

The recent pork barrel scam in the Philippines, involving diversion of legislators' discretionary funds into the pockets of individuals representing fake nongovernment organizations (NGOs) and allegedly of legislators themselves, has brought once again the country's whole governance and accountability systems under close public scrutiny. Opinion pieces and exchanges in both mainstream and online media abound these days with suggestions for possible alternatives to the pork barrel system in Congress, and even the President's own discretionary funds.

One such alternative proposes strengthening local planning and budgeting as a more rational means of identifying local needs and allocating public resources. The national government's recent initiatives in "bottom-up" budgeting (BUB), for instance, have once again brought the spotlight on citizen involvement in local priority-setting and public resource allocation, and on the available formal spaces for citizen participation in terms of local governance.

The Affiliated Network for Social Accountability in East Asia and the Pacific (ANSA-EAP) recently had a chance to examine some challenges facing citizen groups in local planning and budgeting when it was tapped as a partner under the Enhancing Transparency Impact (ETI) Project. ETI is a two-year initiative that aims to enhance the impact of citizen actions towards transparency and good governance through grant-giving and knowledge sharing. Key implementers include the Partnership for Transparency Fund (PTF) and the Makati Business Club – Coalition Against Corruption (MBC-CAC). The Development Cooperation, Australian Embassy-Manila has provided funding support to the initiative.

For Year I, ETI partnered with three (3) citizen groups: the Responsible Citizens, Empowered Communities In Solidarity for Social Change (RECITE, Inc), the Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Governance (CCAGG), and the Kalinga Apayao Religious Sector Association (KARSA). As part of its learning support to grantees, ANSA-EAP also conducted case studies on local participatory governance, covering ETI grantees' projects and similar efforts by other citizen groups.

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Strengthening local participatory planning and budgeting: Revisiting focus and strategies of citizen groups



Enhancing capacities on local participatory governance

From these experiences in local participatory planning and budgeting, one important work that emerges is that of raising awareness on the value of participatory governance. Related to this is building capacities to customize participatory strategies. A wide array of actors – e.g., national agencies, local governments, higher educational institutions (or HEIs), and citizen groups – have run capacity building programs to address these learning needs. But gaps still remain including sustaining such efforts given the volume of demand. At the barangay level alone, there are more than 294,000 officials that need to be trained every three (3) years.

How have CSOs tried to address such gaps? The models emerging from experiences of the ETI grantees and other citizen groups included: 1) Citizen groups directly providing training to local officials, other citizen groups, and partner communities; 2) Networks like the Iloilo Caucus of Development Non-Government Organizations (Iloilo CODE) partnering with HEIs and training institutions to develop and run formal courses on participatory governance. Both approaches could involve some mentoring wherein local officials and ordinary citizens actually go through planning and budgeting activities (a practice-based or "learning-by-doing" approach).

Some concerns with the first model: 1) Do local citizen groups have enough capacity to carry out effective learning programs for local officials?; and, 2) Can such initiatives be sustained and replicated (i.e., in other places, or on a broader scale)? As with the second model above, local governments can either fund whole training programs, or support individual "scholars" among their officials and employees (includ-

ing perhaps even their counterparts from citizen groups or partner communities) to go through such capacity building or learning activities.

Other possible sustainability approaches include tapping private sector support, having HEIs shoulder (partially or in full) runs of courses on local participatory governance as part of their extension or community outreach initiatives, and charging fees from individual participants to partly cover the costs of the learning event. This means though that citizen groups will have to be able to package and market these capacity building services as their products, with certain expectations or standards in terms of quality and effectiveness in delivering results.

With regard to the second model, an important concern could be that of integrating the citizen groups' perspectives and agenda on local participatory governance into the modules and actual delivery of the courses, given that academic institutions usually either have existing programs, or can easily tap faculty members and experts to develop their modules and learning materials. Citizen groups may still thus need to put forward the value of their inputs and contributions to the partnership (e.g., familiarity with local needs, practices in mobilizing communities, networks that can provide a broader knowledge base in terms of participatory governance, etc.).

¹ Guevara, Milwida 2006. *Inventory and Assessment of Local Government Capacity Building Programs*.

² There are 80 provinces, 143 cities, 1,491 municipalities, and more than 42,000 barangays all over the country. (Source: DILG website, LGU facts and figures).

Building shared agenda for addressing local needs

A second concern is that of building a shared and credible agenda as basis for local participatory planning and budgeting. This would involve coming to a common understanding of local needs, and arriving at an agreed set of priorities for a particular period. It involves consensus building among local constituents, and between citizens and local officials – negotiating through varied views and positions of diverse groups, ensuring that marginal voices are articulated and heard, and aggregating or identifying common interests. Some citizen groups in fact consider this as a more important focus for their interventions in local planning and budgeting.

Among the ETI grantees and other citizen groups covered in ANSA EAP's case studies, there was a variety of practices or strategies used. In some cases, shared agenda building may not be as explicit as the focus on convincing local officials to solicit citizen inputs, setting up participatory mechanisms required by law (e.g., local development councils), and getting citizen groups and ordinary citizens to participate in planning and budgeting. Efforts of intermediary organizations may include setting up of community-based groups or teams of volunteers who are then urged to engage with their local and barangay officials in the planning and budgeting processes.

A number of citizen groups initiate data-gathering activities (e.g., baseline surveys, participatory learning and action methods, etc.) to identify sectoral needs and explore solutions to emerging local issues. These may involve learning sessions to orient citizen groups and local or barangay officials on such data-gathering activities, and to try these out. Needs identification and some problem-solving can also be done through consultations (with citizen groups, or with residents in zones, puroks, or other sub-units of the barangay or local government). Other initiatives may involve building systematic databases on the local poverty situation, and related development indicators, which could also later serve as bases for performance monitoring.

Still other efforts may involve a more explicit process of coming out with some kind of "People's Agenda", and then demanding its use as basis for the local government unit's prioritization and allocation. It could be a broad-based and inclusive series of consultations bringing together or reaching a wide variety of local groups (e.g., neighborhood associations, local transport groups, vendors' groups, farmers' organizations, cooperatives, women's groups, youth groups, etc.) and ordinary citizens. The People's Agenda may be presented to interested local candidates during elections, and their commitments to adopt said agenda in case they get elected can be secured through formal social contracts. Advocacy on agenda items and development of proposals, can continue through networking and participation in the local development councils.

Coming out with a broad consensus on what the local government or the barangay needs to prioritize, and going down to the level of developing appropriate projects (even thinking about creative ways of sourcing resources and funds to support such initiatives) could be one area where local officials will need support from citizen groups. One thing coming out from the ETI project is that this could be an important area for knowledge exchange among local civil society organizations involved in transparency and social accountability work.

Local groups involved for a long time in monitoring government projects (like infrastructures or public service delivery) and who have achieved some gains in terms of ensuring the proper use of public money in implementing such projects are now starting to ask about relevance of these projects in addressing real needs of communities and poor people. They are starting to see the value of participating in public

planning and budgeting when such projects are first discussed and funded. This shift (or broadening) of focus may require some retooling and learning on the part of local citizen groups – shared agenda building may call for skills and approaches that are quite different from checking on road specifications, or the availability of medicines.

A related concern would be in terms of checking on how much of identified needs or proposals contained in the shared agenda are actually integrated into the local government's plans and budgets. For a long time, ANSA EAP has situated social accountability – organized and capable citizens constructively engaging with the government to monitor its decisions and performance towards improved development outcomes – in the Public Financial Management (PFM) cycle which includes planning and budgeting. A key question that often emerges here, however, is how can citizens exact accountability at the public planning and budgeting stage?

The ETI grantees' initiatives highlighted social contracting as a tool that can serve this purpose. As with other typical social accountability initiatives, however, the real challenge is checking on whether agreements with regard to resolving the problems raised by local citizen monitors are acted upon. In light of this, perhaps a related challenge is making items in the people's agenda and the resulting social contracts more specific and measurable. Other approaches commonly used in analyzing public budgets at the national level, and checking whether these documents reflect government commitments or articulated priorities, can also be customized and used to monitor local government plans and budgets based on previous social contracts.

Possible next steps for ANSA EAP and the ETI project

ANSA EAP's role as provider or facilitator of learning and knowledge sharing support under the ETI Project, and within the EAP network of social accountability practitioners, puts it in a good position to help in addressing these challenges. Earlier initiatives with networks of academic institutions, like the Association of Schools of Public Administration in the Philippines (ASPAP), to develop and pilot modules and courses on social accountability can provide starting points for similar initiatives aimed at facilitating collaboration between citizen groups and academe towards addressing capacity building needs in participatory local governance.

Knowledge sharing among local citizen groups on strategies in organizing and facilitating multi-stakeholder dialogues towards setting local priorities, and building commitments around these priorities, could contribute a lot in terms of promoting good practices and improving the quality of local participatory planning and budgeting. Under the ETI Project, ANSA EAP has also been tasked to develop an online resource portal on third party monitoring (TPM) that could support such knowledge sharing. Building on the knowledge generated by the ETI grantees, this online TPM portal is envisioned to expand its reach and gather knowledge products from other citizen monitoring initiatives in the Philippines. ANSA EAP's existing regional linkages could also open possibilities for expanding the portal's coverage to other countries in the region.

The ANSA EAP Practice Brief attempts to provide quick summaries of the experiences and insights from ANSA EAP's social accountability initiatives, drawing from project reports, periodic assessments, and reflection sessions with partners. This issue captures lessons from the Enhancing Transparency Impact (ETI) Project.

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³ A social contract is a binding written agreement between stakeholders (those who govern and the governed) aimed at fostering transparent, accountable, and participatory governance. These agreements have been used by many citizen groups in holding public officials, service providers, and other power holders accountable for their conduct, decisions, and performance. (Source: Civicus, PG Exchange website)