**ACCOUNTABILITY, TRANSPARENCY AND E-GOVERNANCE:
CONCEPTS AND EXPERIENCES IN THE PHILIPPINES**

I. Introduction

There has been a growing consensus over the need to foster growth and development through more dynamics and participatory approaches to governance in the past and recent years. Without strategic governance reforms, poverty alleviation efforts and the quest for socio-economic development will not be completely achieved. As multi-lateral institutions like World Bank has observed, the link between good economic and human development performance and good governance is umbilical, thus, effective and efficient government is crucial to the development process.

The quest for efficient, responsive, transparent and accountable government is not for national government alone to fill, private sector and civil society must get engage for purposive actions to dramatically change development outcomes. In this paper, we will outline the experience of the Philippines in the increasing collective actions and institutional efforts of change advocates coming from the civil society organization and national government to instill and promote accountable, transparent and corrupt-free government.

Citizens Participation in Enforcing Accountable and Transparent Governance

Background/Situational Analysis

The present political and party system in the Philippine have in many ways engendered politicians and government officials bereft of duties and responsibilities as public servants. They engages in graft and corruption, the funds appropriated for basic services needs of the populace particularly the poor are pocketed and pro-people policies, plans and project interventions are left or set aside in pursuit of their personal interest. In Northern Luzon, out of fourteen (14) provinces/cities, most of the population are living below the poverty line. Almost all the local government units (LGU's) neglect their duties to open the venue for people participation in development planning, investment programming/budget resource allocation and project implementation and monitoring and to disclose accountability the funds for general public services handed to them. Based on this realization, volunteers from one of the province in Northern Luzon (that is Abra) banded together to effectively respond to the needs of the people, ensure the judicious and transparent use of public funds, promote effective delivery of public services and uphold the rule of law.

Concerned Citizen of Abra for Good Governance (CCAGG)

After the 1986 Snap Presidential Election, National Movement on Free Election (NAMFREL) volunteers in the province of Abra decided to continue their

involvement beyond electoral issues and concerns thus heeding. President Corazon Aquino's call for people participation toward the restoration of democratic institutions. The development situation at that time gave birth to Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Governance (CCAGG), a province-wide non-government organization duly registered with Securities and Exchange Commission. As a non-government organization, the general membership of CCAGG is composed of people coming from all walks of life with different vocations and avocations, driven by the desire to be of service to the people and who believes in voluntary works towards societal transformation and renewal.

In its mission to establish a self-reliant community of a politically mature and economically emancipated citizenry, the CCAGG is implementing programs along the following thrusts and concerns.

1) community organizing – a more systematic change process of transforming a community into an organized, empowered and self-reliant development entity. The essence of organizing is on the capacity building of the communities and institutionalization of problem solving processes and tools.
2) Participatory monitoring and auditing – the community based monitoring system is being undertaken to track implementation of government projects from conceptualization to implementation and evaluation stage. The monitoring system will see to it that the project executed are truly responsive to local needs and implemented following the project plans and specifications.
3) Concerns for the indigenous cultural communities – plans and programs are being designed to help and contribute to the indigenous people legitimate cry for justice especially in their right to self-determination, recognition of their right to ancestral domain and their right to cultural identity.
4) Productivity enhancing development programs – the empowered poor are assisted to design and manage the implementation of projects that is community-based and community-managed.
5) Concerns on ecology – undertaking biodiversity conservation programs in partnership with other NGOs.

Pursuant to CCAGG's constitution and by-laws, the organization aims to achieve the following objectives:

1.) organize communities and go into citizenship-building;
2.) establish permanent structures for regular and direct consultation with the people on their needs, problems and interests;
3.) deal effectively with the government agencies to ensure that the people's interests are on the political agenda;
4.) monitor government projects to ensure that funds meant for projects are judiciously utilized; and
5.) undertake projects which are aimed towards the upliftment of the socio-economic conditions of the people.

By looking at CCAGG objectives, one easily recognize the organization's bias for people empowerment. CCAGG believe that an empowered and vigilant citizenry is the number one ingredient in fostering accountable, transparent and democratic government.

Continuing Participatory Project Monitoring (CCPM): The "Signature" Project Activity of CCAGG

The CCAGG is most known for its monitoring and evaluation activities of government infrastructure projects. The monitoring activity started with an agreement signed with NEDA (the central planning agency of the government) and Ministry of Budget and Management (MBM) in 1986. NEDA trained the personnel/volunteers of the organization on the basics of monitoring and evaluation and both NEDA and MBM gave relevant documents (project proposals and work and financial plans, project location maps, etc.) to CCAGG as bases for project inspection and field monitoring. The information/documents given by the two government agencies were shared with the communities, thus, contributing to their increased awareness and knowledge of these government projects in addressing their needs and concerns. In the course of CCAGG monitoring, ghost projects "completed on paper", used of substandard materials, deviation from project engineering (technical specifications, project cost-overruns and other project implementation anomalies were unearthed, discovered and reported to higher/proper authorities. Many of CCAGG's monitoring activities have made high profile successes. Erring officials and engineers of public works agency were prosecuted, sanctioned and dismissed from the service because of the anomalies committed by them. Heavy losses of very scarce government resources were reduced greatly and millions of pesos were saved and rechanneled other useful projects. Moreover, vigilant project monitoring and fight against corruption have generated increased involvement of civil society and private sector in Luzon area. Representatives from church-based civil society organizations from Region I, II and the Cordillera Autonomous Region (CAR) have forged critical alliances in a battle against graft and corruption inspired by the success stories of CCAGG. Church-based NGO's from thirteen (13) dioceses in Region I, II and CAR have formed on alliances, led by one of the bishop called Northern Luzon Coalition for Good Governance (NLCGG) to spearhead anti-corruption initiatives in their respective areas. The most important success/achievement realized by CCAGG, was in 2000 when Transparency International gave its first Integrity Award to the group for its exemplary fight against graft and corruption at the local level in pursuit of good governance during an International Conference held on September 28-30, 2000 in Ottawa, Canada. The CCAGG is one of the four (4) awardees all over the world. Also in 2000, COA and CCAGG signed a memo of agreement to pilot test Participatory Audit in Abra. This was the first ever experience of COA in involving civil society organizations in its operational and financial audit works. The joint endeavor was adjudged a success and as a consequence COA replicated the arrangements and the process in the provinces of Samar, Camarines Norte and Mt. Province.

Components of Continuing Participatory Project Monitoring

The CPPM of CCAGG fosters the continuing transfer of monitoring technology to the local communities in the province of Abra and the other provinces in Northern Luzon. The project aims to empower the people of Abra and the rest of Northern Luzon to take pro-active position in addressing and curbing corruption within public administration. In implementing the project, the following components or activities are being undertaken:

1) Monitoring and evaluation – it involves on-field checking and technical validation of project implementation and delivery of government good and services,
2) Development and enhancement of monitoring tool and manual – the monitoring guide/manual is intended for non-technical persons where the basic concepts of "dos and dont's" details of monitoring are simplified, illustrated and learned in actual monitoring,
3) Organizing and mobilization of civil society organization – entails the tapping and mobilization of potential or existing groups in the area/region that would participate meaningfully in local governance undertakings,
4) Capacity-building – conduct of formal and informal trainings on monitoring, group's change management process, problem-solving and coordination and networking and conduct of dialogues, fora and other resource and information exchanges.

Bases of Project Monitoring of CCAGG

In the project monitoring task, CCAGG met a lot of detractors and oppositors along the way, but they are steadfast in their mission by citing relevant laws and legal issuances as their basis for their monitoring task. They cited provisions in the Philippine Constitution, which speak of "the right of NGO's and People's Organizations to promote their welfare….to pursue and protect their legitimate and collective interests and aspirations through peaceful means". They also referred them to the various Executive Orders, which mandate the creation of project monitoring committees with NGO and PO membership on all levels of government (national down to municipal) to monitor and evaluate development projects of the government. The strategic collaboration of CCAGG with partner government institutions are also perfected and legitimized through Memo of Agreement with agencies such as NEDA, DBM, COA, OMBUDSMAN and CSC. Indeed, all these legal instruments have cemented their task and mission and reduced/protected them from harm and risk in pursuing their noble mission.

Electronic Governance

Introduction

There has been a noticeable improvement in the delivery of frontline services in the country government in the late 1990's mainly through the reforms in the information communication technology (ICT) and the advancement of e-commerce in the Philippines. The most important milestone in the field of ICT in the country is the enactment of Republic Act No. 8792 or the E-Commerce passed in June 2, 2000. The Act gave electronic documents the same legal protection as paper-based documents. Likewise, the Act mandated that all government offices are to be internet-enabled within two years. Thus, for the past 6 years, several ICT initiatives were undertaken that streamlined government operations, improved service delivery and increased the detection and prevention of graft and corruption. Among the ICT-related projects that were set in place and operational are the: 1) Land Titling Computerization Project of the Land Registration Authority, 2) the Machine Readable Passport Project of the Department of Foreign Affairs, 3) the Civil Registry System Project of National Statistics Office, 4) the Integrated Computerization Project of the Bureau of Internal Revenue which include the e-filing and payment system, e-taxpayer identification, 5) the Database Infrastructure and Information Technology System Project of Land Transportation Office, 6) the Alien Certificate of Registration Identification Card Project of the Bureau of Immigration, 7) the National Computer Center e-Local Government Units Project that led to the development and implementation of member system and the Data Warehouse, various LGU's electronics revenue generating systems (e., Real Property Tax System and e-Business Permit Licensing System), 8) the Government Electronic Procurement System Project of the Department of Budget and Management, and 9) the Electronic New Government Accounting System Project of the Commission on Audit (NEDA-SER 2004). The GEPS will be discussed in details in the paper.

Government Electronic Procurement System (GEPS)

Background

At the turn of the century, the Philippine government has made some modest strides to catch up with the rest of the world in pursuit of e-Governance. In the year 1999, the Department of Budget and Management Procurement Services (PS-DBM) began an initiative to modernize and reform its procurement practices and systems. Procurement by government agencies during that time was largely decentralized, with each agency being responsible for its own supplier eligibility requirements, advertising, procurement practices, contract awards and supplier performance monitoring. The one major exception was the procurement for common-use supplier, materials and equipment for which national government agencies were required to procure through the PS-DBM (Clemente, June 2005).

The birth of the system came about in November 2000 through the assistance of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The pilot implementation of the Pilot Electronic Procurement System (EPS) government-wide become operational on December 1, 2000. The goal of the Pilot EPS is to provide a single window for registration of suppliers and posting of bid opportunities by government agencies for access by suppliers through the internet. The Pilot EPS service is based on the MERX system currently used by the Canadian Federal Government and other public agencies in Canada but all form and processes were designed by PS-DBM to ensure that they were customized according to Philippine procurement requirements (Clemente, June 2005).

Legal Basis

The issuance of Executive Order 40 in October 2001 has facilitated and supported the implementation of EPS. The EO has consolidated procurement rules and procedures for all government agencies and local government units, shorten the timeframe for bidding and institutionalize the representation of civil society organizations in the Bids and Awards Committee. The passage of the Government Procurement Reform Act (RA 9184) brought further a lot of promise to modernize, standardize and regulate procurement activities in the government. The new law requires all government agencies undertaking its procurement transactions of goods and general support service, civil works and consultating services to be centrally posted through an internet infrastructure which is called the GEPS, formally the EPS.

Institutional Arrangements

In the implementation and management of GPES, a policy-making body called Government Procurement Policy Board is the responsible entity. In the performance of its functions, the GPPB is supported by a Technical Support Office (TSO) manned by some organic personnel of the Procurement Service of the DBM. For the procuring government entity, a Bids and Awards Committee (BAC) is established compose of at least five (5) members, one is coming from duly recognized private group/civil society organization and it is chaired by at least a third ranking permanent official of the agency.

Status of Implementation and Emerging Results

Given the mandate of RA 9184, a total of 4,524 government agencies and 19,216 suppliers have been registered into the system beginning 2001 up to June 2006 (see table No. 1). From 2001 to June 2006, 225,306 notices and 49,313 awards have been posted in the GEPS. Meanwhile, a total of 4,345 suppliers and 4,652 government agencies were trained on the use of GEPS. Before the enactment of RA 9184, bid opportunities costing P 2.0 M and above for goods and consulting services and P5.0M and above for civil works should be advertised two times in three newspapers of general nationwide circulation and with the new law, opportunities should be advertised twice in two newspapers and be posted in the GEPS (Clemente, June 2005). With this, the government saves about P356.6 M in newspaper advertisement expenses as of June 2006 (see table No. 2).

Positive results worth mentioning is it has shortened procurement processing time. Take the case of attached agencies under the Department of Interior and Local Government, the system greatly reduce the waiting time for the opening of the sealed bids (e.g., National Police Commission from 24 weeks to 1 week, Local Government Academy from one month to two weeks, Philippine Public Safety College from two weeks to one week and Bureau of Fire Protection from 56 days to 41 days. In line with the need to enhance the understanding of various actors on RA 9184, the first edition of the Philippine Bidding Documents (PBD's) for the procurement of goods, civil workers and consulting services was released in August 2004 and training seminars in the use of the PBD's to all the government agencies have been conducted. The second edition of the PBD was issued on May 2005. As of June 2006, 90 percent national government agencies/government-owned and controlled corporations/government financial institutions were trained on the use of the second edition of PBD (NEDA-SER 2005). Also on that same year, the Generic Procurement Manual was finalized, tested in selected government agencies and was officially released to all agencies in 2005.

In April 2004, the DBM entered into a contract with Ayala System Technologies, Inc., a local service provider to enhance the GEPS. The contract involved the development of new features of GEPS such as Electronic Payment, Virtual Store and Electronic Bid Submission. Although slight problems were encountered in the design and testing of the new features, the new features in the system is set to be launched on 2007.

One of the major positive development in the procurement reform is the participation of civil society in monitoring public procurement activities. To strengthen civil society participation in procurement reform, an alliance were formed among the various stakeholders. The Transparency and Accountability Network (civil society, private sector and academe alliance), the Makati Business Club (business sector alliance) and the Catholic Bishop's Conference of the Philippines (government and civil society alliance) were some of the participants in the procurement processes. The alliance has established a deployment system for observers in the bidding and conducted training seminars for volunteers of member-organizations. The national government is open and encouraging involvement of more organizations in the procurement process to enhance public accountability and transparency at various levels of government.

Issues and Concerns in the Implementation of GEPS

Resistance to change by public service employees were identified as one major obstacle in the implementation of GEPS. Staff in the procurement unit of particular agency feared that computerization or automation of their mechanical or routine tasks would result in job displacement and loses. Also, official heading a particular procurement unit fear that they would lose control over their procurement authority. There is still a need to conduct an extensive internal and external social marketing (Clemente, June 2005). The lack of knowledge and doubt in the utility of the GEPS were addressed through continuous training and information dissemination. At present, most government agencies are now aware of the benefits that they can get from the GEPS.

Another implementation issue was the absence of a facility to validate the information of the suppliers in as far as the legitimacy of their business operations are concerned. Plan is being work out to link with existing database of agencies such as Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR), Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) to validate and probe the suppliers judirical identity and financial standing (Clemente, June 2005). For the local government units, barriers for the adoption and smooth implementation of the system are the lack of computer facilities, lack or absence of internet service connection in the area and limited knowledge or inexperience of designated employees on the use and operation of the software and hardware components of the system.

Action Plans for GEPS

The complete roll-out of the GEPS at the local level is targeted at the end of 2006. Among the Local Government Units, provincial, city and municipal governments have 88.6 percent, 95.7 percent and 47.9 percent registration coverage respectively. The set up of information kiosks for each of the cities and municipalities is being fastrack to address the system acceptability, issues at these local units (Clemente, June 2005). Related to this roll out, a composite team of trainors coming from different accredited State Universities and Colleges (SUC's) will be the one conducting the training group of PS-DBM. To assess the compliance of government agencies with the GEPS implementation, development of a Procurement Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation System is on-going and is expected to be completed and operational within the end of 2006. Finally, to address the large ICT infrastructure concerns, the Commission on Information and Communications Technology (CICT), a cabinet-level agency primarily responsible for the promotion and development of ICT and its allied sectors in the country, plans to draw up a Broadband Deployment Plan which will target putting in place broadband internet connectivity employing both wired and wireless technologies across the country by the year 2010 (Clemente, June 2005).

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