

# **Civil Society Participation in Local Governance**

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I wish to thank the DILG-WB-CSO committee that invited me to speak in behalf of civil society. I was rather vocal in an earlier meeting of that committee and then absent in the following meeting. The committee chose me then because I could not object. So the lesson is: Don't be absent . . . unless there is something you want very much to share. Fortunately for me, there are indeed a few things I want very much to say. Eight things, in fact.

## **Wonderful Time to Engage Government**

First, this is a wonderful time for constructive engagement with government, national as well as local. For all of us who dreamed of inclusive growth with integrity for our country, there are great opportunities waiting to be seized.

We have a President who means well. He is not perfect . . . no one is . . . but we are sure he will not steal and what he does not steal can be used for eliminating poverty or at least reducing it and stimulating growth. Kung walang corrupt, walang mahirap. Now is our chance to pursue our dreams for the nation using participatory strategies.

We have a Secretary of the Interior and Local Government who served Naga City as its elected mayor for 18 years or two sets of three terms each, and every year there was something new that his city could be proud of. I have sat in the selection committee of the Galing Pook awards program for many years. As far as I remember there was only one year that Naga City's entry was not an awardee and that was because the selection committee that year raised the bar of excellence in assessing its project submission.

Sec. Robredo may have been appointed in an acting capacity so he would not be tied down by Commission on Appointments hearings, so that he could take on additional tasks in regard to the urban poor of Metro Manila. He may be an Acting Secretary on paper but in reality he is more like an Over-acting Secretary as he is the only one who officially has to attend meetings of all five Cabinet clusters, despite the fact that he has only one truly functional Undersecretary and all his Assistant Secretaries are career officials who were at the department before he arrived.

Sec. Robredo has always appreciated people's participation. Naga City was one of the first to organize a Naga City People's Council that was given real power because it showed how it could be helpful to the city, thanks to then Mayor Robredo and fellow Nagueño lawyer Sol Santos who was then with the Institute for Politics and Governance.

The rest of the Cabinet – with two or three exceptions, please don't ask me who these are – may not be Magsaysay awardees like Sec. Robredo but they are cast from the same mold, people we can respect, be proud of and can work with because we share the same basic values and want to serve the country with integrity and contribute their utmost to broad-based development.

The present Congress seems to want to cooperate with the Executive more than to criticize it. The minority may be waiting for the Administration to stumble before it pounces. Let's hope it waits forever.

We still have to see if in the end the Supreme Court and judiciary will prove to be of the same mind as the Executive, but the SC Justices did not protect Merceditas Gutierrez and that is a step in the right direction.

Even in civil society, there is a new mood in place. We may be disappointed by the slow pace of certain government quarters, but we love the direction in which the President is taking the country. *Ayos na ang tuwid na daan kahit na kung minsan may punong natumba ng bagyo at naging sagabal.* We can always navigate around it.

### **Working with Local Governments on SGH and PCF**

Second, in regard to local governments, the DILG has opened the door to many new possibilities. The Seal of Good Housekeeping is like a tree across the road. To get around it or climb over it we need a number of documents – the website says 12, Asec Rolando Acosta says 23. After we achieve this, we can compete for a Performance Challenge Fund grant.

According to a news item in Manila Bulletin a week ago, 303 fourth to sixth class municipalities will receive Php 1 million each; 25 fourth to sixth class cities will each get Php 3 million; and 16 fourth to sixth class provinces will be given Php 7 million each – provided the LGU uses the award for a project approved by DILG and puts in a counterpart equivalent to the award. Doing the arithmetic gives the sum of Php 490 million. This means there will be Php 10 million left over to be awarded to first to third class municipalities, cities and provinces plus of course whatever is not given to fourth to sixth class LGUs because of lack of winners.

LGU projects under the PCF may focus on any of four themes:

- ❖ Attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs);
- ❖ Tourism and local economic development;
- ❖ Disaster risk reduction and management; and
- ❖ Solid waste management.

Meeting the MDGs means combating poverty as these goals focus mainly on education and health aside from poverty reduction itself.

Tourism is highlighted among the various local economic development strategies, because of the country's endowments. We abound in smiling faces, seas, and beaches, and we have discovered how we can excel in providing health and other services and in entertaining people. But economic development can also mean improvements in farming and fishing, in industry, and in commerce.

Disaster risk reduction and management as well as solid waste management address climate change threats and environmental concerns.

How might civil society organizations participate in SGH and PCF. One of the first things to be done is to win accreditation as a people's organization or an NGO. Accreditation means membership in an assembly that would elect the city or municipal development council. A seat in the council gives one access to additional information about the functioning of the LGU.

An NGO may also wish to help an LGU put together the documents required for the Seal of Good Housekeeping, or having gone over the LGU's documents, criticize or praise the LGU, in order to hinder or help it win the SGH.

The PO or NGO helpful to the LGU in winning the SGH would have an inside track to recommending the project to be submitted for PCF funding. An NGO involved in improving basic formal education and managing alternative learning systems will want to encourage the adoption of its cause. An NGO

engaged in backyard broiler production or in rice-duck technology or in vermiculture or in the production of organic palay is likely to ask an LGU to adopt its project.

The key is engagement and the emphasis is on being constructive.

### **Barangays Deserve Attention**

Third, may I express one criticism of the SGH-PCF system? It does not include the barangays except as adjuncts of municipalities or cities. But barangays have a life of their own and are intended to function on their own even if in coordination with their mother LGU. Cannot there be space in the future for barangays in the Performance Challenge Fund? Perhaps some of the provinces that win a PCF grant will want to use their award to sponsor a barangay-focused PCF.

I understand why it is difficult for the national government to address barangay needs and challenge barangays to perform better. The reason is simple: there are 42,000 of them. And yet the truth is that the best barangays can function well, serve their constituents properly and mobilize their enthusiasm even when the municipal or city government ignores them.

I requested the organizers to include in the kit a paper that traces the history of participatory local governance. The two bilateral donor organizations that generously supported local governments' development efforts were USAID and CIDA of Canada. Unfortunately, they, too, seemed to think of barangays as mere extensions of municipalities and cities. They went for trickle down, not heave up.

It was the non-governmental donor organization Ford Foundation that invested heavily in supporting NGOs eager to get to the barangay directly. Unfortunately, Ford Foundation has had to de-prioritize the Philippines. Also, most of the efforts that focused on the barangay were unable to scale up. But at least, one can say, at the barangay level, some headway was made.

Many of the barangay-level projects focused on enticing the peripheries to move toward the center by advocating participation of the marginalized – geographically, financially and sometimes ethnically (thinking about the Higaonons in Claveria and Gingoog in Misamis Oriental). Their representatives would get involved together with the representatives of other sectors and sitios in the Participatory SAPBRIME Cycle running from . . .

- ❖ **S**ituational **A**nalysis;
- ❖ **P**lanning & **B**udgeting;
- ❖ **R**esource generation;
- ❖ **I**mplementation;
- ❖ **M**onitoring; and
- ❖ **E**valuation.

### **Beyond SGH and PCF**

Fourth, while I certainly advocate the involvement of CSOs in SGH and PCF, they must not feel that their participation in local governance is restricted to these.

The Mindanao Caucus of Development NGOs represented by the Mindanao Congress of NGOs and NGIs or MINCON led by the NGO Balay Mindanaw Foundation Inc. (BMFI) is currently undertaking a project called BTTAG or Budget Tracking for Transparent Accountable Governance in Mindanao supported by the Asia Foundation. Under this 18-month project, 18 CSOs working closely with 18 city and two provincial governments watch how the development plan and budget are assembled and how money is

spent and accounted for. Of course, there is an anti-corruption angle in this effort. But more important is the education of the NGOs and the people they serve so they may learn how to influence local government planning and how to access their local government resources.

Pag-inupdanay Inc., an NGO in Negros Occidental, went into micro-finance by starting at the barangay level. Its Participatory SAPBRIME process led to the creation of a livelihood fund from which barangay residents could borrow. Pag-inupdanay monitored carefully what projects seemed to succeed and who the good borrowers and payers were. These good ones qualified for bigger loans from Pag-inupdanay Inc.

I'm sure there are hundreds more stories of how CSOs can participate in local governance and contribute to the community's development without getting involved in SGH and PCF. My point here is simply to celebrate the autonomy of NGOs from GOs. While the leadership of the local chief executive and LGU in local governance is accepted, there is so much that POs and NGOs – and we may as well add academic institutions and faith-based groups – can contribute in local governance and development.

### **The Corporate Community and Political Parties Have Valuable Roles, Too**

Fifth, I find it a bit odd that this forum would give so much importance to CSOs and downplay the role of the private sector and for-profit organizations. Most LCEs are probably still more familiar with local businessmen than with local CSOs. One would wish that, if similar forums are organized in the regions, local business would be invited in bigger numbers. While in the past it was difficult for For-Profits to understand Non-Profits, I think that it is better for the sake of local communities, that both are included, recognize their own strengths and weakness, and be open to working with each other.

Likewise, a role for political parties should be considered. Why should the parties be active only at election time? Party leaders and members need to be challenged and involved in the issues of the day. Why should they be limited to KBL -- kasal, binyag, libing?

### **Localizing Poverty Reduction**

Sixth, considering all the emphasis on poverty reduction due to the spike in budget from Php 10 to Php 21 billion for conditional cash transfers and the leap in targets from one million families in 2010 to 2.3 million by the end of 2011, it will be important to pay a lot more attention to localizing poverty reduction efforts and recognizing or creating convergences or synergies for this purpose: LGUs with CSOs, and the corporate community.

Can other types of CCTs be developed? Education and health conditions are fine. But for farm families tilling irrigated palay farms, the condition could be maintenance of irrigation facilities. At the start of the year, a grant is made equal to one-half of the irrigation fees collected the previous year. If the service area is maintained or broadened by the end of the year and harvest increase, the second half can be given to the Irrigators Association.

For coconut farmers, coco levy funds can be used to provide a grant of, say Php 5,000 at the start of the year. Two conditions can be imposed: fertilize the coconut trees (the main element for this is salt) and plant vegetables and/or fruits between the trees. At the end of the year, if these conditions are met, another Php 5,000 can be given.

For coastal LGUs and fishers, the conditions may be the delineation of the 15-kilometer line for municipal waters marked by buoys and the creation of marine sanctuaries or mariculture parks.

## **Multiplying the Effectiveness of SGH and PCF**

Seventh, the Performance Challenge Fund grants are relatively small but there can be great honor attached to these. During the last Galing Pook awarding at Malacañang last February – where finally after about nine years the President of the Philippines gives a speech recognizing the awardees' accomplishments and inspiring them to do even better – Seals of Good Housekeeping were also given to 15 LGUs. Looking at the ladies and gentlemen from the LGUs resplendent in their Filipiniana attire, one could sense that they were proud to receive their award in Malacañang.

The monetary value of the Galing Pook award is small – just Php 100,000 – but the Seal of Good Housekeeping is even smaller – nothing. But it makes it possible to compete for a bigger amount – Php 1 or 3 or 7 million. Again, in itself, what is Php 1 or 3 or 7 million? There was the honor that went with it, the photo ops and the possibility of using the pictures in the next electoral campaign. But speaking of money, as we tell Galing Pook winners, there is more. Recognition as an awardee may serve as a useful introduction to a donor organization -- or as part of its credentials when it deals with a bank for a loan for development purposes. This is why both the Land Bank of the Philippines and Development Bank of the Philippines are proud donors to the Galing Pook Foundation. The banks know that LGUs may need bigger amounts to undertake projects with greater impact than basketball courts and waiting sheds.

## **TAP, TRAP or PARTNER?**

Eighth, transparency, accountability, and participation are highlighted as desirable governance characteristics. Sometimes responsiveness is thrown in but transparency, responsiveness, accountability and participation (TRAP) creates an acronym akin to BTTAG. An NGI in Cagayan de Oro has proposed PARTNER to cover seven traits:

- ❖ Participation
- ❖ Accountability
- ❖ Responsiveness
- ❖ Transparency
- ❖ Nvironment
- ❖ Effectiveness and Efficiency
- ❖ Rule of Law

After all, this is what CSOs seek to be in regard to the local community and its LGU and it is to the advantage of LGUs to have as many development partners as possible so long as it can manage its relationships effectively.

## **In closing, may I re-state my eight points:**

- ❖ First, it's wonderful time to engage government;
- ❖ Second, SGH and PCF are certainly worth the time and effort of CSOs;
- ❖ Third, barangays deserve inclusion in SGH and PCF some time in the future;
- ❖ Fourth, CSO participation in local governance goes beyond SGH and PCF;
- ❖ Fifth, corporates and political parties should be welcome players in governance;
- ❖ Sixth, poverty reduction efforts need to be localized and convergence encouraged;
- ❖ Seventh, the effects of awards to LGUs can open doors to donors and lenders; and
- ❖ Eighth, good governance may highlight seven traits forming the acronym PARTNER.