Association.

Soon, Darlene became acquainted with the Citizen Participatory Audit, a project of the Commission on Audit and the Affiliated Network for Social Accountability in East Asia and the Pacific. Immediately she thought, this project was different.

It was the chance for civil society organizations to shine. The groups that she know back home are more





**Once you become a public servant,  
you will always find ways to  
contribute to your country.**

militant in nature. They mean well but they feel that dealing with the government always means you have to be suspicious. This is one extreme. The other extreme is the influence of local politicians on citizen groups. These officials say to these groups, “I will organize you.” This, too, would not do: “We know very well this is how patronage begins,” she says.

The CPA brings with it constructive engagement which she believe is a fairly new concept among groups in the provinces, even in urban centers such as Bacolod. This is why she participated in the Visayas roadshow held in Iloilo, and why she flew to Manila for the national shared agenda building workshop. There are many projects that the people need to look into. “CSOs must take the lead in these activities because we have a big stake here. It is our money, after all.”

Darlene thinks that today is the best time to undertake such projects in constructive engagement and participatory audit. The COA is the best agency to lead reforms in public finance. Today, more than ever, the commission is sending strong signals that it is ready to be the face of transparency and accountability in government.

Darlene has closed the loop. She has crossed over from the government to civil society. She realized that she can never stay away. “Once you become a public servant, you will always find ways to contribute to your country.”

With CPA, Darlene looks forward to productive, constructive retirement years.

# SHEDDING THE BLINDFOLD

## CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IS NO LONGER A HIT-AND-MISS

One is a kagawad (council woman) of the barangay. Another is a vegetable vendor; two are health workers and one is an Avon lady. They share at least two things in common: collectively, they call themselves “Diwatas,” and they are all civil society representatives, some of whom participated in the CPA pilot audit of the Quezon City Solid Waste Management Program.

They first heard of the idea of citizen participation in audit in one of the meetings called in the Quezon City Hall. “Dapat daw, nakikialam ang mamamayan (Citizens should know and meddle with what is going on).”

“I had my doubts,” said Consuelo Borromeo, even though she admitted that it sounded ideal. She felt that mere individuals did not stand a chance in making their voice heard.

She compared it to a game wherein the player is blindfolded and is given a paddle with which to hit a hanging pot. “If you hit it, then good for you. If you don’t, well...”

But when they were asked to participate in the surveys to be made for the audit for the implementation of the Solid Waste Management Audit, they immediately said yes.

### WHY SO?

“Solid waste is an issue close to our hearts. Everybody has trash, whether you are rich or poor. Also, we have been hearing many things about contractors, and how they are getting the job done,” they said.

### HOUSE TO HOUSE

The women’s participation in the audit involved their going from house to house and asking residents about how

they manage their trash — whether they segregate them, whether these are picked up on schedule, and similar things.

It was through these audits that the women gained insight into what really happens when trash is collected — and into so much more.

For example, they observed that residents of more depressed neighborhoods are generally more welcoming of them. In contrast, the more affluent households were more guarded, and initially refused to participate in the survey.

The women took this initial resistance as a challenge. “We explained the objective of the survey and how important their answers would be. Soon they would start sharing, telling us things we did not really ask about, and it would be so difficult to shut them up!”

Kagawad Bernardino, also called Nanay Bebang, saw only hospitality and openness from the people they interviewed.

The women say they enjoyed the experience very much. But beyond that, it gives them a good feeling to know that they have been part of something big and noble.

### REALIZATIONS

According to Rose, participating in the survey opened her eyes to what the “palero” goes through in a day. “Imagine doing all that work facing other people’s trash, under the heat of the sun or under the rain, for just a very small amount? I always have a glass of water on standby just in case he is thirsty,” she said.

They also got to know practices that have always been there but are not necessarily right. For example, what





do you do about people who give their trash — and five pesos besides — to minors who roam around just because the garbage truck does not reach their place?

This, or throwing coins into the trucks to guarantee that they would be back on schedule?

Sometimes, however, the kindness shown breeds some entitlement — take out the coins and the services also don't come as fast, or as regularly.

"There has to be more effort to tell people to segregate their trash," the women say. "How we manage our trash reflects on how disciplined we are. How we regard our surroundings."

Their experiences in the survey also led them to wonder how good governance can be attained. Does it depend on a leader with strong will to do what must be done? Even here, the Diwatas cannot agree.



"How do we fix everything? Should we wait for an able leader? I think having a good leader is very important," Lorena said. "He or she will set the direction and inspire people to abide by the rules."

"But I think it should start from the bottom up," says Nanay Bebang. "Each and every one of us must realize our roles and act accordingly. Other countries can do it — why can't we?"

### HITTING THE POT

Needless to say, the women look forward to participating in succeeding activities of the CPA.

They believe that specifically, next audits should be on how the donations for the victims of typhoon Yolanda were distributed among the victims. "The reports are worrying. *Huwag natin lapastanganin ang blessings* (let us not squander the blessings) for the people who need them."

Indeed their participation as citizen representatives in the CPA project has given the women a mindset that to ask: "what can we do?"

It's no longer like hitting a pot with one's eyes covered in a handkerchief tied around one's head. Instead, they see very clearly that these are the steps they must take, and this is where they should strike to achieve their aim.





# THE EVOLVING I-KWENTA

You can say “i-kwenta” in so many ways.

It can be a suggestion, even an admonishment. Roughly translated, it means “Audit it!”. Yes, i-kwenta is a way for people to get to know if public funds are being spent well, and wisely.

I-kwenta is also a testament to the power of the “I”. I — student, professional, parent, businessman, vendor, citizen — have the right and the capability to look into the government’s affairs. After all, we are the bosses, as the President so famously said in his inaugural speech four years ago. The “I” does not have to be an auditor or a person of influence to give feedback, raise audit possibilities or provide a lead for an investigation. It’s a free-for-all.

I-kwenta is also indicative of the use of technology in furthering governance goals. It is precisely that — a site that can be accessed with just a few strokes on the keyboard. So long as one has an internet

connection, even if it may sometimes be slow, one can join the conversation and make one’s voice heard.

## THE SITE

I-kwenta is a citizen website initially created as a resource hub.

It aimed to bring the audit process closer to the general public by making technical information more understandable to the layman. This is to show that audit is not the realm of highly specialized auditors.

It is a repository of information on the COA functions, their jurisdiction, current challenges within COA as well as the Citizen Participatory Audit approach.

It is also a means to inform the public of the activities of the CPA, whether past or upcoming. For example, the i-kwenta web site carried links to news stories on the CPA’s bagging the Bright Spots Award in London in November 2013.

During the first phase of the CPA, i-kwenta’s primary purpose was to provide information. It did succeed at this level, but the analytics data would show that the absence of new information contributed greatly to the decline in traffic for the site.

In recent months, especially as Phase 1 of the CPA was concluded, there has been a change in the quality of demand. Recognizing the immense power of technology and social media

to help shape local and national agenda, the CPA Team realized that the new objectives should include:

1. Facilitate continuous availability of popularized materials related to audit.
2. Facilitate quick access to audit reports from the CPA pilots.
3. Showcase CSOs’ experiences in participating in CPA pilots.

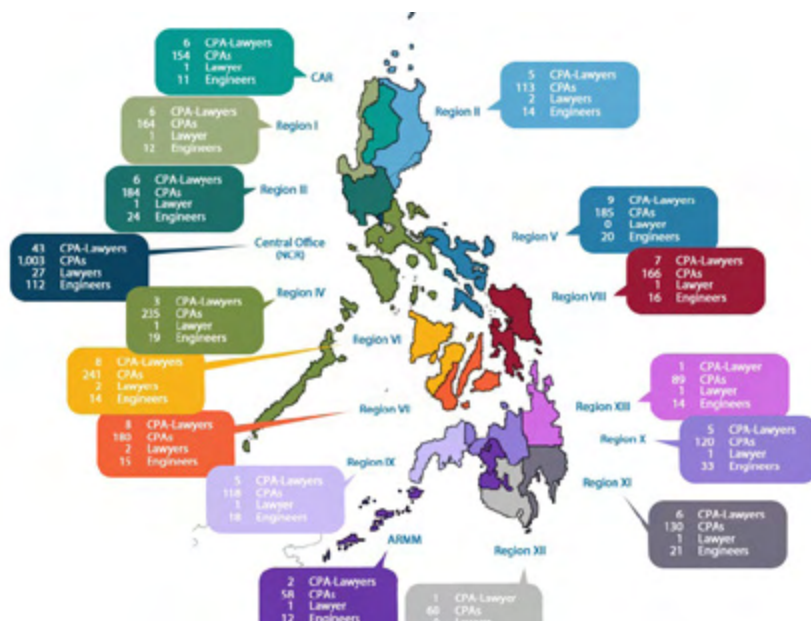






# THE AUDITEES

GOVERNMENT UNITS UNDER COA'S AUDIT JURISDICTION\*



4. Elicit more interest to participate in the audit process by allowing interested CSOs to be part of the CPA Pool.

5. Create an environment of constructive engagement by providing a venue to voice out citizens' concerns and report anomalies and red flags that they have observed.

These objectives, when realized by i-kwenta, would encourage more citizens to also be keen observers of their government projects. They will create demand for increased accountability of the public servants to the people.

They would also encourage citizens to be themselves accountable. They are, after all, the primary stakeholders of government projects.

## NEW AND IMPROVED

The new i-kwenta website has two distinct features not present in its previous version: The Feedback Portal and the CSO Profiling Tool.

Citizens can submit feedback or report to COA through a variety of social networks. Are you on Facebook, Google, Disqus or OpenID? The user will be asked to provide the following information:

- Type of concern (project-related, COA personnel-related, partnership request, follow-up)
- Name
- Email
- Contact number (optional)
- Government agency concerned
- Level/Office
- Project location
- Project name
- Details

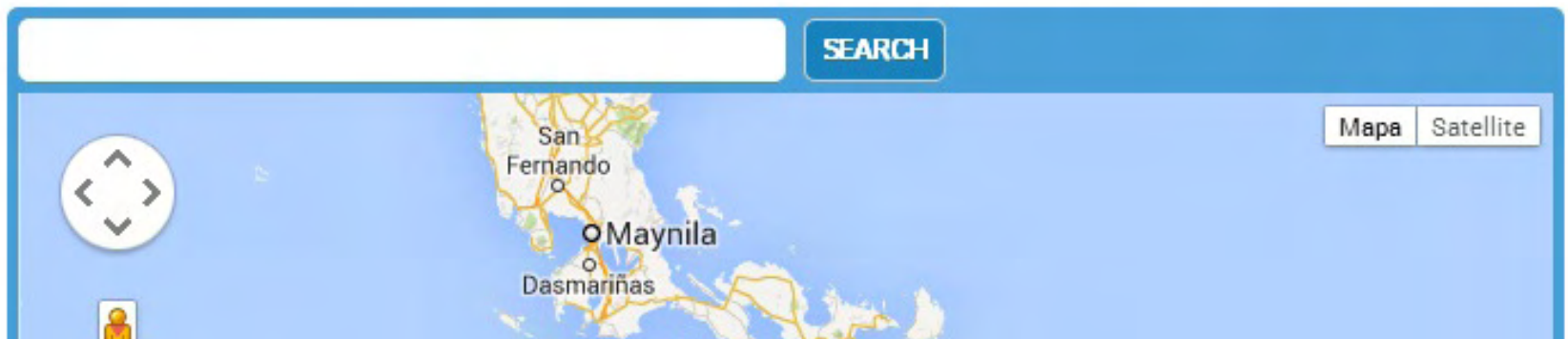
The accomplished online form will be forwarded automatically to the COA's PIS as an email.

Any citizen organization willing to become part of the CSO pool for the CPA project can fill out this online form. The profiling tool is useful in identifying what specific CSOs may be tapped for specific activities in the CPA.





Tell Us Your Concerns





The profiling tool extends the participation of CSOs beyond audit execution. For example, CSOs with expertise on a specific area may be tapped for specific training needed before the conduct of audit.

The aim is to invite as many CSOs to get involved in CPA-related activities as possible.

As CPA continues to roll out towards its institutionalization within COA, the i-kwenta website will be a crucial tool in informing the general public on what is happening with CPA. Moreover, it will serve as a portal to encourage more citizens and CSOs to participate in initiatives such as the CPA, designed to strengthen social accountability in the Philippines.

## Join Us

### Do You Like This Page?



NO ONE HAS LIKED THIS PAGE YET. BE THE FIRST!

### CSO Registration

This profiling tool is in line with efforts of the Affiliated Network for Social Accountability in East Asia and the Pacific (ANSA EAP) and the Commission on Audit (COA) in the Philippines to establish a working database of citizen groups who have expressed support for or taken part in actual Participatory Audit (PA) processes in the country. The said database aims to develop models for government-citizen group engagement in doing PA. The main objective of the profiling and databasing is to help COA identify potential partners for future PA initiatives.

We hope for your active cooperation and support for this profiling activity. Thank you!

**\* Required**

**Name of organization \***

**Acronym (if you have any)**

**Year established or formed \***





# CHAPTER 2

COA OPENS UP



# ESTABLISHING THE FRAMEWORK FOR THE CITIZEN PARTICIPATORY AUDIT PROJECT

“Heidi Mendoza is feeling happy :)”

The commissioner said she would post such a status as she spoke in front of COA auditors and their citizen counterparts in the National Shared Agenda Building Workshop held February 6, 2014 at the COA compound in Quezon City. She reminded everyone that the social media giant Facebook-- through which she has received feedback and audit leads from concerned citizens-- was turning 10 years old that day.

Commission on Audit Chairperson Maria Gracia Pulido-Tan offered her own *Throwback Thursday* moment, saying she was just “playing with the idea of including citizens in the audit process” upon her appointment in 2011.

That idea then grew into an objective, then into a palpable action plan, and on to what is now known as the Citizen Participatory Audit project.

In an essay published in the Philippine Daily Inquirer, Pulido-Tan talked about arriving at the realization that people should have a voice and hand in the work of the COA. “After all, it is their money we are accounting for...[we have to ensure that it is] being spent properly for their best interest and welfare.”

It sounds easy to talk about the lofty idea of including citizens in public audits because it is the people to whom all of government is accountable.

The bigger, more difficult question, however, was how.

The CPA project, for all its progress in its first two years, its stumbling blocks, valuable lessons, and little successes, is just the first of many steps.

“The next step is to institutionalize Citizen Participatory Audit so that we realize the end goal of empowering citizens,” said Pulido-Tan. Institution-

**After all, it is their money we are accounting for...(we have to ensure that it is) being spent properly for their best interest and welfare.**

alization of the CPA is key so that at some point in the future, there will be nothing special about it anymore. “It would be part of the routine.”

But what does it exactly mean to institutionalize?

The crucial part is building the structure to enable COA to, by itself, make room for its citizen counterparts to participate in audits in pursuits of a transparent, accountable and participatory government. PA then will no longer be a special thing, because it would have become so common.

Whereas before, citizens are merely consulted, if at all, in matters of governance, with PA they are themselves part of the active exchange of ideas.

With CPA, the COA has taken the bold step to open itself up. This in itself is extraordinary, given the commission's previous inclination to stay closed and resistant to new ways of doing things. It is opening up spaces for constructive engagement--- and this is not just rhetoric. It backs up these pronouncements with systems and attitudes.

Finally, cooperation between the COA and its citizen counterparts is not confined to the conduct of joint audits. There are countless other potential areas of engagement: Some of them we know now; others have yet to emerge.

This chapter deals with stories and activities pertaining to the efforts of the actors — the Commission on Audit and the Afiliated Network for Social Accountabilty in East Asia and the Pacific — to ensure that the CPA

project and participatory audit as an audit methodology would remain long after the initial project phases are done and support from outside donors cease.

When extraordinary gains turn into everyday realities — even only the beginning of such — indeed we can say, there is much to be happy about.



# NEW METHOD IN ACTION

Quezon City's auditor finds out firsthand that joint audits are as rewarding as they are challenging.

Auditor Rosa Dela Cruz is an expert in risk-based auditing. She has spent the past 36 years at the Commission on Audit, being assigned in the audit of numerous local, national and corporate agencies. She has been designated Team Leader in various special audit assignments and has participated in the audit of United Nations agencies.

She is currently assigned to the local government of Quezon City.

She thus looked at her task as supervising auditor of the joint COA-citizens team that looked into the effectiveness of the implementation of the Solid Waste Management Law in that city with a lot of misgivings.

To be sure, Auditor Rosa was not a stranger to private organizations. She had worked with such groups. Non-government organizations have always been invited to participate in Bids and Awards Committees, or Environmental or Development Councils.

But this was different. Under the CPA, citizens and the COA would comprise the same team. They would not be acting as distinctly COA, or distinctly CSO.

Not having a clear idea about citizen groups, Auditor Rosa was concerned that there were no written guidelines on how the CPA was going to be implemented.

"What would be the delineation of responsibilities for the COA and for the citizen groups?" she asked. She was at a loss on what specific tasks can be given them in the context of CPA.

## CHANGING HER MIND

Auditor Rosa complied with the order to head the team, thinking this was another assignment she had to take on despite her doubts. She was, after all, a dutiful state employee.

She tried to keep an open mind as she pursued this "new audit methodology." She recognized the assistance provided by ANSA-EAP in resolving the issues she was concerned about.

And then she crossed her fingers.

"I just really hoped that we (state auditors and citizen groups) could work well together so we could achieve our common goal." And that common goal was to apply the

**citizen groups could indeed provide invaluable assistance in the audit of government programs and projects**



principle of constructive engagement, specifically participatory audit, in the conduct of the commission's mandate of evaluating government projects.



She found out that through CPA, the team could accomplish more in a shorter period of time.

It took seven months from the initial meeting to the time the “clean” report was ready and brought to London for the Open Government Partnership summit.

In that span of time, Auditor Dela Cruz saw that citizen groups could indeed provide invaluable assistance in the audit of government programs and projects.

“They can assist in the validation of government programs and whether these programs impact the lives of the citizenry.”

Specifically, the report has “generated information from the grassroots/ citizens that is not often drawn in normal audits because of time and manpower constraints.”

The most rewarding part of the process? “It was completing the report and getting the results from an audit that required less number of people and accomplished in a shorter period of time.”

## FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The audit team found that the city was generally compliant with its 10-year Ecological Solid Waste Management Plan although there were instances of non-compliance with regard to the review and updating of the plan and the composition and operation of the City Solid Waste Management Board.

They recommended that the Board include more civil society representatives and that it meet regularly to carry out its mandate.

The respondents were somewhat satisfied with the cleanliness of their communities, albeit at varying levels. 25 percent of the respondents did not practice the segregation of biodegradable and non-biodegradable waste, and this was due to the people’s lack of understanding of the purpose and process of segregation.

The team recommended that a more targeted IEC campaign should be implemented to ensure that residents appreciate and understand why waste



**It was completing the report and getting the results from an audit that required less number of people and accomplished in a shorter period of time.**

segregation should be in place. The city must also determine the reasonable cost of the current cost to outsource solid waste cleaning, collection and disposal. It must also validate the compliance of its contractors and haulers to the terms

of reference of their agreement. There should be continued and stricter implementation of waste segregation, thorough collection of waste based on set schedules, and additional days must be set for the collection of solid waste.

According to Auditor Rosa, the management of the Quezon City Government welcomed the result of the audit “because of the opportunities for improvement that the audit recommended.”

Unfortunately, there is no way to guarantee that the recommendations would be heeded by the audited agency.

### CPA ONWARD

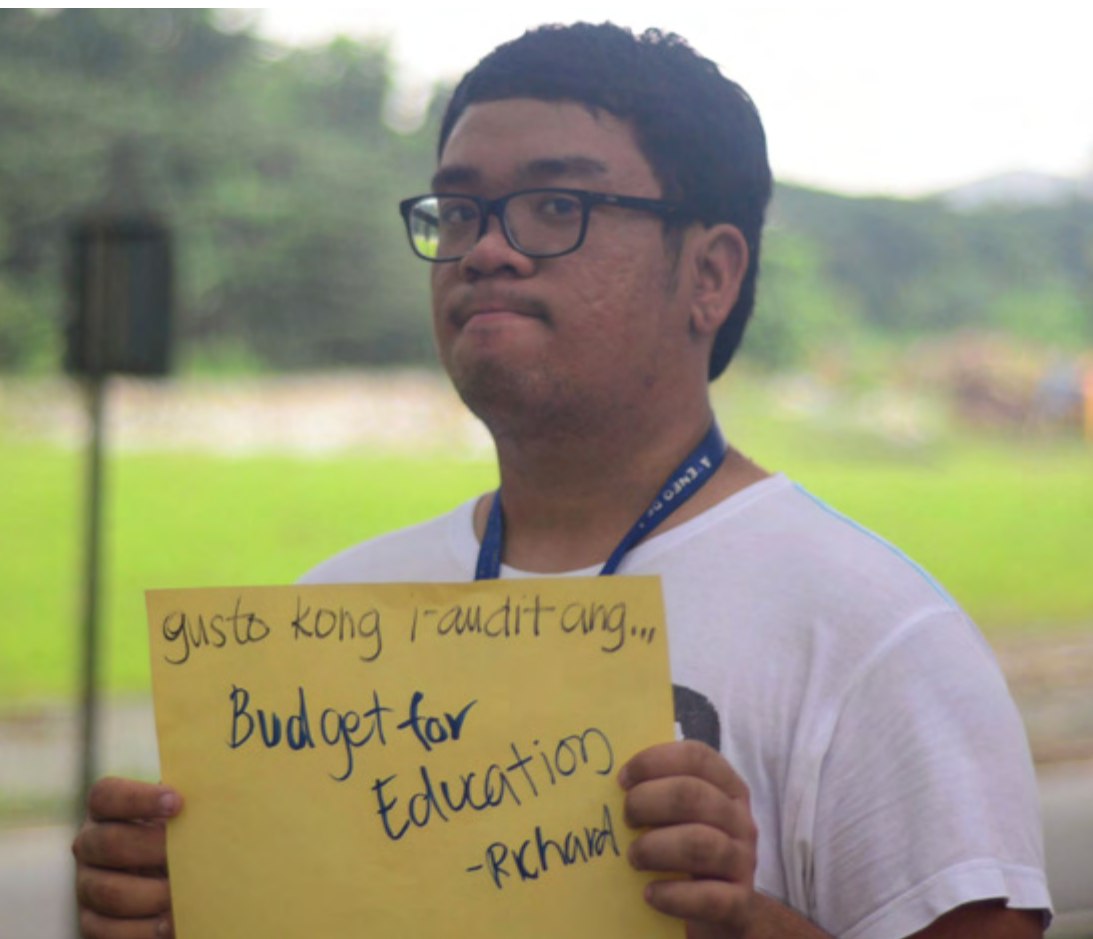
Auditor Rosa believes that the CPA as an audit methodology is sustainable. “For as long as there is assistance and guidance from the supervisors, goals could be achieved.”

She adds that the following are crucial to making CPA a staple: “We should be assured of the availability of citizen groups across the country. We should periodically update our database of citizen groups. We should build their capacity to enable them to engage better.”

“Citizen groups must have technical capabilities needed in audit. Moreover, they should have the time, the willingness and the commitment to accept assignments on a voluntary basis.”

Finally, the guidelines that will be formulated and developed, which should of course be compliant to existing laws, rules and regulations, must be acceptable to the citizen group.”

The pilot showed CPA can be done, and done well. The next step is to challenge ourselves to keep doing it and replicate the success.



# THE MANY WAYS OF LEARNING:

## LEARNING AND CAPACITY BUILDING IN THE CONTEXT OF CPA

Form yourself into groups and imagine the following situation:

*Del Maria, a local government unit, launched the Bawas Asong Ulol or BAU program to reduce rabies-infected animals in the area.*

*Five of the biggest barangays of the town have to vaccinate 1,000 dogs during a two-month period in the summer. A budget of P100,000 was allocated for the purpose.*

*Give situations and instances where Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness could be achieved by the five barangays in the implementation of the BAU.*

This is a scene straight out of the training room: the CPA course on Performance Audit, specifically. In this module, participants are introduced to this type of audit-- its other names, purpose and benefits, its difference from compliance and financial audits. Approaches and the performance audit cycle will be discussed.

By the end of the session, the participants are expected to know how to evaluate projects in terms of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

Then again, the Performance Audit Module is only one of several in the CPA Learning Modules, designed and implemented for the purpose of

building specific capacities of a specific group of people.

### WHAT CAPACITIES, AND WHOSE?

Adelfo Briones, ANSA-EAP's Learning Manager, defines capacity as "the ability of people, organizations and society as a whole to perform functions, solve problems, and set and achieve objectives in a sustainable manner."

According to him, the CPA needs a strong capacity building component aimed at enhancing partnership building and constructive engagement among stakeholders, and, to an equal

extent, building PA practitioners' capability to design and utilize PA tools.

But first, whose capacities are to be built?

The CPA has two sets of key actors: government and citizen groups. These sets are broad, but learning in the past two years have focused on enhancing the capabilities of those who directly undertook CPA pilot activities — the CPA Audit Teams the members of which are from the Commission on Audit and selected CSOs.







Core competencies are what the CPA audit team members need to acquire and learn so that they can perform their tasks effectively. These are the elements of knowledge, abilities,

skills, personal characteristics, behaviors and qualities that are linked to the audit objectives and are key to producing results.



As social accountability practitioners, a member of the CPA team should have these minimum set of competencies: dialogue, problem solving, data gathering, and data use.

As a CPA team member, he or she must be able to:

- Describe concept and ideas related to PA such as good governance, social accountability, the nature and function of the COA, the CSO members, and the CPA initiative.
- Identify, gather, process, analyze and present CPA-related data and findings based on the appropriate, COA-prescribed audit plan.
- Manage relationships with other members of the team.
- Suggest ideas, options and solutions to CPA-related concerns.
- Generate and put forward recommendations to improve and sustain the CPA initiative.

## AND NOW THE HOW

Mr. Briones says that CPA capacity building has three features. It's learning in action, hinged on the experiences and insights of SAc practitioners. "This allows for a systematic way of drawing lessons from experience and practice. In other words, our capacity building is grounded, not merely technical."

Second, there is emphasis on learning organizations. "Learning is not seen as an end in itself. Rather it is seen in terms of building the capability of networks, organizations, groups and individuals for effective action."

Finally, capacity building is demand-driven. It focuses on the enhancement and strengthening of existing capacities with emphasis on the participatory approach.

## HOW, THEN, WERE THE CPA LEARNING MODULES DESIGNED?

David Kolb's ERGA learning model was used in designing the CPA modules. ERGA stands for Experiencing, Reflecting, Generalizing and Applying. Experience and a host of studies show that this is the way adults learn best.

According to Briones, there are six basic steps in developing the training design:

First, identify the need for CPA training. "This means talking with the potential learners and determining the gap between what they need to be doing and what they actually do."

Second, assess the need for instructor-led training. There are many ways of training delivery, but the CPA

activities rely mainly on face to face or instructor-led training. "Two reasons: one is the need to have intensive personal interaction and group processes among the audit team members to build them into a cohesive team, and two, the need to level off on both technical and non-technical matters encountered during the audit activity."

Third, define the learning objectives. Briones warns that the learning objectives do not pertain to what the instructor intends to do in the training. "Rather, they are simply written descriptions of what the learner will be able to do, know, believe or understand after the training."

Fourth, design the CPA training. After writing down the objectives, draft an outline of the content and organize this along the two requirements of

logical flow and psychological flow. "Specify, too, the learning methodology to facilitate the achievement of the objectives. "There are many: lecture, slides, flip charts, brain storming, dramatization, stories and fables, role play, video or film showing, panel discussions, case studies, games and group discussion."

Fifth, develop the training. Make administrative and logistical arrangements as these will affect the learner's ability to absorb the input. More importantly, Briones says, "be prepared to be able to shift from being immersed at the level of details to being able to go up the balcony for bigger perspective and back again."

Finally, evaluate the training. "Evaluation is not an afterthought; it is an essential component in the overall training design," says Briones. "The feedback gets the training team to

improve their instructional design and delivery."

## THE LEARNING MODULES

There are several modules for the CPA training, and it all begins with the session on Social Accountability and Good Governance, which describes the "tales, tools and techniques to achieve desirable and beneficial results both for those who govern and those who are governed."

The four pillars of Social Accountability are discussed: responsive and open government, organized and capable CSOs, access to information and social and cultural appropriateness.

In COA 101, the learners are taught, or refreshed, on the Commission on Audit as the Supreme Audit Institution — its mandate and its functions.



In CSO 101, civil society and its role in nation building are discussed.

CPA 101 talks about the Citizen Participatory Audit initiative its beginnings, its objectives, and what the audit teams are supposed to accomplish, exactly.

Finally, the module on performance audit goes into detail about how the audit teams can evaluate projects based on economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

Mr. Briones admits he wrestled with the idea of having ANSA-EAP come up with the Learning Modules unilaterally because it would be easier and faster. “I knew however that it would defeat the *raison d’être* of the CPA, which should cover not only the actual planning and conduct of PA activities but also in coming up with the learning materials, such as the capacity-building modules.”

The process of dialogue was not easy, not fast, but actually tedious. “But it was truly in the spirit of constructive engagement, as our team from ANSA-EAP and from COA thought through all the possibilities in maximizing citizen participation in the learning process.”

Briones believes that the “*nakasanayan na syndrome*” — doing things a certain way because that is how they have always been done — could just be the greatest challenge that CPA has to face. The bureaucracy, after all, is deemed naturally averse to innovation. But there is a ray of hope — field auditors showed much enthusiasm and appreciation for the project in the few instances that he has talked to them about CPA.

“So in the end, it’s really a matter of advocating the PA initiative in the right way to the people who matter most — those on the ground.”

Now let’s gauge our mood meter. What is the range of “moods” reflecting your perception of, or feelings towards, the conduct of capacity building activities for key actors of the CPA?

**So in the end, it's really a matter of advocating the PA initiative in the right way to the people who matter most -- those on the ground.**

# FROM FEEDBACK TO ENGAGEMENT:

## THE PUBLIC INFORMATION SYSTEM

Patti Lapus and Penny Quesada both work at the Office of the Chairperson of the Commission on Audit. They have their respective specializations, but one task common to them, even before the Citizen Participatory Audit project was set into motion, was to man the Citizens' Desk.

In those early days, there were several channels through which the COA received feedback: Email, SMS, snail mail, and personal visits. There was also a hotline that people could call.

Patti observed that the amount of feedback spiked immediately after Chairperson Maria Gracia Pulido Tan went on air and announced those channels.

The content of the feedback varied greatly, according to Patti. "Most of the messages we received were from individuals across the nation. They

complained about a particular government project or agency. For example, farm to market roads that went way beyond the project deadline, alleged collusion in public bidding and government procurement, ghost employees and projects. Sometimes they also complained about our own COA personnel."

That is not all. Feedback also sometimes consisted of criticism against Chairperson Pulido Tan or the CPA in general, although there were good comments too. "These were usually based on what comes out in print and broadcast media."

Sometimes, there were inquiries about money claims or requests for special audits.

Messages from citizen groups on the other hand, were rare. "If it did

happen, it was to raise complaints about their locality and other corrupt practices in their area." Very few expressed interest in the CPA.

Inherent constraints however led to difficulty in managing feedback obtained from the Desk. As a result, the COA took a long time before it could respond to feedback. Sometimes, there was no response at all. Feedback sent through SMS was manually typed into a record system. Patti and Penny often had to ask each other whether the other had already responded to a particular feedback.

As it was, there emerged a clear need to address the COA's capability to receive and manage input coming from outside. This need became greater when the CPA project was factored in.

### ENTER THE PIS

The Public Information System was created to enhance the COA's capacity to respond to feedback in a timely, efficient and effective manner.

PIS provides a system to integrate information gathered through various channels, mostly, from email and SMS. Through it, citizens can submit their feedback to the Commission on Audit through the following channels:

**[citizensdesk@coa.gov.ph](mailto:citizensdesk@coa.gov.ph)**  
**[pis.coa.gov.ph/pis](http://pis.coa.gov.ph/pis)**  
**0915-5391957**

Links to the online feedback form can be found in different websites such as i-kwenta website ([i-kwenta.com](http://i-kwenta.com)) and COA website ([coa.gov.ph](http://coa.gov.ph)).

## Welcome to the COA Public Information System

To efficiently respond to requests, we utilize this Helpdesk using a support ticket system. Every support request is assigned a unique ticket number as reference for tracking your concern. Every request requires a valid email address.



### Open A New Ticket

Please provide as much detail as possible so we can best assist you. To update a previously submitted ticket, please login.

**Open a New Ticket**



### Check Ticket Status

We provide archives and history of all your current and past support requests complete with responses.

**Check Ticket Status**



With the PIS, all feedback sent through all channels are automatically consolidated and stored in a single repository. Monitoring and response thus becomes easy.

The rolling out of the PIS coincided with the launch of the new COA Website and was presented through a better, smarter-looking interface. “I guess people were happy with our new Web site and that they had a way to directly get in touch with us,” says Patti.

Aside from the usual issues, “we have been getting a number of new queries from fellow government employees who needed clarification on some COA rules and regulations, or who were

looking for certain COA documents,” she adds.

The PIS has done wonders in the way Patti and Penny manage the complaints, inquiries and messages.

Patti says: “Since there is only one database that we access, either of us can respond to a ticket as it comes. We also don’t have to be physically in the office to do that.”

How is this possible? “There is a portion called Internal Notes in the PIS that allows us to record the actions that we take per ticket. This saves us the trouble of having to ask each other all the time about specific action taken on specific complaints.”

Sure, there are still delays, especially when people have technical queries on audit. But Patti and Penny try their best to get in touch at once with the audit sector concerned and have the matter fully explained to them, so they can in turn communicate it effectively to the citizen.

So yes, COA is more able to act on feedback received, “but only in the pace we can afford at this time,” says Patti.

### **CONSISTENT WITH THE CPA**

The Citizen Participatory Audit project is anchored on the principle of bringing together citizens on one hand and government on the other in constructive engagement.

Engagement is premised on open lines of communication in both directions.

The PIS, given its ability to facilitate active communication exchange between COA and the citizens, is a valuable tool for the CPA. It does not simply manage the feedback received by COA or allow the agency to respond to such feedback in a timely manner. It facilitates the active exchange of comments, issues and other citizen concerns. Follow-ups can easily be answered because the PIS generates ticket numbers that serve as reference. Indeed, the PIS is a more convenient and inexpensive way to raise audit concerns.

“As the PIS becomes institutionalized, I expect an influx of complaints, reports, inquiries, etc. By

that time, the COA would ideally have enough manpower to manage and respond to citizen feedback,” say Patti, who as a co-terminus employee to the chairperson, only has until February 2015 to perform her roles. In the meantime, Patti relishes her unique position and looks forward to “the time when the rest of the COAns can get in on the action that Penny and I are experiencing every day...I would really love to see the nationwide implementation of the PIS.”

Then again, the PIS, and the CPA itself, have been designed to strengthen entire institutions regardless of the personalities serving on them.

The adoption of the PIS as an internal system shows that COA wants to serve the people better, and that it is now open to engaging citizens in the context of social accountability and good governance.

**PIS**Public Information System

Guest User - Log In

Support Center HomeOpen New TicketCheck Ticket Status

## Open a New Ticket

Please fill in the form below to open a new ticket.

Full Name:

Email Address:

Telephone:

Ext.:

Help Topic:

— Select a Help Topics —

Subject:

Message:

Please provide as much details as possible so we can best assist you. \*

CAPTCHA Text:

D9D07

Enter the text shown on the image. \*

Create Ticket

Reset

Cancel

## POOLING AND PROFILING

*Write down the name of your organization, the year it was established, address, region, contact person and web site.*

Talking about engaging citizens is one thing. Actually getting to know who you are engaging with is quite another. This is why the CPA Team of ANSA-EAP designed a profiling tool to get to know the citizen groups that partner with the Commission on Audit in its joint audits and other activities.

Signing up for CPA involves more than writing down one's (or one's organization's) name, address and contact number. And this is not just for the COA's files, either. Collecting information would facilitate a better understanding of such groups and help COA hone its approaches in

engaging with CSOs. It would also be helpful in identifying possible collaboration areas to ensure a sustainable partnership between the COA and CSOs.

*With which government agency or local government unit are you registered, recognized and accredited?*

The first profiling tool was tested on some 20 civil society organizations who accomplished it during the shared agenda building workshop or through the i-Kwenta Website. These were the groups who took part in the pilot audits under the current CPA project.

Of the 20 initial respondents, ten were from Luzon, six were from the Visayas, and four from Mindanao. Most of







the groups were registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission — a minimum requirement for CSOs operating in the country.

Some of the groups were also engaged with the Department of Social Welfare and Development, Department of Labor and Employment, and the Department of Education.

Meanwhile, two CSOs were accredited by their respective local governments and had participated in local special bodies.

*How would you classify your group — A cooperative, foundation, non-government organization, socio-civic organization, people's organization, academic institution, professional organization, social movement, or political organization?*

*What is your structure — a volunteer organization, autonomous, a federation, a coalition? What is the scope or level of your organization?*

In terms of area of operation, most of those initially profiled worked at the sub-national levels, while only six indicated some involvement at the national level. Eight to 10 groups were part of national networks or

coalitions of CSOs, or were themselves made up of several local groups. *Which sectors are served or targeted by your organization, or are the main beneficiaries of your programs?*

*What are the activities that your group is engaged in? Please provide details about the activities indicated.*



Among the top activities or priority interventions of the CSOs initially profiled were community or sectoral organizing, campaigns and advocacy and conduct of capacity building and training.

Finally, the CSOs are asked to rate their competencies, on a scale of 1-6, based on participatory audit-related competencies.

These competencies include understanding programs, analyzing results framework, drafting participatory research plans, capacitating and mobilizing citizens, making effective documentation, and engaging with other actors.

Further, the rating system is clarified as such: 1-2 for basic level, 3-4 for proficient, and 5-6 expert.

Finally, how much is your organization's annual operating budget is for the past three years?

The profiling tool is accomplished by the citizen groups on the assumption that they would disclose information about their group honestly and without embellishments. In the future however, the COA must be able to develop ways to validate the information provided especially in the group's own assessment of their PA capabilities.

The task of creating a CSO database, maintaining and updating the information to determine the best possible areas of engagements will be one of the challenges of the CPA in its next phases. Working as part of the same audit team would require that citizens and auditors are clear and forthcoming about what each of them can bring to the table.







# CHAPTER 3

CULTIVATING PARTNERSHIPS



# Making partnerships possible

*I, (name) of (organization), recognize that good governance is not the exclusive domain of government and that Government and citizens both have a stake in the future of our nation.*

*Thus, there is need for constructive engagement between government on one hand, and citizens on the other, in the promotion of transparency, accountability and participation.*

*I fully support the Citizen Participatory Audit approach because it seeks to achieve all these.*

*With my core capabilities, background and interests, as well as my current affiliation, I express my willingness to contribute to present and future participatory audit activities.*

*I pledge to actively participate in the CPA and in similar initiatives and to work in tandem with my counterparts from the government and citizen groups.*

*I commit to do this for our shared stake in our nation's well-being.*

These words constituted the pledge uttered by both citizen group representatives and government auditors during the National Shared Agenda Building workshop held in February.

Partnership is a key concept in the CPA initiative. The two previous chapters have highlighted the stories of citizens on one hand and the COA on the other, on how each of the set of actors perceived and carried on their PA activities.

This chapter will tell the stories of how the COA and the citizen groups managed to develop a working relationship that made possible all the gains of the CPA during this initial phase. It will also describe how the nurturing of such partnerships will spell the success — or failure — of subsequent PA activities when they are finally institutionalized in the COA.

## **I commit to do this for our shared stake in our nation's well-being.**

Three pilot audits have been conducted. The CPA team has reached out to more citizen groups and COA auditors as it contemplates the next phase of the project.

The CPA team has also recognized that the partnership extends beyond the joint audits. The COA-citizen groups can create public pressure around audit reports, mobilize people to monitor government's action on COA's audit findings, capacitate state auditors on participatory approaches, or set up information or feedback systems to link citizen monitoring efforts and public auditing. All these

involve citizen participation in the State Audit Institution's (SAI) work and in the public sector audit system.

Sure, there are gaps — and they are big, sometimes — in the orientation, methods and inclinations of auditors and citizen groups. There may be existing notions about the other group. Some government auditors will always initially think that citizen groups are out to find faults in the way they do their job. Citizens would then go out and accuse them of all sorts of wrongdoing — sometimes on the streets — without even hearing their side of the story.

On the other hand, some citizen groups will always be wary about government workers who are incompetent, corrupt, or both. Any form of joining forces with the government is thus seen as sleeping with the enemy, or being co-opted.

The CPA however has debunked all these notions. Through the pilot audits and other CPA activities, it was established that it was possible

to work together for a common goal without losing one's purpose and principle.

So yes, it is possible to take a stand along the spectrum that has a rabid anti-corruption stance on one end, and co-optation on the other. Yes, it is possible for state auditors to go down from their so-called ivory towers and open themselves up to new approaches, specifically ones that involve the people with the highest stakes in government. It is also possible for citizens to engage constructively with government without being combative, all while maintaining their independence and bringing with them their unique contributions.

There are numerous challenges that lie ahead, but the CPA, if its first two years are to be an indication, is off to a promising start.



# A LOT LIKE MARRIAGE

Thirty-four-year-old civil society representative Anthony “Tony” Septimo compares the collaboration between the Commission on Audit and citizen organizations to the commitment between married couples.

Tony has been with many non-government organizations before. They have had some noteworthy engagement with government. But through all these, citizen groups have always taken the role of “watchdog.”

Let’s face it: there has always been mutual distrust between CSOs and

government. Government tends to be suspicious of citizen groups, sometimes deriding them as “noisy”. CSOs are perceived as always out to find something wrong with what government does. Civil society, in turn, generally believes that public officials will engage in irregularity especially if they can get away with it. And they almost always get away with it.

The Citizen Participatory Audit program promised to be different at the onset, and this is why Tony was eager to join, as project officer and technical staff of the group Diaspora

for Good Governance. “I wanted to know how government audits are conducted, exactly. I was also upbeat about the word ‘participatory’ — it promised something different, something more inclusive.”

Tony was part of the audit team that looked into the first pilot – the flood control project in the KAMANAVA area. The audit was conducted to find out why there was still flooding in the area despite the existence of a flood-control project. Tony says the actual audit process was very enlightening for him. He was able to engage with the stakeholders,

especially the community whose lives were directly affected by the project. It was made clear that the objective of the project was not entirely to eliminate the flooding, but to minimize it by x percent.

“Most of all, I was able to understand more deeply how the Commission on Audit operates.”

He learned, for instance, that they had a mandate to keep quiet about their audit efforts until after the reports have been published. He also understood that there were many steps in conducting an audit precisely



because they want to be fair to everybody concerned. The agency gives the auditee some time to explain or react to the findings. That the COA has opened up to citizen participation is by itself a bold action on its part.

Tony was also educated first hand on the many types of audit – financial, compliance and performance or value-for-money audit. Each type carries different approaches and methodologies.

Now that the first phase of the CPA has drawn to a close, Tony can say that this project has indeed been collaborative. It was not easy – there were many times that he found himself at odds with his COA counterparts. “For instance, it was very easy to mistake their attitude for arrogance. As we completed our partnership however, it became clear to me that this was just their orientation – an institutional contextualization similar to what CSOs have as a default orientation prior to their involvement with the CPA project.”

In the end, Tony says, both sides have similar goals, and that is to ensure that projects are executed well and

the people are aware that they have a stake in the projects that directly include them. Just like a partnership in marriage – you have two people with different backgrounds and values, and sometimes you cannot avoid disagreements. But because of a shared commitment to the union, you persevere to find common ground and try to understand where the other is coming from.

“I truly believe that good governance is never the sole responsibility of the government. The best approach to combating corruption and making good governance work is constructive engagement between government and its citizens. I am happy to be part of the CPA where I saw firsthand this dynamic at work.”

The CPA has many champions and in fact has been recognized abroad for its unique approach. It was given the Bright Spots Award during the Open Government Summit held in London. Tony is hopeful that beyond being “institutionalized”, citizen participatory audit will be seen in action down to the grassroots level, and will be sustained as a practice from hereon.

**I truly believe  
that good  
governance is  
never the sole  
responsibility  
of the  
government**



# IN FOR A SURPRISE

## AUDITOR JULIE LAZO'S INITIAL MISGIVINGS ABOUT COA-CSO COLLABORATION HAVE BEEN PROVEN UNFOUNDED.

Even before she had first heard about the Citizen Participatory Audit, Auditor Juliana “Julie” Lazo, State Auditor IV and Audit Team Leader for the Kamanava Flood Project — one of the pilot audits of the CPA — already had a lot on her plate.

As the resident auditor of the Department of Public Works and Highways- NCR, she was doing analysis and verification of financial statements, conducting value-for-money audits, performing ocular inspections, reviewing contracts and verifying payments made to various internal and external creditors of the agency.

Sometimes, “we attend hearings as requested by the Ombudsman, Sandiganbayan, Congress and Senate.

We act on request/complaints from other government agencies and other stakeholders for which we conduct validation, inspection and verification to comply or reply to their request.”

Small wonder that when Director Cora Gomez informed her that she would need to attend a capacity building activity for COA auditors and representatives of civil society groups, Director Julie had mixed feelings — and a great deal of questions.

She also felt uneasy because it would no doubt mean an addition to her already-full workload.

### INITIAL MISGIVINGS

First off, Auditor Lazo wanted to know what the difference was between civil society organizations and non-government organizations.

Why on earth would they wish to join COA in the conduct of audit?

And from the point of view of her colleagues in the commission, would the team members even accept CSOs who would join them in the conduct of their work?

At that point, Auditor Lazo saw civil society as mere critics of the government. “They have always had bad comments on what was happening.” Clearly, the CSOs would have different approaches and ideas. She was thus worried that having CSOs on board would create misunderstandings.

Auditor Lazo took great pains to prepare her message to the CSOs that as part of the audit team, they would now have to stop being critics and take on the role of government auditors.

She also wanted to explain carefully to all members of the team the process of audit planning, execution and reporting. Auditor Julie made it her









objective to get the CSOs really appreciate their audit, and, of course, to have a harmonious relationship among the group. Aside from her earlier notions about the CSOs, she was also anxious about how she would divide the work. “I had no experience or knowledge of their capacity,” she said.

### **UNLIKELY ALLIES**

But upon meeting her audit team for the first time, Auditor Julie discovered the first of what was to be a string of surprises her. She was surprised at the CSO’s eagerness to participate and impressed at the way they approached problems.

“They had many questions on how the audit would be conducted, what the extent of their participation would be. They offered many suggestions. They talked about their experience as CSO representatives and their previous dealings with the Commission on Audit,” she said.

For the next six months or so, the COA and CSO representatives assumed their clearly defined and differentiated assignments and performed their roles without overlapping.

“We partnered one CSO and one COA representative in the validation for pumping stations and flood gates, as well as in the conduct of surveys. The

CSOs were the ones who facilitated focus group discussions because of their strength in this area.”

By the end of the audit period, the COA and CSO reps had even become close friends. Indeed, “the CSOs are cooperative, resourceful, understanding, resourceful, talented and friendly. They are also very hardworking. They really share their ideas.”

### **MINOR BUMPS**

This is not to say, however, that everything has been easy. The team encountered some difficulty in dealing with the communities. “They were afraid that we were interviewing them

because they would be relocated. They were worried that they might give us some information that could put them at risk.”

How, then, did the team manage to overcome this resistance of the communities to share their experience of the project, as it affected them?

“We explained that the survey we were conducting was precisely to let the government know if they had benefited from the project. We also said that we were interested in the solutions/comments they can share to fully implement the project.”

## FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATION AND FOLLOW THROUGH

The pilot audit found that the constructed structures for the flood control project of the DPWH in the flood-prone KAMANAVA (Kalookan-Malabon-Navotas-Valenzuela) — which sought to reduce the flooding from one meter to less than half a meter — did not completely mitigate the flooding



caused by high tide and heavy rain in the area.

The audit team discovered that the reasons for the unmet objective were deficiencies in the structures and the existence of informal settlers and the large volume of garbage in the area.

There were also inadequate personnel and communication facilities that would enable the efficient operation of the flood control facilities.

12 recommendations were made, ranging from upgrades of the structures, review of the flood and drainage control design, enhancement of the design criteria, dialogue among stakeholders for periodic maintenance dredging, revisit or renewal memoranda of agreement with local government units to secure their

commitment to the projects, encouragement of the LGUs to prohibit the use of plastic, collaborate with barangay officials for continuous information campaign regarding proper waste disposal, among others.

Auditor Julie noted that the management offered no arguments or negative reactions to their findings and committed to implement their recommendations. "In fact, some of our recommendations were already implemented after the issuance of the Audit Observation Memorandum."

She recognizes, however, the possibility of a shuffle among auditors, in which case the next to be assigned to the project should monitor whether the management is truly implementing the recommendations.

## LESSONS LEARNED

Auditor Julie says that in participatory audit, everybody in the group must be aware of his or her roles and responsibilities. "Without this, the project cannot be started."



She also sees the need for capacity building activities wherein the audit process would be discussed. "This way, the CSOs would not be surprised during the execution stage."

On the whole, Auditor Lazo says that her first crack at participatory audit has been quite rewarding.

For the CPA as a concept to be institutionalized, however, cooperation and understanding are key. "If there is no cooperation among the group, different ideas would come up and they would not know what their priorities would be. There would be no unity."



## TOOLS FOR THE CITIZENS

*"If at first they [respondents] were hesitant to answer our questions, soon they were telling us their stories, and we were having difficulty ending our conversation."*

-Volunteer enumerator for the pilot audit, QC Solid Waste Management Project

What does it really mean when citizens or citizen groups join forces with government auditors from the Commission on Audit?

How can they purport to complement the auditors' work when auditors underwent years of rigorous training, in school and on the job, on the rudiments of finance?

Under the Citizen Participatory Audit, auditors and citizen groups each have distinct and specific roles based on the capacities of each. Citizens can

participate through ways that optimize their own experiences, background and interests.

### AUDIT TOOLS AND CITIZEN GROUPS

There are established tools and methodologies used by citizen groups the world over in engaging their respective governments. These were developed and applied by the groups long before participatory audit mechanisms were tried out by some Supreme Audit Institutions.

Among the established tools is the citizen report card, or CRC.

This survey methodology was used to assess the performance of agencies tasked to deliver public service.

In Bangalore, Southern India, the Public Affairs Centre (PAC) used the



CRC to gather citizen data and feedback on public service quality and the state of government monitoring. The public dissemination of survey results, sustained advocacy and creation of spaces for dialogue between the service providers and citizens improved the services and the public perception of such services.

Another tool is the social audit, which basically answers the question of how resources were used to attain social objectives.

It uses various data gathering and performance assessment methods like surveys, interviews, quality tests, collation of statistics, review of records, case studies and participant observation.

The social audit was used in Rajasthan, India for the audit of the National Rural Employee Guarantee Act in

2006. More than 600 volunteers checked the government's compliance with the law including the payment of proper wages. Thus, aside from discussions with beneficiaries, the audit required the examination of payrolls, cash records, and similar financial documents.

A third tool is the community score card, or CSC. The CSC is usually described as a hybrid of the survey-based CRC and the multi-methodological social audit.

Score cards solicit perceptions about the existing state of public services based on collectively generated performance indicators. They gather the views of both service users and service providers. A common feature is the "interface meeting" wherein scores are compared and emerging issues are discussed. Malawi used a CSC prices in 2002 to assess the

services of rural health centers.

### **TOOLS AT WORK IN THE CPA**

According to feedback from state auditors who joined the CPA projects pilot audits, integration of the citizen audit tools enhanced public audit procedures and results in a number of ways.

Citizen audit approaches provided a systematic data-gathering process (non-financial or non-contract based data like perception or level of satisfaction). These data, taken together with information gathered from usual

public audit approaches (assessment of program status vis-à-vis its design and objectives, checking program compliance with policy, review of contract provisions) gave a more complete picture of program results.

An example would be the CCT pilot in Marikina. Here, the community score cards allowed target groups to rate aspects of services provided by







barangay health centers based on identified indicators. Self-ratings by local service providers and an interface meeting later validated their assessments.

The second benefit emphasized the importance of collaboration with stakeholders — implementing agencies, local service providers, affected communities, local public officials and the program's target groups — and ensuring their understanding of the audit process.

In the KAMANAVA flood control pilot audit, citizen auditors conducted community based meetings to orient local stakeholders on the participatory audit process. They also held such meetings to collectively assess the results and impact of the project.

And then, in the audit for the Quezon City Solid Waste Management Project, volunteer enumerators from partner citizen groups and barangay official from targeted waste collection zones attended an orientation organized by the joint audit team.

They later on said that this activity helped elicit support from the city government and the concerned barangays, both of which provided staff and resources to the initiative.

Finally, the citizen audit approaches produced information about program implementation that, according to COA auditors, would have been challenging to access and gather given their existing capacities and array of audit tools.

What really helped, for instance, in the QC pilot was the familiarity of citizen enumerators with target communities and people's waste management practices.

These allowed deeper inquiries into such practices and related issues — and often went beyond the questions listed in the survey instrument. For example, other valuable information like the garbage collectors' health concerns, complaints about their wages and the presence of cleanliness campaigns and other garbage collection systems in some communities were also brought to the surface.

These additional information pointed to some feasible areas for future participatory audit processes.

## WAYS FORWARD

Citizen audit tools complement established public audit tools employed by the Commission on Audit. Because of their ability to draw forth qualitative data, they have the potential to help make public audits more relevant to citizens' need or concerns.

Citizen groups normally communicate the results of their monitoring activities to the public. This is a way of creating pressure on executive agencies to act on their recommendations.

However, under COA processes, information about the audit can only be disseminated after the exit conference. Even then, citizen groups would be better equipped to do awareness-raising and advocacy activities. These should be especially helpful in following up on whether the audited agencies are heeding the recommendations of the audit team.

As the CPA is a work in progress, the use of citizen tools and approaches are also evolving. They can be sustained and enhanced through subsequent participatory audits and perhaps even outside the framework of joint audits with COA.





# CHARGING TO EXPERIENCE:

## THE CPA DEBRIEFING SESSIONS AS A VALUABLE LEARNING TOOL

Imagine a soldier coming back from combat.

He or she undergoes a debriefing session to assess the conduct and the results of the particular mission.

In experimental psychology, debriefing occurs after a subject has participated in a study and he or she is told the purpose of the experiment.

For key actors of the Citizen Participatory Audit – COA auditors, citizen groups, and ANSA-EAP — debriefing and reflection sessions proved to be a crucial part of the learning process. The objective is to constantly improve their knowledge and understanding of the many aspects of the PA experience.

### FOCUS ON THE PROCESS

*Sa pagsasagawa ng citizen survey, saan ka nasiyahan o nahirapan?*  
(In conducting the citizen survey, which aspect was, for you, satisfying? Challenging?)

*Paano it mas mapapahusay?*  
(How can the process be improved?)

Questions during the debriefing/ reflection workshop for the Quezon City pilot project.

COA auditors and citizen groups underwent their respective debriefing and reflection sessions after conducting their joint audits in the KAMANAVA flood control and Quezon City Solid Waste Management programs, with ANSA-EAP facilitating the sessions.



The citizen participants discussed the quality of their engagement with COA, how participatory “participatory” really was, and to what extent they were able to influence the conduct of the audit.

They also voiced their concerns in handling the expectations with regard to their role in the CPA. Some said they should have taken a bigger role in designing and facilitating the group processes since they had more experience in terms of applying participatory approaches.

As a result of the debriefing, ANSA-EAP realized that it could have organized more conversations among participating CSOs. The CSOs may need to demonstrate to the COA their organizational capacities and their members’ competencies. The citizen groups involved should also ponder how their experiences and insights could inform the participation of other CSOs in the CPA.

In the session involving the participants to the joint audit of the Quezon City Solid Waste Management Program, focus was on the conduct of the survey. The enumerators pointed out the questionnaire that was used created some confusion. There was thus a need to think through the proper approaches in getting the respondents’ attention and explaining to them the survey’s objectives.

It was established that there was a need to have an optimal number of questions given the limited time for interview and other field conditions, as well as a set of questions that flowed naturally and logically from one section to the other.

### THE BIGGER PICTURE

*Sa programa sa pamamahala ng basura, ano ang pinakamatingkad na nalaman o natutunan? (In the city’s*

Solid Waste Management Program, what was the most remarkable insight that you obtained?)

*Ano ang epekto ng pananaw na ito sa gobyerno? (What is the effect of this view on the government?)*

The debriefing with citizen groups in the QC SWMP yielded, further, their reflections on the challenges faced by city officials in implementing the program, and on their individual roles as citizens, not only in program planning but in monitoring the implementation.

These later on led to further questions: Where must change really begin?

“There is a need for an effective leader who will inspire the people and ensure that the laws are implemented,” one participant said.

“But why should we wait for that leader? Change should originate from each and every one of us,” said her co-enumerator.

### SUCCEEDING STEPS

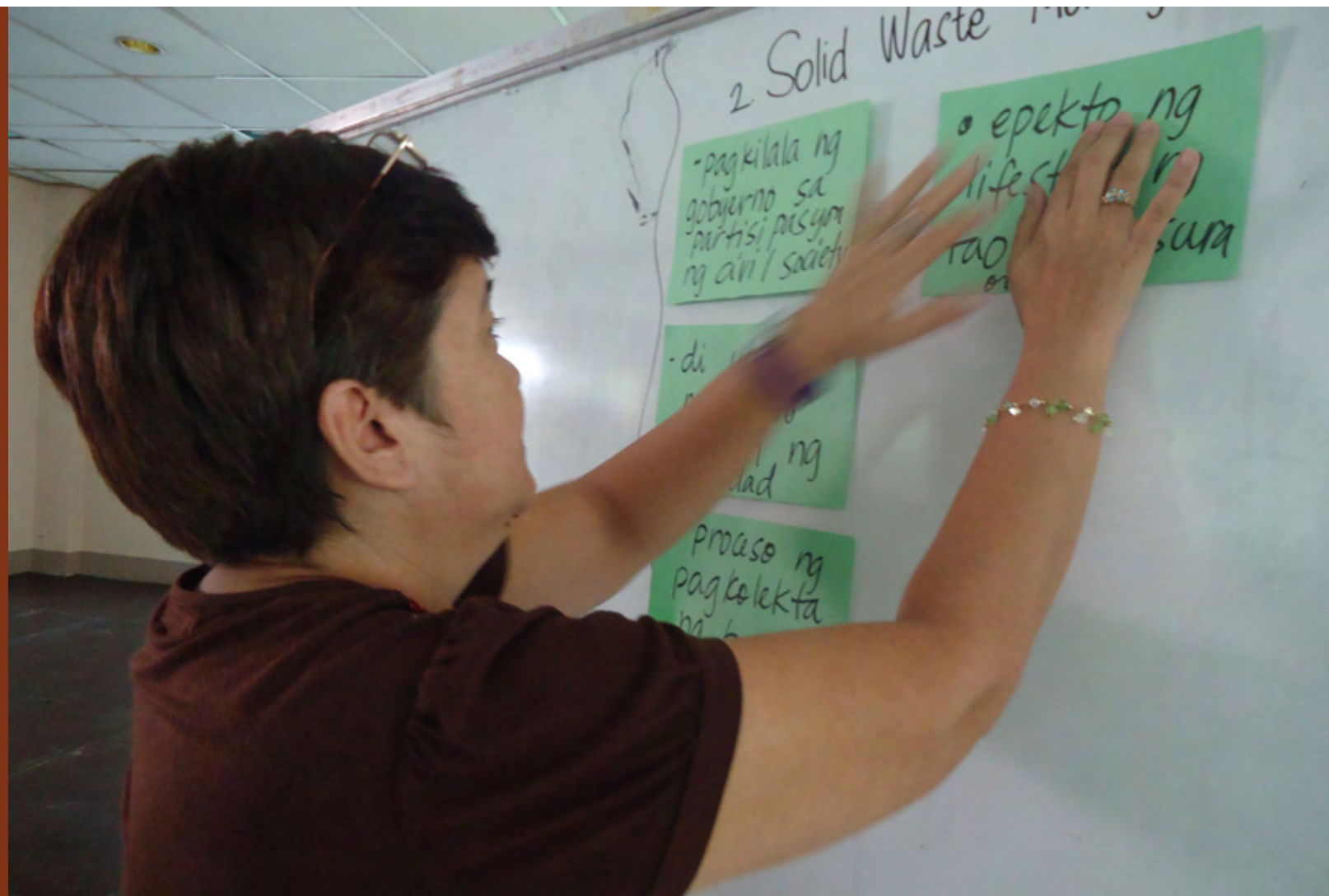
Citizen participants highlighted the importance of being able to follow up the audit findings and recommendations. For instance, in the QC pilot, the recommendations were to have more effective ways of campaigning and disseminating information about the need to properly segregate waste emerged. The schedules and standards for collecting garbage in the communities were also deemed very important.

Potential areas for follow up audits were identified. They were: the working conditions of garbage collectors, compliance of contracted collectors to the standards on

proper hauling or handling of garbage, and existing community-based waste management strategies as potential alternatives to current system.

In the meantime, ANSA-EAP which acted as facilitator also had its own takeaway, specifically on the regularity and quality of communication of decisions and plans reached with COA to the citizen groups, mainstreaming CPA among other citizen groups outside of the pilot audits, and highlighting results that have to do with empowering citizens through participation in the CPA and helping COA do its work better in the context of good governance.

*Sa mga susunod na hakbang, ano ang handa mong gawin bilang indibidwal? Bilang organisasyon? (In taking the next steps, what are you prepared to do as an individual? As an organization?)*





# BEING A BRIGHT SPOT: OPENING UP GOVERNMENT BY GETTING CITIZENS ON BOARD

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A “BRIGHT SPOT”?

The Citizen Participatory Audit bagged the Bright Spots Award in the Open Government Partnership Summit held in London on October 31 to November 1 last year.

It's a validation of the promise offered by the project undertaken by the Commission and Audit and the Affiliated Network for Social Accountability – East Asia and the Pacific.

CPA brings together the government (through COA ) and citizen groups in constructive engagement in pursuit of transparency, accountability and participation.

Interestingly, the award was given to the CPA at a time when the pork barrel scandal was putting Philippine public institutions to a serious test.

## WHAT IS THE OPEN GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP?

The OGP was launched in 2011 “to provide an international platform for domestic reformers committed to making their governments more open, accountable, and responsive to citizens.”

In a span of a little over two years, the number of participating countries has grown from eight to 63. “OGP’s vision is that more governments become sustainably more transparent, more accountable, and more responsive to their own citizens, with the ultimate goal of improving the quality of governance, as well as the quality of services that citizens receive. This will require a shift in norms and culture to ensure genuine dialogue and collaboration between governments and civil society.” (<http://www.opengovpartnership.org/about/mission-and-goals>)

As one of the eight founding members of the OGP, the Philippines has made these commitments:

- Sustaining transparency in national government plans and budget-related matters and processes;
  - Supporting the passage of legislation on access to information and protection of whistleblowers;
  - Engaging civil society in public audit;
  - Enhancing performance benchmarks for local governance;
  - Enhancing the government procurement system; and
  - Strengthen grassroots participation in local planning and budgeting;
- In the London summit, the country added these to its list of commitments:



Photo from: <http://philnews.ph/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Philippines-OGP.jpg>

Providing more accessible government data in a single portal and open format;

- Initiating fiscal transparency in the extractive industry; and
- Improving the ease of doing business in the Philippines

## THE BRIGHT SPOTS AWARD

There were 1,000 summit participants from civil society, business and government in the 63 countries.

The CPA was among the seven short-listed entries for the Bright Spots Award. The others were projects from Chile, Estonia, Georgia, Indonesia, Montenegro, Philippines, and Romania. The selection of winners was done by voting. Ultimately, it emerged as the top contender.

ANSA-EAP's Vivien Suerte-Cortez, project coordinator for CPA, sums up why the project gained the most number of votes: "other social audits are mainly conducted independently

by civil society groups...under the CPA project, citizens are with auditors. They are not on the outside looking in."

And indeed the CPA has brought together the COA and citizen groups in its three pilots – the Department of Public Works and Highway's KAMANAVA flood control project, Quezon City's Solid Waste Management Program, and the barangay health centers in Marikina City.

Since the CPA's launch in November 2012 and leading to the conclusion of its first phase early this year, the audit teams – composed of state auditors and representatives of citizen groups – have developed a mix of tools like data gathering activities, surveys and score cards that complement the technical process of COA-style audits. The resulting report carries the stamp of COA's authority.

Dondon Parafina, ANSA-EAP executive director, says that COA's opening up its audit process to citizens is a milestone in itself.

## MOVING FORWARD

The Bright Spots Award came at a time when the pork barrel scandal was casting serious doubt in Philippine government institutions, specifically the Legislative and Executive departments as well as the NGO sector. Months later, cases still have to progress even as the Priority Development Assistance Fund has been declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court.

The CPA then stresses the need for governments and citizens to work together instead of taking an adversarial and mutually distrustful approach.

"Being recognized was one way of putting pressure on government to take reform initiatives like CPA seriously," added Cortez.

She said the project also highlighted the weak accountability mechanisms in the country.

In the 2012 Independent Reporting Mechanism's Report, the Philippines was deemed only having "partially

fulfilled" its commitments as of 2012 – mainly because of the country's continued failure to pass the freedom of information bill. The Executive has not certified the bill as urgent.

The chairperson of the Senate Committee on Public Information and Mass Media, Senator Grace Poe Llamanzares, says she is confident that the bill would soon pass, especially since the latest draft of the legislation contains several features pertinent to the Philippine OGP commitment.

The road to transparency is never easy, but constructive engagement between government and citizens emphasizes that everybody has a stake on whatever happens to the country.

May the CPA's Bright Spots Award give way to yet more enlightened initiatives for a truly participatory and inclusive approach to governance. (This article originally appeared on the ANSA-EAP Web site.)



# CHAPTER 4

SUSTAINABILITY IN  
THE CPA INITIATIVE



# Building clamor, and then keeping it

*"I've participated in many worthy projects before. But they were almost always just good in the beginning. There is good intention. There is attention. And then it all just...fizzles out."*

-Citizen partner  
KAMANAVA Pilot Audit

The Citizen Participatory Audit project sets in motion all the lofty ideals of transparency, accountability and participation in the context of good governance. It translates into concrete action the Philippines' commitment to the Open Government Partnership and fleshes out Filipinos' desire to be more involved in the government's running of their affairs.

In the past two years, much effort has been expended by the Commission on Audit, ANSA-EAP and the citizen groups themselves in making the CPA achieve its articulated objectives.

The rewards came early. All three pilot joint audits were completed as scheduled, with actors from all fronts learning much from the experience and making their unique contributions to the initiative. The project itself was given the Bright Spot Award in London in November 2013 — a clear-enough sign that it was doing things as envisioned and had the promise of setting a example to other countries in terms of citizen participation.

There were challenges, too, but none proved insurmountable.

Now that Phase 1 of the project has ended and it is transitioning into its institutionalization at the COA, the CPA faces the very crucial and very real issue of sustainability.

## HOW LONG CAN THE CPA LAST?

Demand is the answer. So long as there is demand for a project that

brings together the government and citizens, working not as adversaries nor watchdogs waiting for the other to fail, but real partners belonging to the same team, then CPA will be viable.

## RE-DEFINING THE AUDIT AGENDA

The national government's conditional cash transfer program. The use of rehabilitation programs for typhoon victims. LGUs' use of their Internal Revenue Allotments for local development. The quality of local service provision.

During the Shared Agenda Building workshops held in three key cities and in Metro Manila, citizen and COA participants identified these areas, among many others, as those they would like to conduct a performance audit on in the next round of the CPA.

A performance audit is not the same as a financial and compliance audit. It is more specific; it seeks to find out whether public programs are executed with economy, efficiency and effectiveness. Meanwhile, financial audits determine whether an entity's financial information is presented in accordance with applicable financial reporting and regulatory framework. Compliance audits focus on whether a particular subject matter is in compliance with criteria identified by authorities.

A performance audit is rarely undertaken by the commission. In 2011, for instance, there were only 31 performance audits as against 38, 173 financial and compliance audits done.

The shared agenda building process may represent a significant step in realigning the focus and direction of public audits performed by the COA.

Specifically, there could be greater emphasis on checking the use of public resources and assessing the results of public programs, especially those targeting poor and marginalized communities.

Of course, there must be support from COA's top leadership in terms of the commission's strategic and sectoral planning.

## CREATING AWARENESS

*What has the CPA done? How has it worked? What more can it do? How can the CPA be a tool to exact accountability from public officials? How can people reach out and take part?*

The answers to these questions need to be communicated to the public in general and citizen groups, especially those operating at the local levels, in particular.

Some of the constraints on government's efforts to open up spaces for citizen participation stemmed from the limited response from citizen groups. Moving forward, this immediate hurdle can only be overcome by sustained and systematic interventions to inform the people about the CPA.

There are numerous ways to create awareness, too — for instance, the CPA website i-kwenta.com has room for much higher traffic despite the relatively low internet penetration rate in the Philippines. To augment the gap, the CPA team can also establish formal partnerships with local media networks to help with the information drive.

## BUILDING CAPACITIES BETTER

*"A big challenge to the CPA is its sustainability which can be challenged by the availability of citizen groups*

*across the country with technical needs needed in audit, time, willingness and commitment to accept assignments on a voluntary basis."*

### -State Auditor assigned to one of the pilot joint audits

The capacity building strategy honed during the first phase of the project involves an action-oriented learning program, anchored on initial classroom-based orientation and training sessions, and subsequent mentoring support in the process of implementing joint audits.

This process, expected to be lodged in COA, has been designed mainly to build state auditors' and citizens' capacities for conducting joint audits.

This approach however may need to be re-assessed in light of plans to broaden the involvement of citizen groups in other parts of the country,

and the need to generate citizen demand for all areas of CPA. An emerging challenge is to create interest among ordinary citizens to assess public programs and generate more spontaneous citizen efforts.

Such a broadly targeted capacity building effort for CPA may need to ask how individuals and citizens at the grassroots can have the necessary skills to gather information about ongoing public programs. Substantive reports can thus be given to COA through citizen feedback mechanisms. Citizens may also access COA's regular or CPA reports and follow-up with audited agencies.

## MORE TEETH

The level of government offices' implementation of COA recommendations following an audit has been dismal. In 2011, for instance, only 6,315 out of 16,954 or

37.25% of COA's recommendations were heeded by concerned national agencies.

The numbers are worse for the local sector, where only 6, 719 out of 24, 332 of COA's recommendations were implemented.

The entry of citizen groups into the audit process has the potential of changing this. Citizen groups have the ability to put pressure on the agencies to heed the recommendations made by the COA after they had been edited.

Among the limitations of the first phase of the CPA project is that it was not able to complete the participatory audit circle through a follow up on the agencies' actions taken on the CPA pilot audits. Citizen groups have limited knowledge on its part of COA's work, specifically on monitoring tools

and assessment methods it uses in doing these post-audit follow-ups.

The results of such monitoring and follow up activities will complete the cycle by showing the public that participatory audit is an effective way to see good governance in action from agencies, thus creating clamor for subsequent joint audits in other areas.

Ensuring the viability of the CPA by strengthening the demand for it entails strengthening citizen's voice in shaping COA's priorities, enhancing key stakeholders' awareness of CPA and their capacities to constructively engage with each other, and ensuring CPA's effectiveness in exacting accountability from public officials.

**Institutionalizing participatory audit in the COA means that at some point in the future, there will be nothing special about it anymore. It would be part of the routine.**

**-COA Chairperson Ma. Gracia Pulido-Tan**





# CHAPTER 5

REFLECTIONS

Citizen Participatory Audit is a project that brings together the Commission on Audit on one hand, and citizen groups on the other. There is however a third entity, the Affiliated Network for Social Accountability in East Asia and the Pacific (ANSA-EAP) acting as the go-between in the initial phases of the project.

What exactly was the role of ANSA-EAP, specifically its CPA Team, in the project? Its members ponder this and come up with the following reflections—



# Adelfo Briones

## CPA Learning Coordinator



When I got looped into the CPA Project as the lead for the Capacity-Building Component, I had mixed feelings. On the one hand, I realized I was treading on unfamiliar ground—one to which I, admittedly, was quite averse, as the term “audit” conjures numbers and statistics that I simply abhor. On the other hand, I felt that it was a God-given opportunity for me to promote and support what has been a personal advocacy for the past decade—citizen participation and citizen engagement through social accountability approaches. In addition, I thought this was my perfect chance to use my experience and expertise as a capacity-building practitioner who loves the adult learning approach. I thought then that it would be a

breeze. But it became some sort of a whirlwind, if not stormy, romance. The term “participatory” is something very personal and quite dear to me because that is the essence of andragogy (or teaching/learning strategies that focus on adults). “Participation”—while overused and abused—articulates one’s having a voice, of being empowered, that indeed one matters in the bigger scheme of things. In the context of democracy and good governance, participation is not just an event (where one participates), but a PROCESS in which one can influence and share control over priority setting, policymaking, resource allocations, and/or program implementation. It means that ordinary people’s voices



are integrated into initiatives that improve their condition. It means their voices are heard and included in decision-making. Or at least that was what I thought when I joined the CPA. Like a Zen master, one can close his eyes and smilingly think of happy thoughts about “participation”. But when one opens his eyes and sees the challenges, reality sucks. Sigh.

“Challenge”—the word that social development workers love so much and like to bandy around. That word is the mantra, or opium if you will, of glassy-eyed idealists and revolutionaries who want to change the world. We in the CPA, at least in those initial months, kept telling ourselves that we would continue bearing the challenges. It became a self-fulfilling prophecy.

It was a surprise to many, including myself, that COA opened itself up to participatory audit. Just hearing it

said that COA is the “Supreme Audit Institution” of the land, brings into mind royal and stately images, of an institution that’s “out there”, of being “unreachable”. Perhaps that imagery was a sign of troubling things to come—that was the way how I saw COA, and so that would be the way I would behave towards it.

What I saw then in COA was a humungous institution apparently set in its ways—how it does things, how it understands its work, how things should be done. So it was not surprising that its people would behave the way they understand themselves. And that was my challenge: to understand their behavior that did not seem to fit into my mental schema of “participation” and “participatory”.

How many times did I catch myself hissing under my breath, right in the middle of a meeting, “Is this

participation?” Our team leader got fed up with me because I would pull her aside every 30 minutes and remind her that “we ought to be participating!” and not be imposed upon.

It took some time for me—and would I say a qualitative leap of maturity—to see through the “blindness” of the other person and realize how differently he or she saw things. Like many of my colleagues in ANSA-EAP, I went through a process of (low intensity) catharsis during which I purged and purified my emotions, resulting in (low intensity) renewal and restoration. While mine was no Pauline scales being shed off from my eyes, it was quite liberating to begin to understand that, voila!, even “participation” cannot be imposed upon others. It’s like a fisherman patiently and slowly, with perfect timing that goes with maturity and wisdom, pulling his line so that the

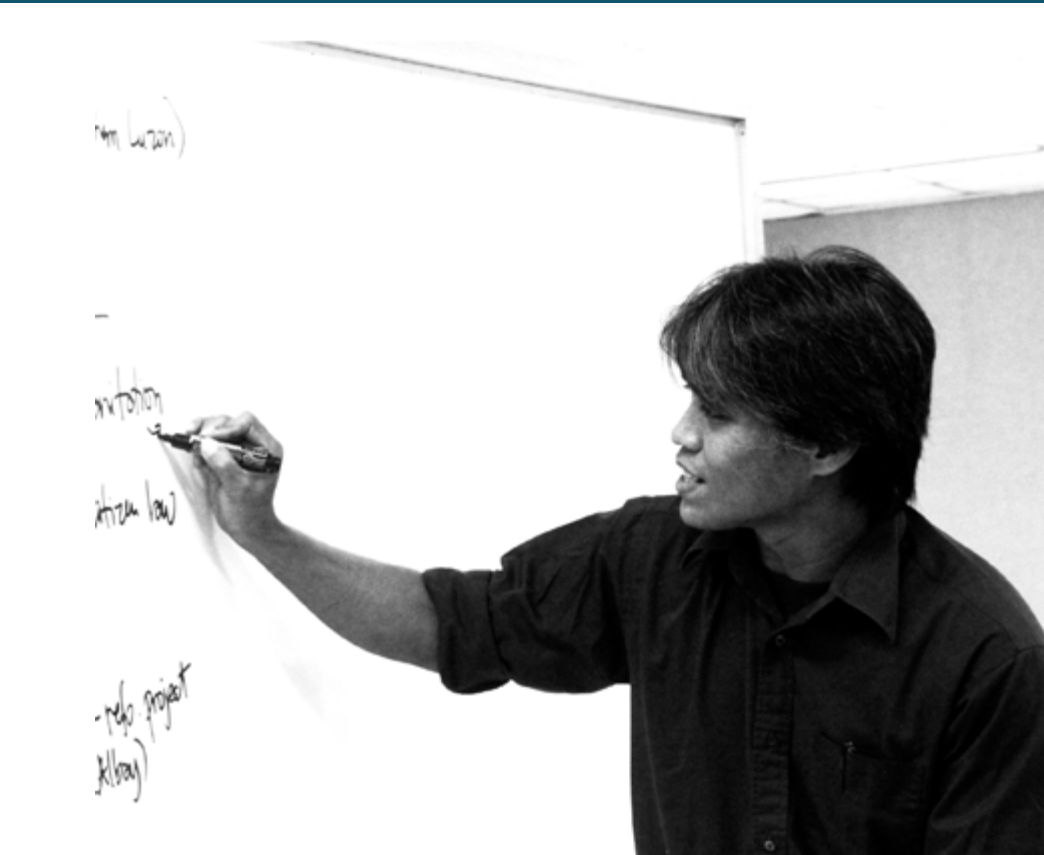
hooked fish will not panic and thus break the line.

And so, what is my takeaway after all has been said and done? Not the project outputs, for they are my deliverables (the word “deliverable” means “from me/mine to yours/theirs”). Not the photographs, for they were shot and edited to be shared on Facebook and project publications.

My takeaway from the CPA is something very personal—that I have moved a step forward towards becoming a more mature person, having realized that I have to learn to wear the blinders of others so that they, too, will begin to appreciate my view of the world.

# Randee Cabaces

## Knowledge Management Coordinator



In my view, there were three key result areas for ANSA EAP's carrying out of its role as facilitator for the CPA project. These are more capable individuals, stronger groups, and more sustainable agreements.

### **CAPABLE INDIVIDUALS**

No doubt, ANSA-EAP enhanced the individual competencies of the citizen groups in constructive engagement. It oriented and briefed citizen groups about the role of public audits in the context of good governance, CPA as a social accountability initiative and the public program to be audited.

These briefings helped frame and level off CSO representatives with varying experiences and appreciation

of engaging with government. They also provided a good initial working knowledge of the program being targeted for audit.

As a result, citizens were able to provide valuable input during the audit planning. During the planning, they designed the citizen survey or public consultations, crafted the survey and FGD tools, and plotted the best ways to approach community members and administer the surveys and FGD instruments.

During and after data gathering, ANSA-EAP conducted debriefing and reflection sessions with CSOs. The CSOs were then able to conduct joint analyses of audit results and group processes.

For example, CSOs who participated in the Quezon City pilot audit on solid waste management realized their roles as citizens and made a commitment to participatory audit or citizen monitoring in general, as well as pledged to help raise the public's awareness on SWM and other programs of the LGU.

### **STRONGER GROUPS**

ANSA-EAP helped strengthen the groups' capacities to create an enabling environment for citizen engagement. It continuously clarified the concept of citizen participation and highlighted issues and practices on the part of the COA and CSO partners which seem to hinder participation.

For example, ANSA-EAP and the citizen groups initially had to contend with some auditors' tendencies to require certain processes and standards in evaluating citizen

auditors, framing audit objectives/ criteria, or determining possible audit activities/methodologies with insufficient consultation or inputs from the citizen groups.

The citizen groups, through ANSA EAP, were able to clarify these issues during group activities like PMO meetings, audit planning and learning/ orientation sessions. These allowed insights to bear upon immediately on the group's interaction/ process.

The shared agenda building workshops gave participating groups opportunities to shape CPA's direction and also spaces for future engagement with COA. There are other areas of work, aside from joint audits, that citizen groups can commit to based on their existing capacities. Examples of this are awareness-raising on public audits, capacity building for state auditors on participatory tools, etc.).

The SAB also gave citizen groups an initial glimpse into COA's public audit planning, with the session on clarifying identified audit scope or focus. They were thus given an idea on what to expect when engaging with COA and state auditors.

### **MORE SUSTAINABLE AGREEMENTS**

ANSA-EAP balanced the interests of COA and citizen groups in carrying out participatory audit.

For example, citizen groups were inclined to audit more publicized, fraudulent cases like the PDAF or examine program impact.

On the other hand, the COA wished to protect citizen auditors or partners from any threats, legal or physical, which are usually experienced by its own auditors. COA may also be concerned about its current lack of tools for impact evaluation, or about the

limitations on what can be done given the pilot nature of the project. ANSA-EAP takes the middle ground by reminding citizens of the requirements of the project while negotiating with COA on how pilot audits can include program results.

The CPA project team of ANSA EAP also assisted the PMO of COA in coming out with indicators and mechanisms to monitor the accomplishment of plans under the CPA. It set objectives and activities involving citizen groups which took part in the pilot audits. Together with the PMO, it disseminated information about the COA's plans to citizen groups attending the workshop. These activities helped establish initial lines of accountability with citizen groups and other stakeholders.



With my background in journalism, I am exposed to the issues of corruption and lack of transparency, participation and accountability in governance day in and day out. I read about these things; I write about these things. I believe that citizens have the right and responsibility to engage their Government in the running of their nation.

But prior to my involvement with the Citizen Participatory Audit, my knowledge of these things has been all theory and no practice.

I came on board as communications coordinator at a time when Phase 1 was winding down. The pilot audits had been conducted and the reports were being finalized.

I came in just in time however to witness how state auditors on one hand and citizen groups on the other interacted during the shared agenda building sessions.

In helping put together this e-book, I interviewed members of citizen

groups and auditors and listened to them talk about overcoming their initial misgivings about participatory audit in general, and about each other in particular.

I am delighted to be part of the team that says: Yes, it can be done. It's not just a neat concept that gets muddled in actual practice. The actors, and my colleagues at ANSA, say it was at times difficult. Differing orientations, views and methods got in the way. In the end, they rose above their differences for a common goal. They were part of the same team.

This is why, too, I am thrilled to see what CPA will evolve into after this first phase. To be sure, there are challenges. Some of them will be those experienced and hurdled before. Some new ones will emerge. But I know the greater goal is the greater good.

I am honored to see what CPA in action is like, and to be part of the team to tell the world just exactly how this is possible.



**Adelle Chua**  
**CPA Communications Coordinator**

# Christine Marie Cruz

## CPA Project Associate



Graduating from a university full of activists, I was exposed to people fighting for their advocacies and demanding government to take action on different issues and concerns of citizens. Most, if not all of these, are conducted on the streets while shouting, and holding banners and other paraphernalia. Some even involved violent uproars.

In fact, I was one of those who took to the streets, protesting and demanding for government to take action. Before, it seemed to be the best way to force government to act. But we do not see eye to eye, and this, like a domino effect, results to different battles being fought on the streets, some with sweat and blood.

With many different government anomalies, being aggressive seemed to be the only way to make officials work on addressing citizens' concerns and combatting corruption. It was not until I became part of ANSA-EAP and the Citizen Participatory Audit (CPA) Project that I realized, something better could be done to strengthen good governance in our country.

### **A PARADIGM SHIFT**

As an organization mainstreaming social accountability (SAc), ANSA-EAP integrated SAc principles in CPA. This brought a new perspective and personally, became an eye-opener.

Social accountability is constructive, rather than combative engagement. It is fueled by assertiveness rather than aggressiveness. It is citizens and government working together to improve public service delivery, people's rights and welfare, not just government solely doing it.

In social accountability, the responsibility lies not only with the government but with citizens as well. It realizing that citizens, too, have to take part in sustaining dialogues and solving problems with the government, not just asserting for their needs and government reforms.

## **LESSONS FROM CPA EXPERIENCE**

Through CPA, SAc is not only taught to but also practiced by all involved stakeholders. Citizen monitoring

efforts are put to good use e.g., data from monitoring are analyzed and used as part of audit reports and as basis for audit recommendations.

Through CPA, COA and CSOs also get to know each other better. Citizens get to understand and experience why the COA audit process takes long. One of the notable learnings was understanding that COA has to follow due process; that premature disclosure is not allowed, not because COA wants to cover up the anomalies they discovered, but because they give time for the auditee to respond to initial audit findings and recommendations; to hear the auditee's side and to let them explain why such findings exist. In this way, they can understand the auditee better and come up with more coherent and appropriate recommendations.

On the other hand, COA opens an opportunity for them to work with CSOs and understand CSOs advocacies and their perspective on governance issues. COA also learns new data gathering tools and techniques that allow them to immerse with citizens on the ground. CPA also allows COA to better engage with the citizens, specifically, the CSOs.

Through CPA, COA and citizens complement each other. They strengthen each other's advocacies while respecting boundaries and jurisdictions. Though monitoring of audit recommendations is still an area in the audit process that needs to be strengthened, CPA, I believe, has in one way or another affected the lives of citizens who have been part of it. CPA has even more promising impact now that serious efforts from COA to enable citizens to better participate in

the audit process i.e., allotting 5M PHP as CPA budget for FY 2015 has materialized.

Being part of CPA, I must say, is a very enriching experience both technically (gaining knowledge and experience on COA audit process) and personally (realizing one's accountability as a stakeholder and a citizen of this country).



## REFLECTION ON CPA EXPERIENCE

The CPA ride, like many other Social Accountability initiatives, is definitely not a smooth one especially to those who took a leap of faith just to be part of this intervention. And I am not saying that it is the CSOs including ANSA-EAP alone; the same feeling might also go with our COA and other government partners, too. Below are two points that I may want to highlight as two learning conundrums of my CPA experience.

“How participatory is participatory?” Probably this may vie for a Ms. Universe question, yes? A tough one especially for us who are trying to prove a point may also find difficult to answer. But, as we go along, thinking through it all, we may not have least noticed that it created a big dent to what has been the usual process and notion. Citizens, unlike in other practices, was part of the audit process in every step of the way; not as process observers or watchdogs of perceived anomalies, but as

auditors who also visit sites, write audit reports, and serve as resource persons for learning sessions and co-authors of possible areas for audit.

Citizens and auditors fill in each other’s gaps. However, like a handclasp, it doesn’t mean complete absence of collision. Each side is one of its own that makes it fit to fill the other. “How do we make a good visual story of CPA?”

As humans are naturally captivated by (interesting) visuals, working on sights of people who are sitting down, talking to one another, pointing to texts, tables and numbers that any non-participant would understand was a brainteaser for me—“how would anyone buy into this?”

It is still a continuing effort for us to do so. But along the way, it was a realization that utilizing the story behind this story and breaking stereotypes could be the way to satisfy the question. For instance, CSOs also constructively engage and converse with government apart from

marching to the streets; definitely not all of them are bogus and manipulated for personal interests. COAns, on the other hand, are citizens too before they are auditors; they are also

beneficiaries at some point and shouldn’t be automatically equated to thick glasses, clipboards, hair buns, and formal attires in the midst of a brightly lit sun.



**Shigemi Muramatsu**  
**CPA Project Associate**

## Vivien Suerte-Cortez

### CPA Program Coordinator

When Ma. Gracia M. Pulido Tan assumed the position of Chairperson at the Commission on Audit (COA); she started a series of reforms that were closely aligned with President Benigno Aquino III's social contract with the Filipino people. She introduced reforms that disrupted the way people at COA were used to doing things. She introduced the concept of engaging with citizens and civil society to conduct public audits. While it wasn't a wholly new concept (since CCAGG piloted a similar activity in 2002), Chairperson Tan was convinced that this was an innovative way to promote transparency, accountability and participation in COA. The Citizen Participatory Audit

(CPA) experience showed that a strong and resolute leader could innovate and enhance existing systems to achieve better outcomes.

However, it wasn't always like this. Several months after the project's start-up operations, we were faced with uncertainty and tension. Distrust and skepticism were the initial reactions of state auditors and civil society. After all, public audit was solely the realm of COA, while public monitoring fell under the expertise of civil society. Thrust together, these two naturally opposable forces – the government and its citizens, had to find ways to move forward together. After a short period of paralysis, spaces for



dialogue and negotiation slowly started to open up. Eventually, COA and the CSOs learned to develop mutual trust, honesty, and openness. Jointly drafting the CPA Operational Guidelines, conducting joint capacity building workshops, and having a Memorandum of Agreement helped. It clarified roles and responsibilities, and highlighted ways by which their expertise and skills can complement each other's. In time, this resulted in the conduct of three participatory audit activities that paved the way for CPA's institutionalization in COA – but that was only the beginning.

The next few months of 2014 will signal the start of CPA's second phase. This will probably make or break the initiative. During this phase, previous initiatives will be scaled up; the CSO base will be expanded; and the demand for participatory audits needs to be sustained. Surprisingly, COA emerged as the dark horse in

citizen engagement. The institution was suddenly thrust into the limelight given its successes, and is now seen as a model by other government agencies. To date, it is the only agency that has submitted a budget of over PHP 5 million to provide counterpart funding on CPA. It is nice to note as well that member economies of the Open Government Partnership have set their sights on CPA, observing whether this initiative will be hold to its initial recognition as a Bright Spot in 2013.

Still, challenges abound. Two years from now, we will witness the changing of the guard in the national government. This too will undoubtedly happen in COA. By February 2015, Chairperson Tan will have to step down, probably earlier if she is appointed to some other position. In light of these challenges, it is difficult to ignore that foremost on people's minds is whether COA can sustain its reforms.

Personally, I think that even before we talk about sustaining reforms, it is noteworthy to assess whether the intended beneficiaries feel the gains. They say that reforms that reach the people are the hardest to take away. Once seized, the people will be forced to fight for it, because they have felt its loss. While I am aware that the CPA has a long way to go for its impact to be felt, I believe that we are in a good place. COA has opened up, and there are several CSOs waiting in line to participate in joint audits. Risking sounding overly optimistic, I believe we will reach our goal soon. In a sense, implementing the CPA provided us with a feeling that somehow, transparency and accountability in government have come into fruition (or at least, nearing fruition) ... and this is something that I have felt, and will fight for should it be taken away.

## POSTSCRIPT

There is a certain satisfaction when a person works with government. We find ourselves privy to information usually reserved for those in the know. We see how government institutions struggle to implement reform initiatives, and most of the time, we see how changes strike them off balance. Most of all, we learn that somehow, in the process of working together, we've formed deeper relationships that give us glimpses that our counterparts feel the same way we do when faced with uncertainty or challenges. There is one line that I have never forgotten in one of the conversations I had with a state auditor. She said, "I am a citizen first, before I became an auditor; and I will remain a citizen even after I retire as an auditor." In the end, I am glad to be given the opportunity to work with COA. I have learned that regardless of where our affiliations lie, we share the same hopes and dreams, and we are all equal as Filipinos.



# Patricia Membrebe

## Volunteer



### FROM DISCERNMENT TO EMPOWERMENT

As a self-confessed worrywart, I have always been in a quandary over which path I would wholeheartedly take after graduation. With the desire to get a head start in my career discernment, I decided that this summer would be the perfect time for me to get involved and work as a volunteer for any sector that is dedicated to development and passionate for public service. After weeks of searching for the best avenue to dedicate all the passion that I have for the development sector, I stumbled upon ANSA-EAP's website. I have to admit that I couldn't stop reading the articles published on the site. I was so amazed by how creative,

dynamic and relevant the network's projects and advocacies are. Without hesitation, I decided to send my resume. I was just so excited to meet the people behind the network, especially the great minds behind the Citizen Participatory Audit (CPA). CPA was one of ANSA-EAP's projects that really piqued my interest. Initially, I thought of CPA as a brilliant way to ensure that the government is doing its job. Eventually, I found out that there is so much more to the project than just testing the government's efficiency.

Albeit nearing its conclusion, the current phase of CPA still had a place for people like me who are willing to volunteer. Looking back to my interview, I remember one question

that really struck me. I was asked about what I think of the government in general. Even though I was really embarrassed to tell the truth, I admitted that I have always been afraid of working for the government. To me, it has always been a sort of high-walled entity; therefore, ordinary people like me would find it very difficult to find their “way in” to see what is really going on in there. Having said that, I was certain that I still felt hopeful that maybe someday, something will change my problematic notion. The question bothered me for weeks, even in my time as a volunteer. But it became my motivation, my ‘why’ as I looked forward to proving myself wrong.

As a volunteer for CPA, I was tasked to layout the practice briefs for the project, write an article regarding the conclusion of the phase, and organize a database of contacts. I must admit that I initially thought that the responsibilities assigned to me were

a little bit technical. I understood that this was because I came at a time when the phase was already being wrapped up. I used to think that only the field works are the most important parts of any research or project. But I learned through this experience that the interviews, the tools, and the findings would be for naught if they were not documented and communicated. As a matter of fact, reading the practice briefs made me understand what CPA is all about. I became even more familiar with the nitty-gritty details of each phase. On the other hand, organizing the database for the project made me realize how much an organization should value its connections. ANSA-EAP is a network after all, so in building bridges and working together to get to one destination, it is very important to bank on strong tie-ups. I am really grateful to have had the opportunity to partake in such a crucial time for the latest phase of CPA. Moreover, I consider myself really

fortunate that I got to witness how the stakeholders of CPA gathered to celebrate the progress of the project in the turnover ceremony with the Commission on Audit. The event looked back to the progress of the Citizen Participatory Audit and recognized the driving forces of the project. I honestly felt even prouder to be given the opportunity to volunteer for such an amazing project. I was just so amused by the great number of people who support and take part in accomplishing the goals of the project.

I admit that I always had too many apprehensions and doubts about the government and how they implement policies and projects. But in retrospect, all of that changed after I volunteered for CPA. Even though I was not able to witness how the project started out and how it was all processed, I can confidently say that I have seen enough to conclude that CPA--more than being the perfect

example of social accountability and the best avenue for good governance— is also a good way of empowerment. CPA is not only a tool to check if the government is doing its job well, it is not just a process of correcting everything that is wrong in a government project. It is also the best way to let everyone know that even as ordinary citizens, we have the capacity to voice out our needs, our demands. For me, it is the very heart of social accountability— that all sides are empowered enough to be informed, get involved, make an impact; and inspired enough to work hand in hand to achieve the ultimate goals. After all, the real power of a democratic government like ours lies in the ordinary citizens.

This summer has taught me a lot and I really felt like a changed person. If at the onset I was merely looking to gain career maturity, I learned so much more about myself, and what I want to passionately fight for, in the future.

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For more information, please visit these links:

[www.coa.gov.ph](http://www.coa.gov.ph)

[www.i-kwenta.com](http://www.i-kwenta.com)

[www.ansa-eap.net](http://www.ansa-eap.net)

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