PAVING THE WAY FOR CITIZENS' ENGAGEMENT IN LOCAL PROCESSES

EuropeAid

Case study: The Local Government Watch programme in the Philippines

The European Commission policy *The Roots of Democracy and Sustainable Development: Europe's Engagement with Civil Society in External Relations*[1] declares the promotion of a conducive environment for civil society organisations (CSOs) as one of the three priorities for the EU support in partner countries. By examining a participatory local governance programme in the Philippines, this case study aims to identify good practices for contributing to this priority. The case study has been developed to inspire staff in EU Delegations and at the headquarters implementing this policy priority. It is developed for the European Commission by the European Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ECNL) in collaboration with the EU Delegation in the Philippines.

The case describes the recently launched Local Government Watch (LG Watch) programme in the Philippines supported by the European Union, through technical assistance to the Government – the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG).

Launch of the LG Watch Programme, Photo credit : DILG, 2012

The assistance was provided under the Strategic Project Facility II (SPF II). SPF II aims to improve the quality of local governance by supporting models for participatory local governance, disseminating and institutionalizing good practices in local governance. It provided financial support for pilot projects implemented by civil society and for technical assistance to the government.

The largest number of CSOs per capita in Asia

The CSO sector in the Philippines is large, vibrant and well-regulated in comparison with other developing countries. It has the largest number of civil society organisations per capita in Asia, with the total number estimated at between 15,000 and 60,000 organisations. However, many civil society organisations are small and have limited financial and operational capacity. The civil society plays an active role in a number of fields including the fight against poverty, health, education, Indigenous People, environment, and disaster preparedness.

The legal environment for CSOs defines two different types of organisations: non-governmental organisations and Peoples' Organisations (POs)[2] and their registration and operation is regulated by several laws depending on the non-profit form they register as.[3]

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[1] Adopted in September 2012 and endorsed by the Council of the European Union in October 2012; http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2012:0492:FIN:EN:PDF; Council Conclusions: http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/132870.pdf
[2] POs are generally composed of disadvantaged individuals and work to advance their members' material or social well-being.
[3] For more information on the regulatory environment see: Caucus of Development NGO Networks (2008). NPO Sector Assessment: Philippine Report. Report prepared for the NPO Sector Review Project, Charity Commission for England and Wales, http://code-

The broader legal environment aims to stimulate the development of civil society and increase CSO participation in local government initiatives. The Local Government Code (LGC) of 1991 facilitates such engagement, as it provides for greater opportunities for participatory governance: it mandates the institutionalization of participatory mechanisms, institutes the right of local communities to be consulted on programs prior to their implementation, and allows for CSO participation in local governance, particularly in basic service delivery.[4]

Local Governance Watch

The LG Watch initiative is a key component of the Filipino National Development Plan 2011-2016, which highlights the important role of CSOs in good governance and the fight against corruption. LG Watch is an offspring of President's Aquino's "social contract" with the population of the Philippines.[5] It was initiated in order to promote closer relations with civil society and to help DILG strengthen democratic local governance.

> *« The end goal here is to make LGUs more responsive and efficient because they now have the CSOs as active partners in development »*
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> *- Jesse Robredo, former DILG Secretary*

LG Watch aims to contribute to an **enabling environment for systematic engagement of citizens and civil society organisations (CSO) at the local level in order to improve service delivery and to increase transparency and the accountability of Local Governments Units (LGUs).** LG Watch is envisioned as a mechanism that paves the way for more active participation by citizens in local government administration processes. It was launched in April 2012.

LG Watch consists of the following four components. They each address different elements necessary to support participation and civil society oversight of local government performance:

(1) **"Citizens Satisfaction Index System (CSIS)".** The Index is a third party assessment tool that measures the "satisfaction" with basic services delivered by local government. This is a simple tool that establishes the right and principle of informed citizen and CSO engagement in local government service delivery, and of holding local government to account for the quality of the service it delivers.[6] It is implemented by the CSO Partnership Coordination Office under the Bureau of Local Government Supervision.[7]

(2) **Civil Society Participation Fund.** The Fund will finance proposals which promote transparency, accountability and local participation by civil society in LGUs. Proposals that create mechanisms for CSOs participation, promote CSO capacity building, or create good practice examples that, if replicated, can lead to better governance and service delivery, will be supported by the Fund.[8]

(3) **Capacity Development and training programme for CSO.** This component envisions training programs offered to CSOs to successfully undertake their role and

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ngo.org/home/images/stories/pdf/Philippine_NGO_Sector_Assessment_Full_Report.pdf
[4] Final Report: LG (Local Governance) Watch Programme, January 2012
[5] When President Aquino was sworn into office in 2010, he made a Social Contract with the Filipino People where he committed to be the nation's first and most determined fighter of corruption, and where he envisions the rebuilding of public institutions that operate under the highest standards of integrity and on solidarity with the people.
[6] CSIS complements the DILG Local Governance Performance Management System (LGPMS) which is a self-assessment tool of local governance.
[7] Memorandum Circular 012-113, July 5, 2012
http://www.dilg.gov.ph/PDF_File/issuances/memo_circulars/DILG-Memo_Circular-201275-a3828cb7f7.pdf
[8] For more information see 2012 Guidelines and Operating Policies for the Civil Society Participation Fund:
http://www.dilg.gov.ph/PDF_File/reports/DILG-Reports-201273-ff444cd793.pdf   and
http://www.dilg.gov.ph/PDF_File/reports/DILG-Reports-201273-9cffef2211.pdf

function in using the tools of LG Watch. It also aims to strengthen CSOs in order to better advocate for and advance their agenda in the local processes.

(4) **"Electronic watch" (E-watch)" Information Communication Technology (ICT) system.** This ICT system supports the other three components of LG Watch by generating information and feedback from citizens and disseminating it to the relevant government offices, CSOs and other users. The information is generated from the CSIS, best practices that are documented and supported by the CSO Participation Fund, and knowledge products that are developed and used in the Capacity Building interventions. It also aims to support CSO engagement and advocacy with LGUs.

CSOs are considered as partners in implementation of some components. For example, the CSIS programme will create a technical working group composed of CSOs to oversee the implementation of the Index; and DILG collaborates with non-state actors in analysing survey results in order to ensure their objectivity.

Benefits of the LG Watch programme

At the time of writing, the LG Watch initiative is a little more than one year in to implementation. The initiative has been included in the work plan of the DILG and some implementation steps have begun: CSIS has been piloted in several communities;[9] DILG allocated financial resources to the Fund which has been disbursed to support some CSO activities. In addition, DILG is preparing a Handbook on how to ensure CSO

> *"The LG Watch will put in the hands of civil society a very useful set of tools that will allow organized citizens to engage with local authorities in a more systematic and structured way in order to make them more transparent, accountable and efficient."*
> - Ambassador Guy Ledoux, head of the European Union delegation to the Philippines

participation in the programme so as to facilitate better involvement from the side of the LGUs.[10]

It is still too early to assess benefits and results generated by the initiative. Nevertheless, mechanisms are being created which:

- Facilitate citizens and CSOs' feedback on local government performance, especially regarding service delivery;
- Provide financial assistance and capacity building to CSOs to engage in local governance;
- Stimulate partnerships in service delivery and local governance involving civil society;
- Facilitate a move towards more open government; and
- Create a structured space for replication, experience sharing and the opening of new perspectives.

If implemented effectively, these mechanisms will improve the environment for citizen and CSO participation at the local level through:

- **Institutionalizing citizens' participation** in local public administration and governance.
- Strengthening **opportunities for an interactive, direct and constructive means of dialogue**;
- Inspiring **joint participatory efforts between CSOs and LGUs** in delivery of services; and
- Improving **efficiency of public spending** according to citizens' needs;

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[9] http://ncr.dilg.gov.ph/home/index.php/news/169-san-juan-city-identified-as-pilot-site-for-citizen-satisfaction-index-system-csis
[10] The Handbook is due to published in 2014.

Important considerations by the EU in designing the assistance

In designing the assistance, the following considerations were of importance.

EU Ambassador Guy Ledoux and Interior Secretary Robredo; Photo credit, EEAS

- The EU Delegation provided a broad range of support, not just financial. In addition to funding, the delegation provided advice, guidance and support, and was involved in discussions with various stakeholders in the delivery of the assistance.
- The EU assistance was aligned to the overall policy and needs of the government: in fact it came as response to a specific request from the DILG.[11]
- The assistance built on already existing examples and experiences from the field. It considered a range of different initiatives launched by CSOs over the years in this area. It used those experiences to help design the operational framework of the programme.
- The technical assistance was matching other initiatives by the SPF II which supported civil society directly. 14 CSO project have been approved in the scope of the SPF II, parallel to the technical assistance to the Government.
- While the two-year long Programme under which LG Watch was supported, was implemented predominantly by the DILG, the EU Delegation provided continued support. Specifically, the NSA/LA Programme for 2011- 2013, offered a continuation of the SPF II and supported civil society monitoring of LGUs performance, transparency, and accountability.
- The assistance was led by local expert with vast knowledge in the area.

Meanwhile, the design could possibly have been further strengthened with the introduction of a steering committee or a cross-sector body composed of government and CSOs. Such a body could have been helpful in contributing to dialogue and information flow between the stakeholders engaged in the process, as well as sharing of good examples and lessons learnt from various experiences.

Lessons to apply to similar reforms

The following are key lessons from the technical assistance to DILG which could be considered by other EUDs in similar assistance efforts:

- Ensure that the initiatives are **part of the development policies of the country**, or that there is an intention to integrate initiatives into such policies;
- **Understand the process and issues** for reform;
- **Consult all parties** in the process, including civil society and government;
- Ensure there is **complementarity and synergy between bilateral aid and other budget lines**;
- Provide both **financial and non-financial support** (strategic advice, guidance);
- **Show visibility of the support** by the EU Delegations by attending in person meetings, consultations and public meetings;
- Set aside funds for follow up in order to **support implementation of the programme**.

References

(All internet links have been last accessed on 4 October 2013)

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[11] The Government also requested a second area for assistance, the Volunteer and Citizenship Programme. This programme aims to create measures for more active citizen and volunteer participation in local government development programmes and projects.

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