

CAPTURING AND COMMUNICATING LESSONS FROM SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY INITIATIVES

The Affiliated Network for Social Accountability in East Asia and the Pacific (ANSA EAP) joined the Partnership for Transparency Fund (PTF) and the Makati Business Club – Coalition Against Corruption (MBC-CAC) to implement a two-year project called Enhancing Transparency Impact (ETI) Project in the Philippines. The said project involved providing both funding and technical support to social accountability (SAC) initiatives at the local level..

Last 11-13 September 2013, ANSA EAP conducted the third and final area-based learning event for the three grantees in Year 1. The Kalinga Apayao Religious Sector Association (KARSA), one of the three grantees, hosted the event which was entitled "Capturing and Communicating Results and Lessons from SAC Initiatives" and which aimed to help grantees surface some of the initial results and lessons from their SAC work, and identify viable strategies for communicating these to stakeholders. Eighteen representatives from KARSA, Responsible Citizens, Empowered Communities in Solidarity for Social Change (RECITE, Inc.), and the Young Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Governance (YCCAGG) attended the three-day workshop in Tabuk City.

TOWARDS MORE EVIDENCE-BASED RESULTS AND LESSONS

The Tabuk workshop aimed to make more explicit emerging results and lessons from the ETI grantees' initiatives in relation to citizen monitoring and constructive engagement with local officials.. One clear focus that emerged in designing the said workshop was the need for social accountability practitioners to be more aware of key results that they are working to achieve. The ANSA EAP facilitators also took note of the growing demand among donors, government people, and citizen groups to back up reports on social accountability results and lessons with more information that could help other practitioners better understand the context from which such lessons were derived and the factors that could influence future application.

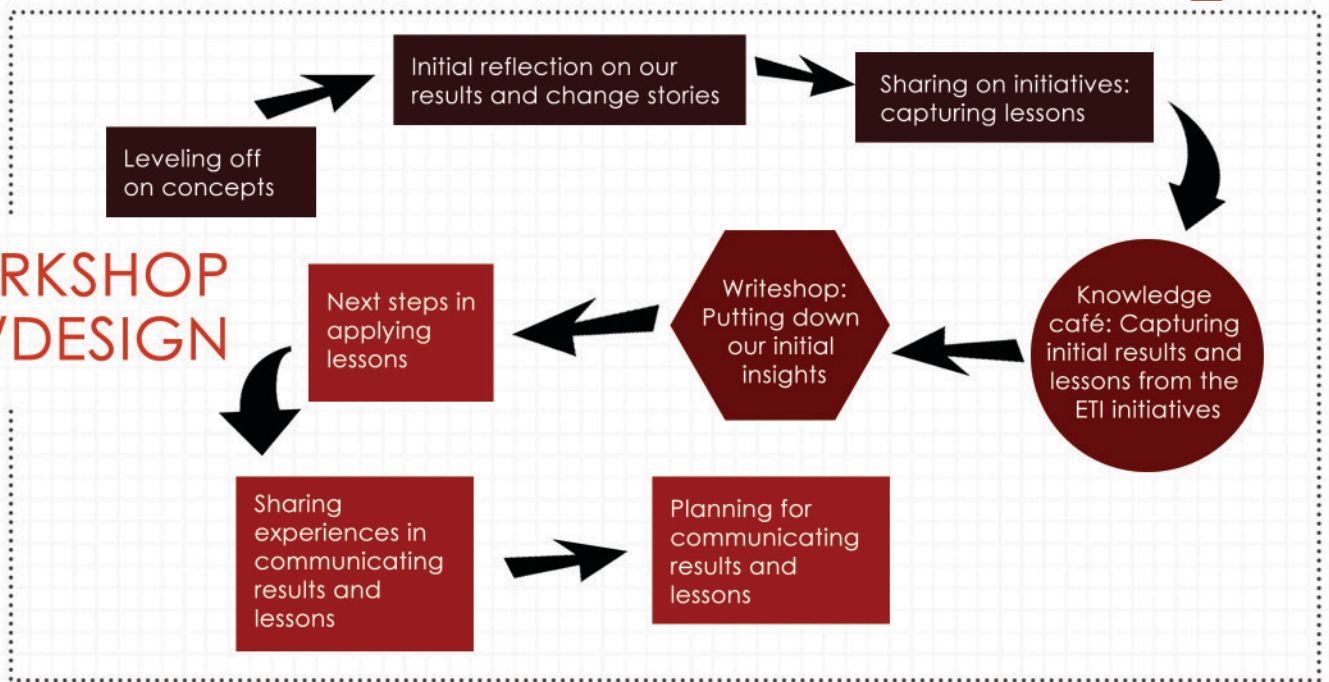
The workshop started with a group activity designed to arrive at a shared understanding on evidence-based lessons from social accountability initiatives and on how such lessons can be derived by evaluating project results. Building on this collective

appreciation, the participants then reviewed their project's results frameworks and designs. The clarified results framework served as bases for deriving insights about what worked and what contributed to the success of their citizen monitoring initiatives. Participants were also asked to write and collate some interesting stories about changes in their stakeholders' behavior and practices that could have come about as a result of the social accountability interventions.

They further sifted through these Most Significant Change (MSC) stories, during the knowledge café activity, which also facilitated identification of collective lessons under the ETI initiative. To help document emerging lessons and supporting evidences, facilitators conducted a mini-writeshop wherein participants were asked to come up with write ups on the identified themes. Towards the end of the workshop, participants crafted strategic communication plans for the effective dissemination of lessons to both internal and external stakeholders. The resulting plans also identified ways of bringing project lessons back into the social accountability practice of the ETI grantees and other citizen groups.



WORKSHOP FLOW/DESIGN



USING THE MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE STORIES APPROACH

ANSA EAP facilitators introduced the workshop participants to some tools and approaches for systematically assessing their interventions and capturing emerging lessons. One such tool was the Most Significant Change (MSC) technique, which involved the documentation and selection of significant change stories from the field about project outcomes and impact. As part of their preparatory work for the Tabuk workshop, participants were asked to write down examples of such stories using a one-page guide which allowed them to document important details of the story, information about how the story was collected (i.e., who were the key informants, date of interviews with community partners and other stakeholders, etc.), and their reflection about the stories' significance to their social accountability work. These short written stories provided participants with initial materials for evaluating the results of their initiatives, and served as starting points for identifying and writing about the ETI project lessons during the writeshop.

For more information about the MSC technique, see Davies, Rick and Dart, Jess 2005. The 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) Technique A Guide to Its Use. CARE International: UK, or email ANSA EAP (info@ansa-eap.net) to learn more about its use in capturing results and lessons from citizen monitoring and other social accountability interventions.



Enhancing Transparency Impact (ETI) Project

Pre-workshop assignment: Sample change story

Story title	Community groups able to access barangay documents
Collection method	Focus discussion with community organization members
Date collected	03 September 2013
Story location	Barangay Tawid Sapa
Description	<p>Members of the Tawid Sapa Association for Social Accountability have been in continuing dialogue with some sympathetic members of the barangay council throughout the project. These barangay councilors attended the organization's training on participatory local planning and budgeting, and came out of the training convinced about the need for active citizen involvement in local governance. These same councilors relayed this story about the change in the barangay captain's position regarding citizen groups accessing barangay documents, and related changes in the barangay council's accountability practices.</p> <p>In one recent emergency meeting called by the barangay captain, he expressed some apprehension about a formal request from the Tawid Sapa Association for SAc for a copy of the barangay development plan and budget. This was the first time that such a thing has happened, and he didn't know what to do. After some discussion and deliberation, the councilors were able to convince the barangay captain that it is within the legal rights of citizen groups to access such barangay documents. In fact, they were able to point out that citizen groups should be able to provide inputs into the barangay planning and budgeting processes.</p> <p>The barangay captain accepted all these with misgivings. He did agree to grant the request of Tawid Sapa Association for SAc, and consented to discussing further how citizen groups can participate in their future planning and budgeting activities within the barangay council.</p>
Significance	Workshops and dialogues conducted by Tawid Sapa Association for SAc seem to have enabled the barangay councilors to demand changes in terms of the council's transparency practices and policies, and people's access to information. If the community organization can sustain such constructive engagement, they will have reliable and effective allies and champions for pushing the demands for participation and inclusion of people's suggested priority projects in the barangay plans/budgets.

SOME INSIGHTS FROM THE WORKSHOP

The workshop on capturing and communicating lessons from social accountability initiatives allowed participants to level off on some important project evaluation concepts such as project interventions or strategies, results, lessons, and change paths or models. This facilitated their understanding and agreement on a common framework for reviewing their project activities, surfacing changes that resulted from these, and capturing emerging insights.

Facilitators and participants, however, noted the latter's difficulty in distinguishing between project results and lessons. The workshop discussions pointed to two (2) contributing factors: 1) Citizen monitoring at the local level may be largely opportunistic – i.e., they are largely driven by government demand or community complaints, mostly unfunded, and volunteer-dependent. This situation may preclude a strong project-based awareness involving systematic monitoring of results and capturing of lessons. 2) Awareness of a project's target results



and interventions is a prerequisite for monitoring and identifying lessons. This highlights the value of a sustained dialogue with stakeholders on an initiative's underlying theory of change and assumptions. In many projects, however, including the ETI grantees' SAc initiatives, discussions on such topics may be erratic or limited to the project staff or direct project implementers.

Participants also realized that they still tended to view evaluation of results and capturing of lessons as key activities which are done only towards the end of the implementation process. The relatively short time frames for project implementation and the volunteer-based structures of the Year 1 grantees (i.e., limited number of full-time staff) were major limiting factors in terms of having a more sustained and systematic process for project monitoring and evaluation (M&E) along the whole SAc project cycle. For most of the grantees, area-based learning events provided by ANSA EAP and the other ETI Project partners served as occasions to review project results and surface insights from SAc practice. Future initiatives to provide support to local SAc projects may want to consider providing more assistance in enhancing grantees' capacities to quickly install functional M&E systems at the project's design stage.

Another key insight that came out during the workshop was on the nature of project lessons as being heavily context-dependent -- that

is, their applicability or efficacy in other situations are largely determined by the presence or absence of some requisites or contributing factors in the environment. Lessons from social accountability initiatives should also be seen in their proper contexts as they involve use of specific monitoring tools and strategies for engagement. Such tools and strategies have to be properly customized to take into account local socio-cultural conditions. For instance, in the case of KARSA, some tribal groups and community members have come to look upon it as a go-to organization when it comes to monitoring public projects without themselves acting or mobilizing on such concern. Applying a community score card process may therefore have to initially put more premium on shifting the people's perspectives from an anti-corruption (that places more emphasis on the role of "watchdogs" like KARSA) to a sustained and more participatory public performance monitoring mode.

On the part of the facilitators, some lessons that surfaced during the activity included the need for participants to understand well their project's underlying change model and interventions. Lack of this understanding may result to difficulties in assessing the project's performance. This is often the case with project partners and stakeholders due to the implementing organizations' weak strategic communication practices. Learning needs analysis (LNA) and other workshop preparations should help emphasize this need with the target participants. Data collection for the MSC stories could be avenue for participants to

discuss their social accountability project's logical framework and results areas with key stakeholders. A separate session or activity to process the outputs and insights from the MSC tool can facilitate full use of and deeper learning from the resulting data. ANSA EAP can also put more effort on documenting good practices in monitoring, evaluating, and communicating key results and lessons from social accountability initiatives to support this type of learning interventions.



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