The Citizens' Participation in
Monitoring of LGU Performance and
Development Planning for Poverty
Reduction (CML) Project Experience

November 2016

Strength in Unity

CML
November 2016

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The Citizens' Participation in Monitoring of LGU Performance and Development Planning for Poverty Reduction (CML) Project Experience

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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■ FOREWORD

Has it been five years already?

When we submitted the initial project proposal for the Citizens' Participation in Monitoring of LGU Performance and Development Planning for Poverty Reduction (CML) Project in 2011, participatory governance advocates in CODE-NGO, other civil society organizations (CSOs) and various national government agencies were just discussing how to best promote participatory planning and budgeting and ensure poverty reduction.

In 2012, the government started the Bottom Up Budgeting (BuB) program, which would eventually cover all 1,500 municipalities and cities of the country. Also, in 2012, we started the CML Project covering 24 municipalities in 4 regions of the country.

This publication strives to put in print glimpses of the rich experience, the challenges, and the gains of the CML Project. It also attempts to document the lessons we have learned in promoting participatory governance at the local and national levels – lessons that are important even now, or especially now, that the BuB program has been discontinued. It is vital that we review, reflect on and refresh these lessons as we engage the new political leaders at the national and local levels and as we continue to promote participatory planning and budgeting.

We thank the European Union for supporting the CML Project, including this publication. We also thank our implementing partners, the Eastern Visayas Network of NGOs and POs (EVNET), Western Visayas Network of Social Development NGOs (WEVNET), Mindanao Coalition of Development NGO Networks (MINCODE) and their member organizations.

It is opportune that this publication is coming out this year. 2016 marks the 30th year of the 1986 People Power uprising and the 25th year of CODE-NGO. People Power, the culmination of many years of struggle, had the Filipino people uniting to end the Marcos dictatorship through non-violent means. The founding of CODE-NGO brought forth the country's largest coalition of development-oriented civil society organizations (CSOs) united to build the capacity of CSOs and to advance integrated human and social development.

We have come a long way from the dismal and dark days of martial law, but we also know that we still have a long way to go to fulfill the promise of the 1986 People Power in order to build a Philippine society based on equality, social justice and integrated human development. Despite the hindrances and reversals we encounter, we continue moving forward, celebrating gains along the way, and sharing burdens and lessons with others who endeavor with us to deepen and broaden democracy and development.

SIXTO DONATO C. MACASAET
Executive Director

■ ACKNOWLEDGMENT

THE CML PROJECT

For the past 25 years, the Caucus of Development NGO Networks (CODE-NGO) has been working to make the lives of the poor better.

It enhances the power of the poor by strengthening civil society organizations (CSOs), creating spaces for people participation, and acting for transparency, accountability, and effective governance of local and national governments. Allies in government reciprocate CODE-NGO's work through reform initiatives that would help ensure systemic and structural change.

It is from this context that the "Citizens' Participation in Monitoring of Local Government Units Performance and Development Planning for Poverty Reduction" (CML) Project was envisioned. Its implementation recognized that mutual respect and constructive engagement with government are essential.

The aim of the CML Project was to help reduce poverty in 24 municipalities and cities by focusing improvement on the following areas:

1. Local government service delivery, particularly on health, agriculture, and fishery; and,
2. Local poverty reduction action plans and budgets.

The following were the specific objectives of the CML project:

- To strengthen accountability of local government units (LGUs) by expanding the use of citizens' monitoring tools in assessing LGU service delivery and governance;
- To strengthen and institutionalize people participation in planning, budgeting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation for poverty reduction in their communities; and,
- To improve and institutionalize systems for citizens' monitoring and participation in governance by working with the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) and other national government agencies.

Key principles and concepts in human rights, participation, constructive engagement, evidence-based advocacy, networking, and multi-sectoral partnership guided the implementation of the project from September 2012 to 2016.

The project covered four (4) regions, seven (7) provinces, and twenty-four (24) with the assistance of the European Union. These areas are the following:

- Region VI – Western Visayas:
  Antique Province – Municipalities of Anini-y, Tobias Fornier, Pandan, and Sebaste

- Region VIII – Eastern Visayas:
  Eastern Samar – Municipalities of Dolores and Oras
  Leyte – Municipalities of Alang-Alang, Barugo, Hilongos, and Matalom
  Samar – Municipalities of San Jorge, Sta Margarita, Tagapul-an, and Tarangnan

- Region XI – Southern Mindanao:
  Davao Oriental - Municipalities of Banaybanay, Governor Generoso, Mati City, and San Isidro

- Region XIII – Caraga:
  Agusan Del Sur - Municipalities of La Paz, Prosperidad, and San Luis
  Surigao Sur - Municipalities of Barobo, Tagbina, and Tago

CONTEXT

How can poverty be reduced faster?

When the CML Project was conceptualized in 2012, poverty incidence had been lowered by only 1.3 percent points from 2009 (26.5 percent) to 2012 (25.2 percent). The sheer number of the poor and the slow rate of the poverty reduction incidence permeated despite economic growth experienced during the period.

The CML Project theorized that if citizens' participation in local development could be made stronger, then causes of poverty would be addressed more effectively.

Thus, beginning 2012, CODE-NGO, through this project and other initiatives, engaged in the Bottom-Up Budgeting (BuB) program introduced by the administration of Benigno C. Aquino III. It was a pioneering planning and budget reform program never before attempted by all post-1986 EDSA People Power administrations. The BuB institutionalized people's participation in the planning and budgeting process in the municipalities and cities.

There were three other major events that made a significant mark in the landscape of Philippine development during the period of CML Project implementation.

First, more than 18,530 local government officials were elected and their assumption to a three-year term in office started in July 2013.

Second, Super Typhoon Yolanda (International name, Haiyan) hit the central part of the country in November 8, 2013 which devastated large areas of Eastern and Western Visayas regions.

Third, the visit of Pope Francis to the Philippines in January 2015. Pope Francis admonished: "Reforming the social structures which perpetuate poverty and the exclusion of the poor first requires a conversion of mind and heart.[1] "The Pope then urged government leaders and the Filipino people "to reject every form of corruption which diverts resources from the poor, and to make concerted effort to ensure the inclusion of every man and woman and child in the community.[2]"

The Pope's moral declaration to side with the poor became a strong motivation to pursue change and to reduce poverty.

In addition, two significant changeovers also unfolded: First, a new global development framework – the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – was approved by the United Nations in September 2015 with improved targets from the Millennium Development Goals. Second, the Philippines held national and local elections in May 2016 and a new set of leaders were elected.

All of these significant events reinforced the social and political directives of the CML Project and affirmed that it was on the right track; its deliverables were relevant; and its life has to be sustained.

[1]Batino, C., Lopez, D., & Yap, C. (2015, January 15). "Pope's Defense of Poor Shows Challenge for Philippines". Bloomberg. Retrieved from https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-01-19/pope-francis-defense-of-the-poor-shows-challenge-for-philippines
[2]Ibid

ACCOMPLISHMENTS:

• **It contributed in reducing poverty incidence through agriculture, fishery, and health projects.**

Philippine poverty incidence was 25.2 percent in 2012, which later decreased to 21.6 percent in 2015.

At the local level, the decrease is also evident. The average poverty incidence in the provinces of Antique, Eastern Samar, Samar, Leyte, Davao Oriental, Agusan Del Sur, and Surigao Del Sur was 50.07 percent in 2009; 47.9 percent in 2012; and, 43.05 percent by 2015.

On the other hand, the average income per household in four of the regions increased from Php 184,500.00 to Php 210,500.00. Moreover, the Maternal Death Rate Dashboard from Zuellig Family Foundation showed that the 24 municipalities performed well in containing the death rates in their respective municipalities.

The CML Project then can informally express that the agriculture, fishery, and health projects listed in the CSOs' Local Poverty Reduction and Development Agenda (LPRDA), which was advocated for government and LGU support or for BuB funding, was generally contributory to the increased income and improved health condition of families.

We now see in the Visayas and Mindanao areas that illegal fishing activities is being given more attention and has become a priority for action by local authorities. Among other accomplishments are: fishing boundaries and a marine sanctuary were established; disaster response teams trained; early warning systems installed; campaign for the protection and preservation of mangroves intensified; post-harvest facilities for farmers provided; herbal medicine production created; primary health care expanded; and mud crab production gained support.

• **It strengthened the accountability of LGUs by supporting citizens monitoring.**

CSO leaders were able to make effective use of the CSO Satisfaction Report Card (CSRC), a citizens' monitoring tool that assesses LGU service delivery and governance. It was conducted in three runs: before the 2013 local elections, midway through the 2013-2016 term, and right after the 2016 local elections. The results were then presented to LGU officials.

Overall, 48 percent of the LGUs attained improved satisfaction ratings on their performance in governance and service delivery from CSO leaders. In agriculture, 52 percent of the LGUs earned improved perception. CSO leaders likewise upheld the same on health on 48 percent of the LGUs.

LGU officials addressed problems revealed by the CSRC results and extended support for CSO monitoring.

For example, in Eastern Samar, the town mayor of Oras adopted the CSRC as a tool to measure improvement no less of her own performance. The mayor further used the CSRC to initiate quarterly evaluation of good governance performance among officers of municipal offices, other LGU personnel, and down to barangay officials.

In Agusan Del Sur and Surigao Del Sur, the Sangguniang Bayan of the municipalities of Tago and Prosperidad passed a resolution to institutionalize the use and conduct of the CSRC. Moreover, in Tagbina and Barobo, a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) will be entered between the LGUs and CSO networks to conduct the CSRC every three years or every end of term of elected officials.

- **It intensified people's participation in local governance and strengthened CSO-LGU working relations.**

The CML Project enabled CSO network leaders in the 24 areas to undertake research in order to analyze their local poverty situation. It also used the CSRC results in crafting their LPRDA. As an evidence-based output, the LPRDA became a basis for agreements and agenda among CSOs in the three cycles of their BuB engagements covering years 2014, 2015 and 2016.

Reviewed annually, these LPRDAs also became useful in preparation for CSO Assemblies and Local Poverty Reduction and Agenda Planning (LPRAP) process of the BuB program. CSO leaders also used their LPRDAs to advocate projects for inclusion in the Executive and Legislative Agenda and Annual Investment Plans of the LGUs and in the agendas of local special bodies where they sit and participate.

Stronger people's participation in local governance is also illustrated by the increasing number of CSOs present in local special bodies. From an average of 32 percent four years ago, it went up to 40 percent, which accounts participation of CSOs in the Local Development Councils, Agriculture and Fishery Councils, Peace and Order Councils, Local Health Boards, and similar bodies.

Consequently, the result demonstrated that the objective of strengthening people's active participation has been attained and fulfilled in many ways. For example, CSO Desks with designated focal persons were established in 14 of the 24 LGUs.

In six municipalities of Leyte, Samar, and Antique, executive orders were issued by its chief executives putting CSO network leaders as members of People's Monitoring Teams.

On the other hand, in response to CSOs' dissatisfaction with local housing, a Municipal Housing Board was instituted in Governor Generoso, Davao Oriental, with two CSO representatives becoming members of the body.

In Davao Oriental, a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) has been signed between the LGU of San Isidro and the CSO network to signify commitment for inclusion of CSOs in local development planning and budgeting.

Moreover, in Barobo, Surigao Del Sur, LGU funds were allocated for livestock dispersal and seedlings. In Agusan Del Sur, one of the BuB projects' biggest contribution was the development of crab production and linking crab growers with export market, as proposed by the CSOs of Tago. While in nearby Prosperidad, the mayor provided for bamboo, rubber and cacao seedlings and committed to review an irrigation project based on the monitoring feedback presented by the CSO network leaders.

The results illustrate that efforts of the 23 newly organized municipal CSO networks, one existing federation, and the 892 mobilized base organizations were effective.

- **It contributed improvements in government systems and enhanced CSO participation in governance.**

A total of 30 recommendations on institutionalizing and improving systems for people participation have been presented to the Dept. of Interior and Local Government (DILG), Dept. of Budget and Management (DBM), National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC), Dept. of Agriculture (DA), Dept. of Health (DOH), and the Dept. of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD).

Examples of policy recommendations that were adopted originated from key propositions related to the BuB. These are following:

- CSOs to be co-chairpersons of the LPRAT;
- Modifying the strict policy on "no liquidations to new project fund releases" into "no liquidation on a project, no new fund release for same type of project";
- Lowering the number of projects for realistic processing and monitoring;
- Ensuring that much needed projects are included in the menu like capability building of CSOs;
- Non-interference of local government in the preparation and conduct of the CSO assemblies.

LESSONS AND CHALLENGES

The four years of CML Project implementation delivered many lessons and challenges for CSOs and other key players from different sectors of society.

• The CSRC is an effective tool for constructive engagement with local officials.

The CSO Satisfaction Report Card (CSRC) provided the local CSOs, including organized basic sectors in the community, an objective approach to dialogue with local government officials. The CSRC improved the capacity of local CSOs to give feedback to both the elected and appointed officials of local government.

The CSOs learned to present the results objectively by using a dialogue approach so that mutual learning and openness could pave the way for collaborative effort. It is implied that CSOs maintain open-mindedness to the response and feedback by LGUs. At the end of the presentation, both CSOs and LGUs came up with agreements on how they could work together to address the issues.

The CSRC also facilitated in organizing informal and formal networks of local CSOs from meetings they undertook to discuss CSRC results and to plan preparations for dialogue with the LGU officials. Another important element that contributed in the success of CSO networks were the various capacity building interventions that were conducted.

The use of the CSRC will become more effective if implemented at least twice during the term of an elected local government official - first, after its election or roughly 18 months after they took their oath of office; and second, few months before the filing of candidacies for the next local election.

• CSO networks can play "big brother/big sister" to local CSOs in order to increase their competency for effective engagement.

CSO networks play an important role in strengthening other CSOs and CSO networks in their areas by facilitating sessions for exchange of learnings, by mutually supporting each other, and by sharing strategies, knowledge, skills, and tools. CSOs realized that local government officials tend to be more cognizant of the feedbacks, analyses and recommendations from CSO networks especially when they carry a collective agenda and when they are united in advocating recommendations.

• Community organizers are also instrumental in the development of local CSOs.

The people in the communities and organizations from different basic sectors could still benefit from community organizers or external facilitators for their own development. These community organizers can help them to improve their capacity to organize in order to become local CSOs and eventually into CSO networks that would be strong, sustainable, and stable. Community organizers can also help broaden their linkage with other social development organizations in order to access assistance and support.

• **Inclusion of the poor and the marginalized sectors in decision-making processes.**

The marginalized sector of society is generally associated either as creator or as victim of problems, but never as part of the solution. This is revealed from regular discussions in analyzing poverty incidence both at the national or local level.

The community activities undertaken under the CML Project, however, showed that we must possess a different perspective on looking at the poor and the marginalized by bringing them inside the structures and processes of decision making. One of the mechanisms for inclusion of the poor was the Local Poverty Reduction Action Teams (LPRATs) under the BuB Program.

The CML Project has integrated the effort through the formulation of the Local Poverty Reduction and Development Agenda (LPRDA) by CSO networks.

The LPRDA formulation is relatively a long process for it entailed research and planning. By practice, each step being taken in the decision making process of crafting the LPRDA involves analysis of local context; creativity to come up with appropriate strategy; technical advice; and dialogue in order to arrive at a consensus.

The process required in order to accomplish a plan inclusive of the needs of the different sectors of society, including the poor and the marginalized, is long, yet it is necessary if we intend to reduce causes of poverty.

The experience gathered by CSO leaders in formulating LPRDA demonstrated that it is possible for the poor and the marginalized to become part of the solution.

• **Consider trajectories that may affect development initiatives.**

The elections in the Philippines are held every three years for local governments, congressional districts, and senators. On the other hand, Presidential election is held every six years.

Periodic election offers an opportunity for changes in leadership and with it follows changes in policies, programs and projects depending on the priorities carried by elected officials. The change in leadership may affect development initiatives.

For instance, the administration of President Rodrigo R. Duterte has abolished the Bottom-Up Budgeting (BuB) program of the previous administration following his election in May 2016. These transformations must require CSOs to be mindful of political trajectories by constantly reassessing plans of its constructive engagements.

• **Link with social enterprise institutions to help improve livelihood activities.**

One of the major challenges in reducing poverty deals with the livelihood of people from poor communities. In the three runs of the CSRC, "livelihood and employment" is consistently one of the top three concerns CSOs believe their LGU officials must address. The need to attain livelihood sustainability among small farmers and fishers engaged in subsistence fishing emerged in the discussions along the course of the project implementation.

Small farmers and fishers have limited capacity to access services and support that will enable them to develop diversified livelihood activities.

To address this concern, more work that includes careful planning, capacity building, finance support, and linkage with social enterprise institutions needs to be accomplished.

• Step up participation in local governance by occupying spaces for CSOs mandated by law.

The CSOs must take active role in local governance by occupying spaces mandated by the Local Government Code of 1991, i.e. by becoming members of local development councils and local special bodies. The CSOs who recognized the effectiveness of the process in formulating LPRDAs will have the opportunity of using the approach in local development planning (e.g. Executive-Legislative Agenda, Annual Investment Plan, etc.)

Thus, CODE-NGO has focused on institutionalizing participatory governance, including the BuB, by way of the following:

1. Advocating for passage of legislation (ordinances or resolutions) supporting or institutionalizing mechanisms for CSO participation like the BuB;
2. Strengthening CSO networks who are supportive of the BuB and similar mechanism of participation;
3. Ensuring that BuB projects for 2014 and 2015 are implemented properly and within schedule; and
4. Working closely with national government agencies involved in BuB project implementation (e.g. DA, DILG, DSWD) to clarify budget processes, priorities, and project monitoring.

WAYS FORWARD

The CML Project has likewise developed a mechanism that will help sustain the gains gathered from project implementation through the use of a social contract entitled: "Statement of Commitment on Strategic Partnerships, Constructive Engagement, and Participatory Governance towards Poverty Reduction."

The Statement of Commitment was signed by CSOs, elected officials, and civil servants in government.

"Statement of Commitment on Strategic Partnerships, Constructive Engagement, and Participatory Governance towards Poverty Reduction."
2nd CML National Conference held Sept 1-2, 2016
Manila, Philippines.

By signing this statement, they:

- Commit to strengthen strategic partnerships and promote constructive engagement between and among CSOs, local governments and national government towards reducing poverty;
- Acknowledge that constructive engagement is a range of processes that bring stakeholders together to act on concerns put forward and to produce change in a positive fashion;
- Appreciate the important role of CSOs in monitoring LGUs through various means such as the CSRC;
- Reiterate the potential of including CSOs in planning and budgeting for the development of their municipality through participation in the BuB; and
- Affirm that the above efforts of CSOs and government greatly contribute to promoting people empowerment and reducing poverty.

Concretely, they commit to:

1. Strengthen local, provincial and regional CSO networks

This includes providing opportunities for building the capacities of CSOs and CSO networks, supporting activities for CSOs to come together such as in local CSO assemblies, and respecting their rights and independence.

2. Enhance citizens' participation in LGU performance monitoring

CSOs will regularly monitor LGU performance using the CSRC or other monitoring tools and to feedback the results in a dialogue/forum to LGU officials. Government officials will support citizens' monitoring efforts, and would be open to and act on feedback from these efforts.

3. Promote CSO–Government partnership in local development planning, budgeting and M&E

CSOs, while maintaining independence and autonomy, will work for their accreditation by the Sanggunian and participate with diligence in various stages of the planning, budgeting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation cycle in the LGUs, and government officials will invite CSOs, open their governance processes to CSOs and initiate action to support quality CSO participation in these processes and in the local development councils, other local special bodies and similar bodies.

CSOs and government officials will also support partnerships for participatory bottom-up budgeting and similar processes related to the national government's budget.

Together, CSOs and the local and national governments commit to a joint journey of vision, mutual respect, equity, justice and democracy.

CODE-NGO is committed to work for peoples' empowerment, sustainable development, and participatory governance. It has been working on enhancing citizen's engagement with national and local government for many years. It will, therefore, sustain the work of the CML Project and continue to create spaces of discourse, engagement, and advocacy especially more during these times of change and challenges in the Duterte administration.

1

7 KEY LESSONS ON SCALING-UP CSOs INTO NETWORKS

By Deanie Lyn Ocampo and Katrina Chloie B. Quilala

Do you need to scale-up the operations and advocacies of your organization? It might be time to start building a civil society network in your area.

The image of a spider's web comes to mind – radials at the center, then spirals of spaced threads around. A network of civil society organizations (CSOs) can be likened to a spider's web: it is made up of organizations that share common purpose, function and advocacy. These member organizations, however, retain its autonomy because of their individual mandate and mission; yet they unite in function and direction as a network.

A CSO network also functions like a hub; it is dynamic and evolves together with the changing socio-political and economic climate in society.

With the constantly changing environment and developments in society, a CSO network must be democratically and independently managed. This means ensuring active participation by member organizations in decision-making processes and building consensus on various issues of common or opposing interests.

Organizing CSO networks is strategic for poverty reduction efforts and people's participation in local governance because it stands on the principles of collective action, that is, there is strength in numbers. It is important especially among groups who come together for a common cause.

Moreover, being together ensures sustainability since information and learning from good practices are shared. This contributes in the growth of individual organizations and, eventually, of the network.

Lessons by such CSOs are shared to a larger audience or in society, in general.

> **"** *The CML Project played an effective role of connecting the communities to the government. The process allowed policy makers like us to gather ideas and feedbacks directly from the people. The BuB's National Poverty Reduction Action Team (composed of national government agencies) always considered the inputs from the CML Project and CSOs belonging to CODE-NGO networks.* **"**
>
> **- Richard Villacorte, Project Manager, DILG-BuB**

From 2012 up to 2016, 24 municipal CSO networks were organized across the Visayas and Mindanao regions under the "Citizens' Participation in Monitoring LGU Performance and Development Planning for Poverty Reduction (CML)" Project. This project was implemented by the Caucus of Development NGO Networks (CODE-NGO) with funding support from the Delegation of the European Union to the Philippines.

"One of the pillars for an effective constructive engagement with the government is having capacitated and organized CSO networks," explained Paul Richard Paraguya, project manager of the CML Project.

This intervention paved the way for CSO network participation in various public processes ranging from working on proposals for poverty reduction project, up to local development planning and budgeting including engagement in the Bottom-Up Budgeting (BuB) process of the national government, and in monitoring and evaluation of government projects and performance of local government units.

Indeed, the four-year intervention and engagement are replete with obvious gains. Here are seven (7) lessons on organizing and capacitating CSO networks shared by the CSO leaders who participated in the CML Project.

1. Conducting CSRC together is a commendable starting point for a potential network.

The CSO Satisfaction Report Card or CSRC is a citizens' monitoring tool developed by CODE-

NGO. It is administered to CSO leaders by fellow CSO leaders or volunteers in order to assess LGU performance in basic service delivery and in the area of governance.

The conduct of the CSRC is followed by a dialogue-forum which allows CSOs and LGU officials to come together to look into the results, discuss assessment points, and plot future courses of action together.

Majority of the results and recommendations derived from CSRC among the 24 municipalities where it was administered were used as basis by CSO networks in crafting its development agenda. It also influenced the content of their plans and strategy for engagement especially in development planning and participation in the BuB process.

Hence, the CSRC approach served as an eye-opener for both the CSOs and LGUs for it highlighted the effectiveness of partnership and collaboration. The effectiveness of the CSRC turned out as a major element that unified CSOs and strengthened partnerships with government in their respective localities.

2. Credible CSOs provide leverage for the network.

"Civil society organizations that enjoy high credibility and had become part of the core group of CSO networks proved as a force to reckon with. They gained solid positions in their locality by exercising the role as a balancing force in local governance," shared Roy Consolacion.

Consolacion, who is the CML area project coordinator for Davao Oriental, further explained that "they earned the ears of the local chief executive and Sangguniang Panlalawigan with some tenured civil servants at the LGU who, admittedly, perceived CSOs as threat."

Credibility certainly serves as leverage for CSOs. They can establish their credibility either by securing accreditation from the LGU or registration from government agencies like the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), Cooperative Development Authority (CDA), Dept. of Labor and Employment (DOLE) or the Dept. of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD).

3. Respect diversity and establish basis of unity.

In spite of their different interests and advocacies, most of CSOs converge and become a network because of common principles, analyses in attaining development, and unity in belief and approaches in fighting poverty.

Developing and building trust no matter how varied CSOs' perspectives and experiences are is important in building CSO networks. It still requires that marginalized groups are given room to be heard and varying positions on issues are presented clearly. Ample space for negotiations must be offered and discussions must be punctuated with patience, tolerance, open-mindedness, and sometimes a good sense of humor.

Individual CSOs may take different roads, but sometimes they are all led to the same castle and that's what networks are all about – it leads to the attainment of common targets.

We can also find that personal relationships are valuable in network building so there is need to nurture relationships to make the journey worthwhile, enjoyable and productive.

4. Start with a core group.

Before the establishment of a network, you will find a CSO core group – a small base group that is usually composed by a handful of leaders from different sectors. Core group members that gather and meet regularly have more chances of solidifying themselves into networks, eventually becoming loose coalitions or formally organized alliances.

It is at this level of the process that enables members to shape their networks by first clarifying their basis of unity, by defining its positions, and by laying down its vision, mission and goals.

It is also at this level that they will be able to establish leadership system by electing officers, recruiting members, agreeing on how decisions can be arrived at and how to communicate and coordinate among themselves.

The core group likewise determines what first moves to take, like generating resources, and how to earn public identity and recognition.

5. Helping CSO network members improve their own organizations is necessary.

For decades, the lack of sustainability among CSOs in Sebaste and Pandan towns in the province of Antique made them poorly recognized and a weak force in the community. Similarly, in La Paz and San Luis in Agusan Del Sur, CSOs have difficulty in accessing resources to sustain their respective organizations.

These challenges discouraged many CSOs to actively participate and engage even at the municipal level.

By realizing their inherent weaknesses, CSOs may start organizing themselves into a network. By coming together, CSOs began to share the challenges they encountered and to define what appropriate steps to take in moving forward.

"Networking is important because it allows other CSOs and network members to tap at opportunities with funding support," said Don dela Victoria, CML area project coordinator for Davao Oriental.

6. Tap local, experienced CSOs or CSO networks for mentoring.

"It was during a CSO assembly for the 2013 Bottom-up Budgeting process that I learned about government's poverty reduction program. With my participation, I acquired a better understanding about the role of CSOs in the process of local planning and budgeting," said Rebecca Nofies, core group member of the municipal CSO network of Oras, Eastern Samar.

"Without good and quality representation from civil society and other sectors, it's difficult to expect that we would receive a decent development project, the kind that is responsive to our needs," stressed Nofies.

"The Eastern Samar Social Development Organization has been our mentor and guide. It helped us to organize ourselves and reactivate organizations of farmers, fisherfolks, women, youth and senior citizens in every barangay. It brought us together and it guided our CSO network to gain recognition from the LGU," highlighted Nofies.

7. Work inside and outside the boxes.

The established structures by the government and its rules and practices sometimes limit the realization of CSOs participation, said Ricardo Concan, president of Malobago Farmers Association of Dolores, Eastern Samar.

"We realized the value of forming CSO networks because it can strengthen our respective organizations. We have attained that and majority of our organizations are now led by active leaders," added Concan.

Concan also shared that "in a collective manner, we were able to craft a development agenda which reflected the interest of the different sectors. The move became instrumental in pushing to a higher level our engagement with the LGU."

The capacities by CSO leaders which resulted in the cohesiveness of CSO networks in Prosperidad and Tago in Region XIII became a major contributing factor in raising needed funds for the registration of its federation to the SEC.

Although their proposed mini-feed mill did not make it for inclusion in the 2014 BuB Budget, the Tago Livestock Raisers Association continued with their lobby effort for support from the LGU and the Dept. of Agriculture (DA). On top of that, efforts were sustained in tapping support from other external sources.

These seven (7) key lessons will hopefully guide CSOs in their work on poverty reduction, participatory local governance and in forming strong networks in their areas.

The communal spider web where webs are built together and spread out to another now best illustrates how a CSO network functions and why it is important for CSOs. ∎

2

A DIFFERENT KIND OF CARD

By Deanie Lyn Ocampo

The leaders of civil society organizations (CSOs) conducted the first run of the CSO Satisfaction Report Card (CSRC) in 24 municipalities in the Visayas and Mindanao from May to July 2013.

The municipalities that were covered by the survey in the Visayas were Antique, Leyte, Samar and Eastern Samar; in Mindanao were Davao Oriental, Agusan del Sur and Surigao del Sur.

The CSRC was used to find out about the level of satisfaction on the performance of local government units on the area of local governance and social service delivery. An interview was conducted by CSO leaders among CSOs in their respective areas. The result of the survey was presented to LGU officials in a forum in order to offer an opportunity for both parties to interact regarding the results and discuss analyses.

The result was also used as reference for planning and collaboration between CSOs and the LGUs.

A total of 872 CSO leaders representing 837 CSOs from communities participated in the conduct of the CSRC. The first run was timely and significant because midterm elections was just concluded and elected officials are about to be installed and assume public office.

MAJOR FINDINGS FROM THE FIRST RUN

The result of the first run revealed a range of issues and concerns from health service delivery, environment, agriculture, fishing, land, graft and corruption, illegal activities and peace and order.

It also revealed which areas of concern the LGUs appeared weak; what areas has low priority; which area needed more support; and what services are satisfactory or strong in delivery and accessibility.

Like a score card, here are the following issues and concerns from the results of the CSRC:

1. CSO leaders emphasized that there is a need for LGUs to address people's equitable access to livelihood, employment, and business opportunities.

2. CSOs identified health; food and nutrition; and potable water and sanitation, as among the basic services that are problematic and which requires intervention and solution from their LGUs. In specific municipalities, CSOs were uncertain regarding delivery and accessibility of water and availability of sanitary toilets in their communities.

3. CSOs highlighted agriculture as a sector that needed most support. Across all regions, however, CSOs were uncertain how its LGUs have provided or facilitated market development and post-harvest development services on agriculture.

4. CSOs identified the following issues and concerns that are specific among selected municipalities: ancestral domain, agrarian and aquatic reforms, illegal fishing, and sustainable and safe environment. Because they raised these top-of-mind indicates that the concerns are longstanding and enduring problems in their respective provinces:

- Graft and corruption – Antique,
- Illegal fishing – Samar and Leyte, and
- Ancestral domain – Agusan del Sur.

5. CSOs were uncertain whether they were satisfied or not regarding access to resources on the following: land asset; ancestral domain; agrarian, aquatic, and urban land reform; sustainable industrialization; gainful employment and just compensation.

6. CSOs were also uncertain how their LGUs will address problems or promote sustainable and safe environment and peaceful community. Specifically, the issues enumerated below earned low satisfaction rating among CSOs and underscored peace and order as hardly addressed at all among selected municipalities:

- Environment – garbage collection, environmental protection and conservation
- Illegal activities – campaign against illegal fishing, illegal gambling and proliferation of illegal drugs
- Peace and order – no peaceful resolution of armed conflict.

7. Generally, majority of CSOs showed satisfaction on the delivery of social services among LGUs, especially covering basic needs, such as: food, shelter, water, health and education. Findings specific to regions revealed:

- Davao Region – LGUs in the region fare better in the delivery of services if compared to others.
- Eastern Visayas – access to food and nutrition appeared inadequate.

- Western Visayas – access to housing and shelter requires improvement.
- Caraga Region – LGUs performing well on the delivery of food and nutrition, but it needs to work better on other aspects of social services.

8. CSOs showed satisfaction with the delivery of social services on health. Delivery of child-health services earned high satisfaction among CSOs.

9. Among the social services listed in the CSRC card, Eastern and Western Visayas CSOs were generally unsure of a lot of the services if compared to CSOs in Mindanao.

DIALOGUE WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT

By October 2013, the results of the CSRC survey were presented to the chief executives together with the officials at the executive and legislative branch of the LGUs. Most of the LGUs covered by the survey acknowledged their inadequacies in the area of social service delivery, recognized their limitations, and identified factors why delivery of social services needs improvement. Some LGUs, however, also expressed doubts on the accuracy of the CSRC results especially in terms of representations, spread of respondents and the weights used in interpreting the perception survey result.

It was observed that LGU officials who got low CSRC ratings viewed its outcome as valuable for it facilitated realization of its inadequacies and identified challenges. The result was also helpful for it defined areas of concern that require focus and inclusion among its priorities for support and action.

The LGUs in Eastern Visayas, for instance, approached the CSRC result with optimism by treating it as a productive exercise by CSOs in order for the LGU to perform better in serving the people.

It was also observed that LGUs led by "traditional politicians" tend to be sensitive on the CSRC result and treating it like an output from similar public evaluation initiatives. On the other hand, progressive leaders are more receptive of transparency mechanisms in local governance and expressed openness and willingness to cooperate on the CSRC as an evaluation tool.

MAJOR AGREEMENTS BETWEEN CSOs AND LGUS IN 15 MUNICIPALITIES

One of the best result of the CSRC survey is the opportunity it opened between the CSOs and LGUs to collaborate and establish partnership. It became evident that in order to improve social service delivery, CSOs and LGUs must open up the space to work together.

The crucial step for partnership has been undertaken and as a result CSOs and LGUs were able to seal specific agreements in moving forward. The following are the six major agreements as a result of the CSO-LGU partnership:

1. To establish civil society desks at the LGU;
2. To designate an LGU focal person that will attend to CSO-related concerns; such as, CSO accreditation, access to information regarding Grassroots Participatory Budgeting and LGU-funded projects and membership in local special bodies, among others;

3. To institutionalize the Municipal Housing Board and by designating two sits for CSO representatives in the board;
4. To conduct CSO orientation on the Annual Investment Plan, Full Disclosure Policy, and Public Financial Management Audit;
5. To present the local budgeting calendar to the CSOs; and
6. To pass Sangguniang Bayan Resolution adopting the CSRC as a mechanism for CSO participation.

There are numerous points in the agreement that were already attained and delivered by the LGUs. While other LGUs and CSOs are still working for its realization, the steps taken from the CSRC indicate that strong working partnership between CSOs and the LGUs is making headway. ∎

3

BRINGING PEOPLE TO THE TABLE

By Deanie Lyn Ocampo and Katrina Chloie B. Ouilala

In early 2013, civil society organizations (CSOs) started discussing about "constructive engagement" with local government units (LGUs). "Constructive engagement" means partnering with government in developing communities towards resilience and prosperity.

The discussion for engagement was timely for midterm elections was underway, yet the people appeared disinterested to actively participate in the process.

Ahead of the election period, the CSOs had started monitoring work on LGUs' delivery of social services to the communities and its constituents using the Civil Society Organization Satisfaction Report Card (CSRC). It carried out interviews to leaders of basic sectors like farmers and fisherfolks, indigenous people, faith-based groups, market vendors, public transport drivers, urban poor, senior citizens, women and the youth.

The interviews kicked off with a simple question: Are you satisfied with your LGU's performance? The findings from the interviews were then gathered, organized, and presented to the newly elected officials after they were sworn in in 2013.

Hence, the process of "bringing people to the table" commenced as local government officials face CSOs to discuss the issues and concerns CSO leaders raised as captured by the CSRC.

"Bringing people to the table" likewise indicates the beginning of constructive engagement as discussions become points for negotiation or consideration among LGU priorities in the local planning and budgeting process. At this stage, the CSRC results became valuable in setting priorities. Its outcome was translated as benchmarks in monitoring local government initiatives and in tracking progress in the delivery of social services.

DEVELOPMENT AGENDA AND THE PARTICIPATORY PROCESS

The results from the CSRC were not only helpful in identifying gaps in social service delivery and in planning for programs by the LGUs; it was also useful among CSOs in crafting their development agenda. The CSRC result formed part of their analyses of the cause and effect of local poverty which, in turn, became instrumental in formulating their strategies for intervention.

It is in the development agenda that pro-poor programs are identified and projects and activities are outlined for implementation. "Bringing people to the table" is integral at this stage because support from the legislative branch is also needed, especially if there are legislations to be passed.

The agenda served as CSOs' guide that allows them to effectively participate in the process of local development planning and budgeting.

CSOs also utilize the agenda for inclusion in the LGUs' Executive-Legislative Agenda and Annual Investment Plan. This is the reason why a development agenda is revisited annually for review and assessment, adjustment or revision.

The effectiveness of having an agenda ready was tested by CSOs in its engagement in the Bottom-up Budgeting Process managed by the Dept. of Budget and Management (DBM) and the Dept. of Interior and Local Government (DILG). It made the process of identifying priorities efficient indeed.

While there are local chief executives whose leadership style disregard participatory processes, CSOs had become useful agents in reminding them that people's participation in local governance make improved service delivery and make them better stewards of people's interest.

CSOs who witnessed or experienced these challenges in working with the government improved their knowledge and skills for successful constructive engagement. By building their competency, CSOs become LGU partners in keeping priorities at the right track and in ensuring government accountability.

RECOGNIZING THE EFFECTIVE ROLE OF CSOs IN GOVERNANCE

Among the best outcomes of CSO engagement using the CSRC is the recognition of LGUs that CSOs are good partners in local governance and in attaining development goals in general.

In Banaybanay, Davao Oriental, for instance, a secretariat for CSO concerns has been established. The secretariat is fully supported by the LGU with equipment, facilities, and supplies for its operations. The development fund is also properly appropriated for CSOs' utilization in conducting planning-workshops, a crucial support for CSO activity especially in crafting its development agenda.

Moreover, a CSO Desk was also established in the municipality of Barobo, Surigao Del Sur and in Oras, Eastern Samar.

On the other hand, in Hilongos, Leyte, and in Governor Generoso and in San Isidro, Davao Oriental, CSO participation has been sought out regularly by the LGUs. This is evidence of the LGU's growing recognition that CSOs are effective partners in local governance.

IMPLEMENTING PROJECTS RESPONSIVE TO THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY

Constructive engagement by CSOs using the CSRC also resulted in improved prioritization of projects by the LGUs.

For example, the LGU of Sta. Margarita, Samar, promised to address three priority issues that emerged from the CSRC survey: illegal fishing, livelihood and employment, and graft and corruption.

As a result, Mayor Gemma Zosa allocated P1.7-million in the 2015 budget to establish a marine sanctuary, including the establishment of buoys and markers to identify fishing boundaries. The effort also included the reactivation of its Bantay Dagat (Guardians of the Sea) program among its top priority.

Furthermore, its livelihood programs were enhanced by complementing current initiatives with budget support from the 2015 Bottom-up Budget (BuB) allocation.

In Tagapul-an, Samar, on the other hand, CSOs were able to include its development agenda in the LGU's Annual Investment Plan (AIP). Along the way, CSOs learned that their target projects were also prioritized in the Executive-Legislative Agenda of the LGU.

“Now I am 100% confident that every CSO I am dealing with is not bogus.”

- Juliet Magsosong, MLGOO, Banaybanay, Davao Oriental

Dialogue and feedbacking is a key to SUCCESS.

Dialogues between CSOs and local government officials also ensured that projects were relevant and responsive to people's needs.

For instance, CSOs who lobbied for crop inputs and subsidies in the AIP of La Paz, Agusan Del Sur received positive response because the proposal was relevant to the local context and priorities. Rice and corn is a major agricultural commodity in La Paz.

The participatory process is not only beneficial to local government officials; CSOs also gained important knowledge and technical know-how on how the bureaucracy works and earned better understanding of how LGUs prioritize programs and projects.

FACILITATING CONSENSUS MAKES WIN-WIN SOLUTION

One of the major outcomes of "bringing people to the table" is its effectiveness in facilitating consensus. Not all decisions are product of consensus, but in this case, consensus aided win-win solution.

In Tarangnan, Samar, CSO leaders employed negotiation as an advocacy strategy in order to optimize the favorable political condition in their town and to maximize available resources to benefit the people. As a result of negotiations in the proper sourcing and allocation of budget, projects proposed by CSOs earned support from the LGU's annual budget.

The LGU also made possible small grants to complement other components of the project while large projects by the LGUs were lined up under the BuB.

Civil society organizations in Matalom and Hilongos, Leyte also successfully used their ability for leveraging in order to secure support for their capacity building activities. The LGUs responded positively to their request and the CSOs supported their LGUs' infrastructure projects.

Hence, the CSOs acquired funding support of P500,000 for Matalom and P600,000 for Hilongos as BuB allocations for capacity building activities for the year 2015.

DIALOGUE AND FEEDBACKING IS A KEY TO SUCCESS

Dialogue and negotiations also institutionalized feedbacking mechanism. This mechanism allowed the people to bring their concerns to the attention of local officials and established openness and transparency between CSOs and the LGUs.

"Mayor Viviane Alvarez, for example, received with optimism the CSRC results presented to her. Alvarez used the CSRC results as guide, not only in measuring the performance of the LGU, but also of the barangays within the LGU," shared Rebecca Nofies, CSO leader in Oras, Eastern Samar.

Through the CSRC, local chief executives have learned how CSOs and its constituents perceive the quality of their LGUs' local governance and service delivery. It is two-way for CSOs for they were contributing effort in local development and, at the same time, gathering helpful information that enabled them to engage with their LGUs.

These mechanisms bring people to the table where they can determine appropriate solutions to their development goals and act collectively. The experiences of CSO leaders reveal the many worthwhile characteristics that made up constructive engagement and why it is successful. ∎

BRINGING PEOPLE TO THE TABLE

4

CONVERSATIONS: CSRC AS AN EYE-OPENER

By Raquel Sanlucan and Rosita Pacay

Raquel Sanlucan and Rosita Pacay are civil society organization leaders in Banaybanay, Davao Oriental. The article is an excerpt from the narrative they wrote from the interview and conversation with Alberto Gador. It shares the experience and insights they have gathered from their participation in the conduct of the CSRC in 2013.

Raquel and Rosita: Sometime in February 2013, we attended an orientation-training workshop on the CSRC conducted in Mati City (Davao Oriental). We were trained how to interview leaders of civil society organizations (CSO).

Most of the CSO leaders we interviewed had no knowledge on some government programs and projects. There are also others who are not aware of government policies like for instance the Full Disclosure Policy. Perhaps it is because LGU officials have been accustomed by simply conducting planning among themselves, without consulting the people or involving CSOs. Likewise, it has been common for CSO leaders not to be involved.

Some of the difficulties we encountered during the survey were weather-related like heavy rains; rescheduling and repeated visits to the respondents; and convincing leaders that their participation in the interview would not endanger them. They thought that the CSRC is politically or election related effort because of the upcoming local election in May 2013. The CSRC was conducted just months before the election.

Alberto: I was interviewed by Mrs. Rosita Pacay with a Tagalog cameraman. I was really puzzled and confused at the time of the interview. I didn't understand the purpose of gathering those data, yet the answers I gave were facts based from my experiences.

I truly disclosed the positive and negative sides of our LGU, especially on CSO-LGU relationship and transparency in governance.

Raquel and Rosita: For us in Banaybanay, we found the CSRC as a useful mechanism for people to express their opinions regarding LGU program implementation and performance.

Alberto: Actually, I was not comfortable giving answers for some of the questions were new to me and I did not hold knowledge about it, specifically on matters regarding LGU finances. We CSOs are not really concerned with public financial statements because we don't know the terminologies.

What we account for from our LGU are the services. That's why I was very confident answering questions related to the delivery of basic services, especially projects for our barangay.

Our barangay is very much blessed for every year we would receive almost P2-M worth of social services and projects from the provincial and municipal governments.

Raquel and Rosita: Six months after we conducted the CSRC, the results weren't presented yet. We suggested that after validating the CSRC data, the result should be presented immediately to the LGU or before the LGU planning cycle starts so they could use the CSRC result for planning.

Alberto: My suggestion regarding the CSRC is that it should not take too long to present the data gathered to the LGU so that they could also evaluate things from their side and they would be guided in the implementation of programs, projects, and activities for the next calendar year.

Raquel and Rosita: After conducting the CSRC, some CSO leaders from different sectors changed their perspective. We observed transformation from hopelessness into eagerness and from lack of involvement into assertiveness. The CSRC activity has given them the resolve to become actively involved in local governance. They also gained additional knowledge on how to participate and to dialogue with LGUs.

Alberto: At this point I am able to understand the relevance of the CSRC, that it primarily aims to capture the LGU's attention so it can work better by collaborating with CSOs and other stakeholders. That way it can faithfully work for the common good.

Raquel and Rosita: The CSOs in our locality, especially for those that have been accredited by the Sangguniang Bayan, offered their comments without hesitation during deliberations in the planning process. In the past, they were afraid to voice out and share their insights because they might antagonize LGU officials.

Now, however, they were actively participating in the debates concerning development issues involving their community.

Indeed, the CSRC served as an eye opener for both the LGUs and CSOs because of its potential to facilitate solutions on the problems of people and communities. It brought the different sectors together and allowed them to participate in local governance. Through this, we, from the CSO sector, can assert our legitimacy and we are open to express our desire to help and uplift the whole municipality as well. ∎

"

The CSOs are now well-represented in the local special bodies of our LGU as a result of improved access to information about the requirements and process for CSO accreditation. We continue to believe that, in due time, this municipality will develop because of the people and the LGU. "

- Ma. Evelyn Juan, CSO network Chairperson, Tagbina, Surigao Del Sur

5

CHIT-CHAT: CSOs ON THE BOTTOM-UP BUDGETING

By Deanie Lyn Ocampo

The Bottom-up Budgeting (BuB) program of the national government has been a welcome reform initiative for civil society organizations (CSOs) and the citizens who are from the poorest municipalities.

The BuB is a participatory budgeting model first adopted and implemented in Porto Alegre, Brazil. It is a poverty reduction initiative which opens a space for civil society to engage with the government in the budget process.

The BuB process involves a planning workshop and participated in by the mayor, heads of the offices in the local government and representatives from CSOs. This formation is called the Local Poverty Reduction Action Team (LPRAT). The LPRAT is responsible for identifying projects that will be funded under the BuB allocation. The output from the planning is called the Local Poverty Reduction Action Plan (LPRAP).

The LPRAP undergoes the approval process by the LPRAT and signed by the mayor being the LPRAT chairperson, and the CSO representative who usually is the co-chairperson. The final plan is then submitted to the national government for inclusion in the national budget. After the national budget is passed by Congress and signed by the president, it becomes a law called the General

Appropriations Act (GAA). The GAA serves as guide for National Government Agencies (NGAs) and LGUs involved in project implementation, which includes approved projects under the BuB.

The BuB started in 2012 and its implementation was rolled out to over 500 municipalities and cities. The coverage increased to 1,223 in 2013. By 2014, it covered all municipalities and cities in the country.

The implementation of projects under the BuB is also guided by a Joint Memorandum Circular (JMC) issued annually by four lead NGAs, namely; the Dept. of Budget and Management (DBM), the Dept. of Interior and Local Government (DILG), the Dept. of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), and the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC). The JMC is circulated to all NGAs and LGUs involved in the implementation of BuB projects.

Since its implementation, it is only on its 5th year that the BuB has confronted its major challenge with a question that hangs over the heads of many CSO leaders who actively participated in the budget engagement – will the administration after President Benigno C. Aquino III continue the BuB?

In July 2014, the Caucus of Development NGO Networks (CODE-NGO) held a National Conference on Participatory and Decentralized Governance. The conference offered an opportunity for CSOs to chit-chat with leaders from five CSO networks and gathered their experiences in BuB engagement from their respective areas for the year 2014.

Through the chit-chat, CSO leaders shared their analyses from the experiences that they have gathered in their engagements. The following were the guide questions:

1.) What worked well with the BuB in your municipality? What facilitated it?
2.) What did not work and why?
3.) What recommendations do you propose in order to make the engagement successful?
4.) What is your general assessment of the BuB as a program?

WHAT WORKED WELL WITH THE BUB IN YOUR MUNICIPALITY? WHAT FACILITATED IT?

"In our municipalities, things worked well as far as BuB is concerned because we have open-minded and approachable local government officials. CSO alliances were formed and CSO members were active and have showed dedication," said Leo Laurio Lupango and Gerelito Ermina.

"They were also equipped with tools for engaging LGUs. Our effective engagement was made possible because we also got help from the Western Visayas Network of Social Development NGOs," they added.

Lupango and Ermina also underscore that "the meetings by members of LPRAT were held regularly and the process is democratic. The relationship among members is also harmonious because of energetic Municipal Local Government Operations Officer (MLGOO) and Municipal Planning and Development Coordinator who facilitated these meetings."

Leo Laurio Lupango is the president of Anini-y Environmental Protection Association and the Anini-y Alliance of CSOs while Gerelito Ermina is the president of the CSO Alliance of Tobias Fornier, all operating in the Province of Antique in Western Visayas.

Estrella M. Ballete, who is the corporate secretary of the Senior Citizens of Oras Inc. in Eastern Visayas, shared that the "BuB orientation seminar facilitated by Efren Hipe of the Eastern Samar Social Development Organization and MLGOO Necrito Balase helped and assisted us in our engagement with the LGU."

"The engagement among the CSOs, national government agencies, and LGU worked well starting from the formulation of the plan up to its submission to the LPRAT in Barobo," shared Joel L. Pantaleon, president of the CSO Network of Barobo, Surigao del Sur.

Pantaleon added that "the KASILAK Development Foundation facilitated the whole process. We also appreciated the Dept. of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and the Dept. of Trade and Industry (DTI) for the implementation of BuB projects for the years 2013 and 2014."

Moreover, "our local chief executive issued an Executive Order creating the BuB Monitoring Team," said Pantaleon.

"What worked well for us in the Municipality of Governor Generoso were the active involvement of member organizations to our CSO network and the help of volunteers and CSO leaders," declared Ali E. Bandera, municipal coordinator of the Pioneers and Christians and Muslims Alliance Network of Governor Generoso, Davao Oriental.

In Prosperidad, Agusan Del Sur, "as a signatory for the BuB projects in our municipality, I am very supportive of the initiative especially that our local chief executive is also very supportive of the BuB," said Sioly S. Robles, parent leader of the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (or the Conditional Cash Transfer Program).

Robles, who is also a barangay health worker and president of the Salvacion Elementary School Parent-Teacher Association in Prosperidad, shared, however, that "there are projects that take time to implement because some government agencies are also delayed in submitting their project proposals."

"But from my end, I always make myself available on concerns related to BuB," stressed Robles.

What did not work? Why not?

"The 2014 BuB plan was done in haste because it needs to cope with the schedule of the RPRAT. There was limited time to deliberate," said Lupango and Ermina of Antique province.

"For our part, we were looking for the approved priority projects for our municipality from Dept. of Education (DepEd) and the Dept. of the Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). However, we sensed that they lack cooperation for the program. We were worried that the budget allocation will not be properly utilized or simply be wasted," shared Pantaleon of Barobo.

On the other hand, according to Bandera of Governor Generoso, "we recognized that our CSO network still needs to be strengthened in order for us to effectively engage with the LGU."

"For me", said Estrella Ballete of Oras, "what did not work was the formulation and preparation of the Local Poverty Reduction and Development Agenda (LPRDA) because it was monopolized by one of the personnel of the municipal mayor."

It is basic for CSOs to gain competency in order to effectively engage with government.

Ballete narrated her bad experience about the maneuverings of the municipal mayor through the involvement of that personnel in the BuB process.

"He blatantly told us members under his group to just 'stay put' for we will all benefit from his work. But we were not contented by the result. The project proposal emanated from the mayor and didn't undergo the process of planning nor involved our participation. We were disappointed," stressed Ballete.

"Take this for example. Our organization, the Senior Citizens of Oras, Inc. (SENCAO), prepared and submitted our project proposal entitled 'Botika para kay Lolo at Lola'. It earned an approval in the 2014 BuB with a budget allocation of P1.2-million," cited Ballete.

"However, we were surprised to discover from Russel A. Gariando, the regional manager on livelihood projects of DSWD, that our project proposal was adopted by the mayor for implementation, yet the beneficiaries would be determined by the Municipal Social Welfare and Development Officer (MSWDO) and would not focus on senior citizens but other sectors as well," explained Ballete.

"It appears that SENCAO was not a favored beneficiary by the mayor. Instead, she used the approved project to benefit only her political party affiliates and supporters. Apparently, the project is again controlled by the LGU," underscored Ballete.

What recommendations do you propose in order to make the engagement successful?

In moving forward, "we propose that there will be capability building for CSOs on the following: monitoring and evaluation, resource development, disaster risk reduction and management and constructive engagement," said Lupango and Ermina.

Lupango and Ermina also emphasized that "more CSOs have to be registered and accredited at the LGU and they also need assistance. It would also be better if government has clear policies and guidelines for the engagement."

"On our end, it is necessary to develop local and regional poverty reduction and development agenda to complement this engagement," added Pantaleon.

Bandera explained that "it is basic for CSOs to gain competency in order to effectively engage with government. Good relations by CSOs to its LGU have to be maintained."

"We recommend that government allows CSOs to prepare their own project proposal. Monitoring and evaluation is important, not just in our municipality, but also at the provincial, regional and national levels. It is something that I would like to push," said Ballete.

For Robles, "I would recommend that our LGU submit project proposals on schedule in order to make its implementation efficient and completion schedule is attained."

What is your general assessment of the BuB as a program?

"We cannot deny that the BuB is very helpful especially for municipalities with low Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) subsidy for it supplements meager LGU funds for social services. BuB projects respond on the genuine needs of the masses and people from the grassroots," said Lupango and Ermina.

"The BuB also opened a wide space for CSOs to establish partnership with the LGUs and it helped in deepening our understanding of good governance. The BuB has allowed CSOs to grow and it helped sustain their organizations," underscored Lupango and Ermina. "The engagement may also curb corruption in government because CSOs remain as watchdogs," they emphasized.

Pantaleon and Bandera shared similar assessment with Lupango and Ermina.

"BuB is beneficial for it addresses the priority needs of people at the grassroots," said Pantaleon while Bandera said that "in spite of the problems in project implementation, the BuB is useful for it delivered projects needed by the basic sectors in society."

"In our case, the BuB proved to be an effective program by government because it has assisted a lot of people. I believe that the success of the BuB also rests on good leadership and governance by local chief executives. Such is our case in Prosperidad," reflected Sioly S. Robles. ∎

> *"The BuB also opened a wide space for CSOs to establish partnership with the LGUs and it helped in deepening our understanding of good governance. The BuB has allowed CSOs to grow and it helped sustain their organizations."*

6

HOW CSRC PROPELLED CHANGE IN ORAS

By Efren C. Hipe and Gina Dean

After a dialogue with leaders from civil society organizations (CSOs), Mayor Viviane Alvarez decided to put in place a monitoring system in order to track the performance of all government officials in the 42 barangays that made up the Municipality of Oras.

Oras is the third largest municipality in the Province of Eastern Samar and its economy is primarily driven by agriculture. The LGU receives an annual revenue share of P74-million from the National Treasury yet the subsidy remains inadequate to improve the quality and delivery of social services to its constituents.

The decision by Mayor Alvarez to step up monitoring work on the performance of barangay officials was grounded on her focus to foster accountability on her administration. The move also responded to civil society after CSO leaders presented the result of the CSO Satisfaction Report Card (CSRC).

The chief executive learned about the CSRC as a useful monitoring tool that could help gauge performance of the LGU in local governance and delivery of social services to the people.

After conducting the CSRC survey, CSO leaders presented to the chief executive the concerns that they have gathered from the community, namely: agriculture development, sustainable livelihood, infrastructure support, improvement in nutrition and health services, environmental protection, disaster preparedness and peace and order.

Mayor Alvarez received the presentation from the CSOs with open-mindedness by accepting their concerns as continuing challenges of her administration. As the leader of the people, Alvarez stressed the limitation of the LGU to mobilize resources in the last three years of her administration; as such, improving social service delivery was an uphill climb.

Yet after learning about the issues in the communities from CSOs, Mayor Alvarez committed that her administration will buckle down to work by using the CSRC findings to take necessary action that addresses the problems they presented. The chief executive also pledged to the CSOs that she will create programs founded on "people's agenda".

The first order of the day for Mayor Alvarez was to improve governance and accountability starting from the barangay level. She encouraged barangay officials to ensure that all the processes must be participatory – which means that the people and civil society must have active participation in the planning of programs, implementation of activities, and in monitoring and evaluation.

Mayor Alvarez also institutionalized the evaluation process by encouraging the use of the CSRC as mechanism for monitoring performance of barangays on a quarterly basis. The barangays with best local governance practices were recognized and given incentives by the LGU to encourage them to do more for the people and contribute in uplifting the standard of local governance in their municipality.

The leadership intervention by Mayor Alvarez delivered positive result to the municipality. The following outcome was observed by the CSOs: renewed commitment by LGU officials and employees for public service; barangay officials have become active, cooperative and sensitive to the needs of the people; it cultivated understanding and respect between CSOs and the LGU; and restored unity in the community.

Integrating reforms in the system of governance, however, does not come easy for both CSOs and the LGU of Oras.

According to CSO leaders, while they have gained a dependable ally from the chief executive, some of its initiatives are still confronting obstacles especially at the local legislative level. For instance, the "Local People's Agenda", a measure supported by the mayor, and which was filed by the CSOs at the Municipal Council, still await its passage for some council members were not convinced of the measure.

Some local legislators interpret the "People's Agenda" as allocating power to the citizens and, in the process, compromising their power as elected officials. From the standpoint of CSOs, this is contrary to good governance practice, yet they will continue efforts to educate people about participatory governance as a cornerstone of democracy.

Nevertheless, the CSOs of Oras are determined to continue with its engagement until the measure is approved and adopted by the LGU. The CSOs realized that having a champion at the LGU and who is committed to carry the people's agenda from start to finish is a big advantage when pushing for reforms.

The engagement also proved effective in enhancing the capacity of the CSOs in understanding the evolving political context and dynamics in local politics and the reforms needed to improve the system of local governance. It also uplifted the quality of CSO engagement in propagating genuine people's agenda and by carrying it from the barangay up to the level of the Executive-Legislative Agenda deliberations until it is approved and adopted.

All of these experiences and learnings that CSOs have gathered using the CSRC necessitate readiness and consistency from their end in its engagement with the LGU today and in the future. ∎
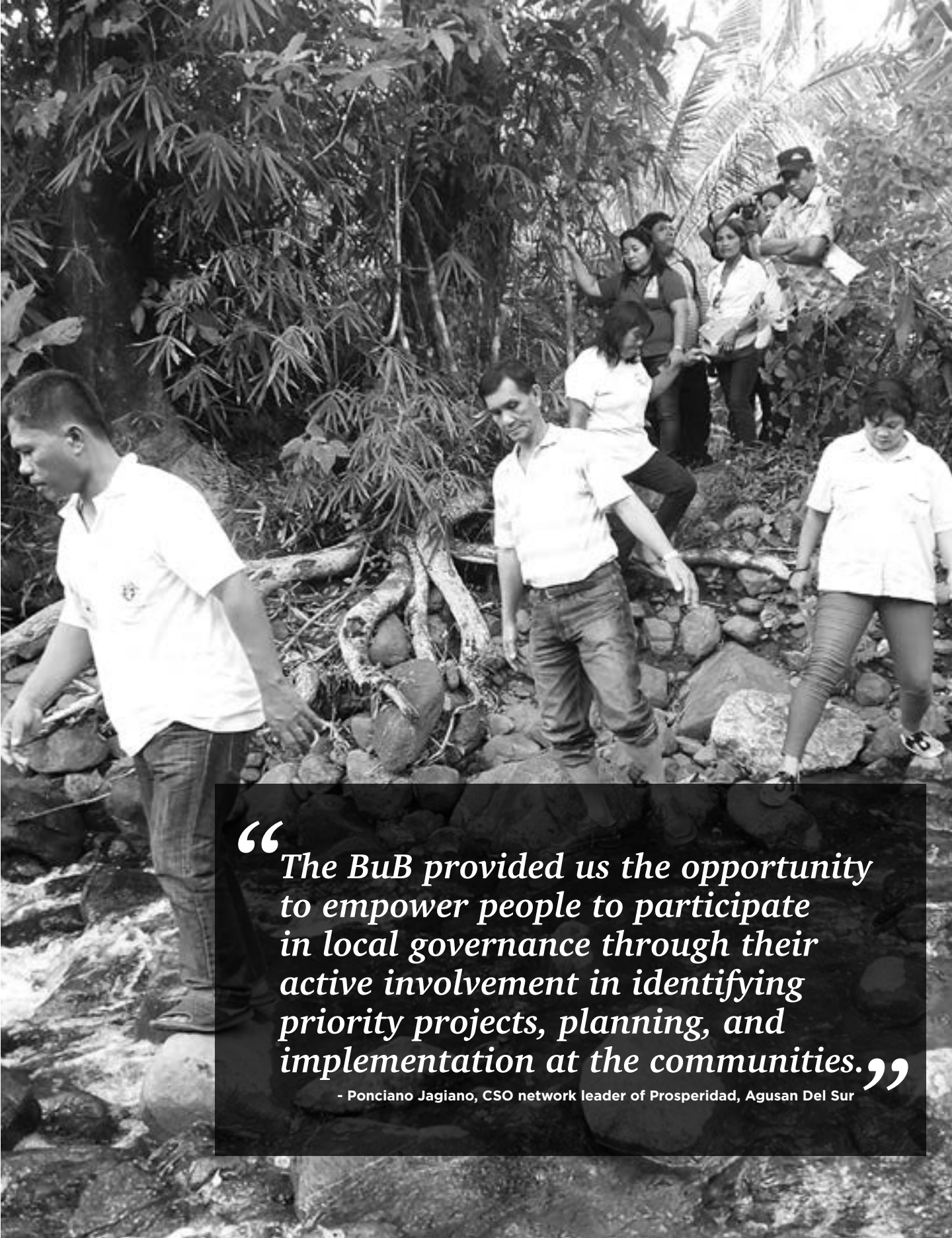
> *"The BuB provided us the opportunity to empower people to participate in local governance through their active involvement in identifying priority projects, planning, and implementation at the communities."*
>
> **- Ponciano Jagiano, CSO network leader of Prosperidad, Agusan Del Sur**

7

THE PEOPLE'S BUDGET: THE CASE OF HILONGOS

By Patricia Mae Peralta

The Visayas is not only home to some of the world's most beautiful beaches; it is also an incubation site for budding civil society and citizens' movement. As such, civil society organizations (CSOs) and local government units (LGUs) in most of its communities are collaborating on the budget process.

The Bottom-up Budgeting (BuB) Process is one of the reforms introduced by the Dept. of Budget and Management (DBM) under the presidency of Benigno Aquino III.

The BuB is an alternative budgetary process. The budget of the community is created with a bottom-up approach wherein members of the community through different civil society organizations, come together in an assembly to participate in identifying the needs of the community. The output from the assembly deliberation is a plan with a corresponding budget proposal.

The body then deliberates the project proposals by tackling issues before finally listing priorities. The result is then submitted to the LGU. Once the plan and proposed budget is approved, it will be submitted to the national government and this will be the reference for its eventual implementation.

A new concept introduced in the Philippine budget process, the BuB is relatively a new engagement even for CSOs. Moreover, it has yet to cover other communities and involve other government agencies in its implementation. However, in the municipality of Hilongos, Leyte, the BuB has been adopted and its implementation has brought out inspiring results.

Hilongos, a first-class municipality, boosts a vibrant CSO community who are actively involved in local governance initiatives including the BuB process. "The process is going smooth in Hilongos town because every organization is able to take part," said Rolando Lora.

Lora is a CSO leader who represented Campina Farmers Association of Hilongos and who is the co-chairperson in the Local Poverty Reduction Action Team (LPRAT).

The BuB engagement in Hilongos did not only serve as an empowerment mechanism for CSOs; it is also a poverty reduction intervention. One of the projects implemented under the BuB was a farm-to-market road.

Constructed from December 2012 to March 2013 with a budget of P11.5-million, the farm-to-market road benefited the community where it traversed especially farmers and market vendors.

According to Lora, the infrastructure project responded to the clamor of the community because transportation and transporting of goods in the area was difficult. "They could not bring their harvest to the markets on time. Considering the quality of the roads, it was difficult and it entailed a lot of additional cost," added Lora.

"Farmers, for instance, incur P50 as additional cost for transportation of goods. But now with the improved road, the cost was reduced to only P10 thereby minimizing operations cost while adding income and savings to the farmers," explained Lora.

The BuB also improved access to potable water. Many far-flung barangays in Hilongos have no access to water and with some who has no water at all. The BuB project was able to address this problem.

In April 2014, the Salintubig Water System commenced construction with a budget of P2-million.

"We were excited of the outcome of the project because water is crucial for people's sanitation and health. But for years it has been a major problem especially by hard to reach communities," described Lora.

We were excited of the outcome of the project because water is crucial for people's sanitation and health.

"The project can provide potable water and help supply household needs for sanitation including for bathing," said Lora.

The BuB initiative, however, is not only endowed by successful projects; there were also problem areas especially on projects that were approved yet failed to materialize. One good example is the P1.98-million Livelihood Assistance Project.

The project was supposedly intended to provide financial assistance for livelihood start-ups among basic sectors like taxi drivers, persons with disabilities, fisherfolks and the youth. Yet the livelihood support didn't reach the hands of the beneficiaries.

Edmund Loterte, a member of the youth sector, reported that the money they were supposed to receive was never awarded to them.

"We already had our photo taken with the signed check like in a turn-over ceremony, but what we got are our checks in pictures only," said Edmund Loterte, a member of the youth sector.

But in spite of these challenges, CSOs remain hopeful for the continuity of the BuB. Many believe that it can help address a lot of deficiencies in social services.

"As CSO leaders, we recognize that there is much work to do as far as the BuB is concerned because its implementation is still on infancy. Yet our experience illustrates the potential of the BuB to deliver needed services of the people," highlighted Lora.

The BuB is empowering CSOs and people in the communities to take part in decision-making and in local governance, hence and we are hopeful that it will be continued because the intervention is indeed for the masses," stressed Rolando Lora. ■

8

BUILDING ALLIANCES FOR LOCAL ENGAGEMENT

By Leo Lupango and Trinidad Mazo Eiman

In 2007, a very small number of civil society organizations (CSOs) were participating in local governance in the fourth-class municipality of Anini-y, Province of Antique. A major reason for the lack of participation is that only few CSOs were being invited in the planning and budgeting process.

If there are CSOs who participate, these are considered as merely compliance to the basic requirements of the law which highlight people's participation. Substantially, the local government gave little effort in identifying CSOs and inviting them to take part in process. Then again, not many CSOs were qualified to participate in the process because most were not accredited by the Sangguniang Bayan.

The situation transformed in 2013 when CODE-NGO introduced the project called "Citizens' Participation in Monitoring LGU Performance and Development Planning for Poverty Reduction" (CML). It was implemented in the municipality of Anini-y with the supervision of the Western Visayas Network of Social Development NGOs (WeVNet).

The implementation became a collaborative effort among WeVNet, Process Foundation-Panay and the Anini-y Civil Society Organization Alliance (ACSOA), a multi-sectoral network of CSOs organized for the engagement.

THE GAINS IN ALLIANCE BUILDING

The CML project became instrumental in stepping up CSO involvement in local governance by taking the first step of obtaining accreditation from the Sanggunian. It then joined hands with other CSOs, including those who were yet to get accreditation, for local government engagement.

It was resolved at the ACSOA level that CSOs in Anini-y support the initiatives and activities of the CML Project, especially that it was aimed to reduce poverty incidence in the municipality.

The alliance underwent a series of capability building seminars and training which helped prepare its members for constructive engagement with the LGU. Among the capability training conducted were the following: understanding legal basis of CSOs involvement in local governance; planning and budgeting; disaster risk reduction and management; climate change adaptation; and Bottom-up Budgeting (BuB).

On top of the capability building menu includes monitoring of LGU performance using the CSOs Satisfaction Report Card (CSRC).

A major component of the capacity building is the formulation of the Local Poverty Reduction Development Agenda (LPRDA) in 2013 and 2014. The LPRDA was used as basis for lobbying support in its engagement with the Local Poverty Reduction Action Team (LPRAT) of the BuB.

With guidance from WeVNet, members of ACSOA conducted regular meetings in order to discuss organizational matters, project developments, and activities related to the BuB.

Among accomplishments of ACSOA are the following:

- 50 percent increase in number of CSOs accredited by the Local Sanggunian;
- 100 percent increase in number of CSOs that actively participated in the Local Development Council, special bodies and other locally mandated units, and in local planning and budgeting processes;
- Transformed LGU perception on CSOs from being critics into genuine partners and effective agents for development;
- Ensured LGU resource support to CSOs through a CSO travel fund, particularly for CSOs participating in the local governance bodies, amounting to P50,000 annually for years 2014 to 2016;
- 70 percent of the projects in their LPRDA were successfully considered in the LPRAP;
- Alliance members elected as LPRAT members and became signatories to the LPRAP;
- Monitored and evaluated 13 BuB projects through the People-Led Monitoring and Evaluation System (PLMES) with Process Panay Foundation; and
- Evaluated BuB projects under a similar program executed by DILG.

THE CHALLENGES IT NEEDS TO OVERCOME

Its accomplishments, however, were equally met by challenges. The alliance confronted financial constraints in organizing and strengthening its network. The limitation, according to its leaders, also affected sustained CSO attendance in seminars, training and organizational activities.

The dynamism of the members also presented some challenges as CSO leaders register varied opinions on issues affecting local governance and analyses from engagement. Some members also expressed apprehension on the sustainability of engagement considering potential changes in leadership and in local administration because of the evolving political landscape.

SHARED LESSONS AND REALIZATIONS

According to the leaders of ACSOA, CSOs must think beyond the limits of what the government can do and offer to them; instead, they have to be actively involved in local governance as representatives of the people.

> *"The CML project became instrumental in stepping up CSO involvement in local governance."*

The ACSOA shared the following lessons from its involvement in project implementation:

- CSOs are valuable partners of the LGU in good governance and development initiatives;
- A good CSO network can boost public-private partnership and deliver positive results;
- Citizens' constructive engagement in the context of principled partnership must have the following considerations:
    - Open-mindedness of elected and appointed officials that transcends fear of authorities;
    - Cultivating friendship among partners;
    - Exercising professionalism and competence by LGU officials and treating everybody fairly and without discrimination;
    - Initiating dialogue in order to reach consensus;
    - Employing objectivity and diplomacy during discussions and in moderating debates on issues and concerns.

The alliance has also gathered lessons that would help other CSOs in organizing into networks:
- Every CSO member must be open-minded. Although each is entitled to his/her opinion, each must learn to respect and find wisdom in collective decisions;
- Engage in income-generating projects in order to sustain its operations;
- CSO Leaders must have the dedication and commitment in pursuing the goals of the organization and must also be conscious of the socio-economic needs of its members;
- The vision, mission and goals of the organization must be clear and understood among members and officers;
- Open communication is essential for transparency, as such holding regular meetings is important in order to maintain healthy dialogue;
- The learning process is a continuing effort, as such, capability building for CSO networks is to maintain constructive engagement; and
- CSOs must endeavor to build bridges with the LGU and other CSOs by making effort to establish harmonious relationship among different sectors.

MOVING THE NETWORK FORWARD

The ACSOA is hoping that CODE-NGO would formulate and publish a CSO Network Building Guide. The guide will be helpful in strengthening citizens' participation, particularly in reconstitution of Local Special Bodies and in engagement at the Executive-Legislative Agenda level.

The guide will be useful as a capacity building tool in local planning and budgeting and in understanding the processes of accounting, monitoring and evaluation. The guide will also be beneficial to both CSOs and local officials, especially that the country holds periodic elections and change of leadership is inevitable at the LGU.

Finally, it will encourage CSO networks to plan for and integrate income-generating projects in order to complement inadequate subsidies, attain some level of financial freedom, and enable CSOs to support CSO network members and personnel in the future. ■

9 OVERCOMING PERSONALITY POLITICS: EXPERIENCE BY SAN JORGE CSOs ON BuB ENGAGEMENT

By Gina Dean

Cesar Samantela bested other nominees for the position of co-chairperson of the Local Poverty Reduction Action Team (LPRAT) in the Municipality of San Jorge in the Province of Samar in an assembly held on February 11, 2014.

Samantela, who had served as chief executive of San Jorge in the 1970s, became known as a peace advocate and he represented the Senior Citizens' Federation of Samar in the assembly. His experience and competence earned him the support of majority of the civil society organizations (CSOs) present in the assembly, but with the exception of the local chief executive.

The mayor did not approve of Cesar Samantela as the elected co-chairperson for the LPRAT. It was learned that she could not see eye-to-eye with Samantela, saying she would never be comfortable working with someone who filed charges against her administration.

THE PROCESS OF DETERMINING REPRESENTATION

A fourth-class municipality, San Jorge was in the process of composing its LPRAT as part of the requirement for the Bottom-Up Budgeting (BuB) process. The assembly was part of the mandate to LGUs under the Joint Memorandum Circular (JMC) issued by the Dept. of Budget and Management (DBM), Dept. of Interior and Local Government (DILG), Dept. of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC), among others.

The JMC also states that the LPRAT composition must be 50-percent from LGU or government representatives and 50-percent CSOs. The local chief executive stands as the chairperson and a vice-chairperson is taken from CSOs, a representation voted upon by the CSOs among themselves during an assembly.

The LPRAT is the team responsible in coming up with the Local Poverty Reduction Action Plan (LPRAP), a plan required by the BuB to LGUs which contains "programs and projects collectively drawn through a participatory process by the LGU with CSOs and other stakeholders."

The plan is intended to address the needs of the poor and marginalized sector of the LGU; hence, the participation of the CSOs is crucial for they represent the different sectors of society. The next crucial step after identification of the priorities for the BuB project is the planning workshop and disagreements between the LGU and CSOs would cause delay, if not hinder, the process from moving.

COLD SHOULDER TO CSOs

In spite of subjecting himself in the process of selection among CSOs and eventually gathering the support as co-chairperson, Cesar Samantela was rejected by the local chief executive and CSOs received the cold shoulder as she walked-out from the assembly.

CSOs later learned that the local chief executive vented out her displeasure against Samantela by declaring her unwillingness to conduct the LPRAP workshop. "Should CSOs proceed to conduct the workshop, their efforts would be wasted for no government representative will participate in that workshop," statements gathered by the CSOs in the aftermath of the assembly.

The only way for the process to proceed smoothly was for the CSOs to reconsider its representation and change Samantela as LPRAT co-chairperson.

The participation of the CSOs is crucial for they represent the different sectors of society.

OFF-TRACK INTERVENTIONS

More people earned the ire of the chief executive because of the result.

Desperate for remedy and with the political pressure at hand, interventions were obviously going off-track. For instance, the Municipal Local Government Operations Officer (MLGOO) of San Jorge took the bold step by first, nullifying the election result, and second, by processing the nomination for CSO chairperson – an attempt to change the elected CSO representative sitting as the co-chairperson of the LPRAT.

Moreover, the MLGOO was even willing to go a step further by likewise changing the programs and projects that were identified for inclusion in the plan by the CSOs.

In an attempt to bring the process back on track, CSOs sought assistance from the office of the Provincial Local Government Operations, yet intervention was not adequate to resolve the problem.

DILG, CSO INTERVENTIONS TO MOVE FORWARD

The CML Project Management Team and officers of the Eastern Visayas Network of NGOs and POs (EVNet) assisted the CSOs of San Jorge in order to resolve the situation by presenting the issue to Regional Director Pedro Noval of the Dept. of Interior Local Government (DILG Region-8) and by discussing proposed steps to move forward.

The meeting and dialogue between the CSOs and the DILG Region-8 proposed the following steps:

1. To conduct the LPRAP workshop outside San Jorge in order to prevent direct conflict between two parties; or
2. To conduct the LPRAP workshop in San Jorge but without the co-chairperson attending the workshop.

In the same manner, CSO members of the LPRAT likewise presented the plan to LPRAT co-chairperson Samantela for his consideration. Samantela agreed to support the second option.

Both the DILG regional office and the CML Project Management Team took further action by initiating a close-door dialogue with the mayor for the purpose of peacefully resolving the issue between the CSOs and the LGU.

The team presented the option to the chief executive and encouraged her to allow the workshop to proceed in San Jorge without the attendance of the co-chairperson.

ATTAINING PEACEFUL SOLUTION AND INCLUSIVITY

On May 2, 2014, or after more than two months of impasse, the LPRAT of San Jorge was able to hold its planning workshop at its Municipal Council Session Hall and participated in by representatives from both the LGU and CSOs.
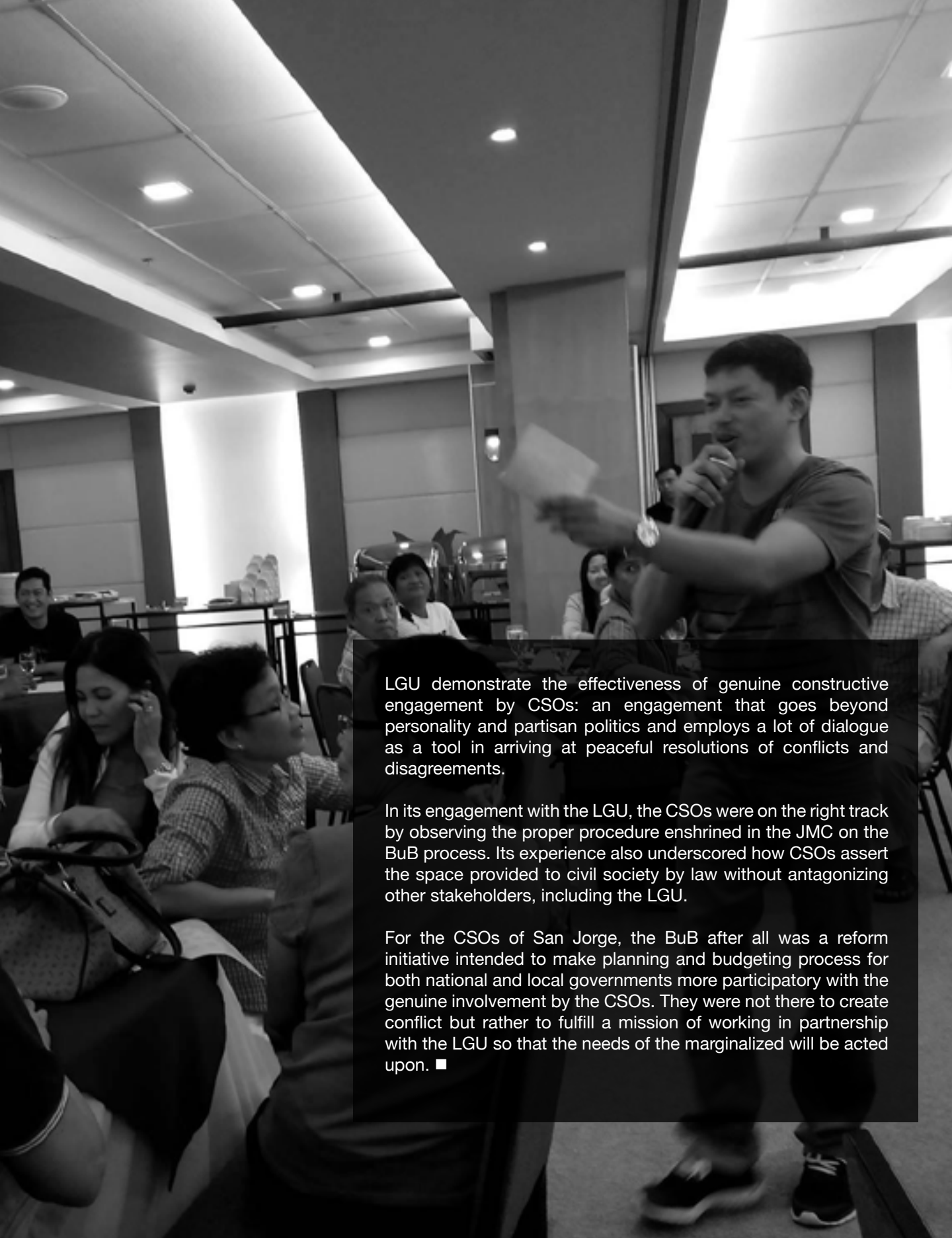
LGU demonstrate the effectiveness of genuine constructive engagement by CSOs: an engagement that goes beyond personality and partisan politics and employs a lot of dialogue as a tool in arriving at peaceful resolutions of conflicts and disagreements.

In its engagement with the LGU, the CSOs were on the right track by observing the proper procedure enshrined in the JMC on the BuB process. Its experience also underscored how CSOs assert the space provided to civil society by law without antagonizing other stakeholders, including the LGU.

For the CSOs of San Jorge, the BuB after all was a reform initiative intended to make planning and budgeting process for both national and local governments more participatory with the genuine involvement by the CSOs. They were not there to create conflict but rather to fulfill a mission of working in partnership with the LGU so that the needs of the marginalized will be acted upon. ∎

10

REAPING WHAT WE SOW IN MINDANAO

By Raizsa Mae M. Anayatin

It is said that building a partnership is like farming. There are four basic things needed to farm: prepare the ground, sow the seeds, nurture the growing plants and finally, harvest the fruits of your labor.

The story of the CML Project implementation by the Mindanao Coalition of Development NGO Networks (MINCODE) can be likened to farming with people for it underwent a similar process. It created genuine partnerships and built friendships along the way.

PREPARING THE GROUND

When the Bottom-Up-Budgeting (BuB) program was introduced in 2012, MINCODE and its member networks saw it as an opportunity to strengthen participatory local governance and development planning and budgeting. Considering that the members of the Coalition were all well-grounded in the priority municipalities that were identified for the project, the member organizations convened the civil society organizations (CSOs) and engaged in the BuB process.

The BuB engagement was viewed positively by local CSOs, because for the first time in the history of Philippine government, the national budget reflected priorities for allocation as guided by the needs identified at the grassroots level. For the CSOs, poverty reduction initiatives stood a chance to get its needed allocation under the BuB.

In Mindanao, the CML Project covered ten (10) municipalities across three (3) provinces and two (2) regions. These are the municipalities of Governor Generoso, San Isidro, Banay-Banay and Mati City in Davao Oriental; La Paz, San Luis and Prosperidad in Agusan Del Sur; and Barobo, Tagbina and Tago in Surigao Del Sur.

On the average, these municipalities have a population of 48,000. Most of these municipalities derive income from agriculture, fisheries, and, to some extent, mining. Poverty incidence in these municipalities average at 53 percent, varying from a low 30 percent in Mati City to a high 73 percent in San Luis.

SOWING THE SEEDS

The project allowed MINCODE and its member networks to engage in government's regional line agencies by strengthening collaboration. This strategy helped ensure that information is shared and flowed from and to the grassroots. Regional government agencies, hence, contacted the networks for consultations and meetings.

In the regional level, MINCODE is considered a partner for the promotion of participatory local governance by the Dept. of Interior and Local Government (DILG). At the municipal level, on the other hand, the CML project facilitated the formation of municipal CSO networks in all 10 municipalities.

The CML Project was timely and relevant. Aside from ensuring that local CSOs take part in the BuB process, it was also about organizing and strengthening networks to enable them to engage meaningfully with LGUs and government line agencies. By using the performance monitoring system, the project became instrumental in strengthening partnership and in facilitating feedback mechanism between LGUs and CSOs.

The CML Story: The Barobo CSO Network

In 2012, there were around 81 different organizations and associations from various sectors present in the municipality of Barobo in Surigao Del Sur. Very few organizations, however, were recognized by the local government unit.

Through the CML Project, these enabled organizations acquired needed capacities, strengthening and empowerment and resulting into a network now called Barobo Civil Society Organization Network.

It was officially formed in 2013 and was facilitated by the Kasilak Development Foundation Inc., a member of MINCODE. Through the project, various consultations, meetings and planning sessions were conducted. These activities facilitated the coming together of the CSO representatives from various sectors. By coming together, various sectors were able to identify common issues and concerns from their municipalities which can be addressed by working together and consolidating efforts.

The Barobo CSO Network created a Local Poverty Reduction Development Agenda and started to engage with the LGU. The agenda was brought to the ELA-AIP 2014-2016 budget planning process. The network also participates actively in the formulation of BuB plans from 2014 to 2016. Some members of the Barobo CSO Network also serve as volunteers for the Project Monitoring and Evaluation Team for both BuB and LGU programs.

As a result of its organized work, the LGU of Barobo allocated P150,000 for 2015 and P170,000 for 2016 as support for the conduct of Barobo CSO network's activities.

The municipal government had recognized CSOs as partners for transparent governance and genuine development. Through its effort, the Barobo CSO Network was able to establish a CSO desk in order to facilitate how issues and concerns by CSOs in the municipality can be addressed and likewise serve as the secretariat for all CSOs.

The partnership resulted in the timely and efficient facilitation of its community's needs and improved transparency and accountability while strengthening public-private partnership.

NURTURING THE GROWING PLANTS

Through the project, various capacity building activities were undertaken. The local CSOs were trained on how to monitor performance of their respective LGUs by introducing the concept of constructive engagement. They were guided on how to come up with their local poverty reduction and development agenda which became the basis for their engagement with LGUs. The skills of CSO leaders in negotiating and lobbying for the inclusion of their agenda and priority projects were also sharpened.

The process and engagement improved the knowledge of local CSOs on local development planning, budgeting and governance and upgraded their understanding of the guidelines being adopted by government agencies like Joint Memorandum Circulars for BuB engagement. The CML Project nurtured local CSOs to participate proactively with their LGUs and communities.

HARVESTING THE FRUITS

The fruits of the CML Project have by now been harvested in the form of 10 organized municipal CSO networks – all nested at CML project areas. This is illustrated on the following:

- 10 organized municipal CSO networks composed of around 15-30 CSO representatives
- CSO Desks established in four (4) municipalities: Tago, Banay-Banay, Barobo and Tagbina.
- CSO Day Commemoration in the Municipality of Tago integrated on its foundation week celebration.
- Three LGUs have invested in organizing CSOs and building their capacities by providing annual budget for CSO activities.
    - In Tago, around P800,000.00 has been allocated as CSO support fund for 2015, while CSO capacity building, meetings and relevant activities are included in the local investment plan for 2016.
    - In Banay-Banay, P250,000.00 has also been allocated by the LGU as support fund for CSOs for 2015 which may be used for capacity building.
    - The same support for CSOs in Barobo and Tagbina are extended by its LGUs.
- Municipal CSO networks acquired legitimacy by having registered either with SEC, DOLE or in its local governments allowing them to become independent, enabling them to implement projects, and enhance their negotiating weight with LGUs.

The story of the CML Project engagement in Mindanao demonstrated that citizens' participation in local governance is essential if we intend to attain development and progress starting from our localities. While CSOs has a lot more to learn on effective engagement with government and other stakeholders, the accomplishments of the project revealed that there is a good harvest in constructive engagement especially if we properly prepare the ground, plant the appropriate seeds and nurture it. By doing so will allow us to reap what we sow. ∎

PROJECT PARTNERS

The implementing partners of CODE-NGO in project implementation were five member networks, namely: Eastern Visayas Network of NGOs and POs (EVNET), Western Visayas Network of Social Development NGOs (WeVNet), Mindanao Coalition of Development NGO Networks (MINCODE), the Philippine Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Areas (PhilDHRRA), and the Association of Foundations Philippines (AF).

The frontline member base organizations that directly implemented this project in the communities were Antique Development Foundation (ADF), Eastern Samar Social Development Organization (ESSDOG), Kasilak Development Foundation (KASILAK), Leyte Family Development Organization Multi-Purpose Cooperative (LEFADO), Pambansang Kilusan ng mga Samahang Magsasaka (PAKISAMA) – Mindanao, Philippine Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Areas (PhilDHRRA) – Mindanao Region, Process Foundation – Panay, Samar Island NGO Consortium, and Western Samar Development Foundation (WESADEF).

A Project Steering Committee was formed with representatives from CODE-NGO, AF, PHILDHRRA, WEVNET, EVNET, and MINCODE, and the Project Manager. The Committee provided overall direction and oversight for the project.

The Project Advisory Committee is composed of representatives of the Dept. of Interior and Local Government (DILG), Dept. of Budget and Management (DBM), Dept. of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), and the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC). The advisory committee provided feedback and advice through semi-annual meetings.

PROJECT STAFF

The Project Management Team was composed of: Paul Richard A. Paraguya, Project Manager; Deanie Lyn Ocampo, Capacity Building Officer; Sandino J. Soliman, Advocacy Officer; Renato A. Garbo Jr., Finance and Administrative Officer; and Cecilia D. Delfin, Finance and Administrative Assistant.

The Regional Coordinators were Gina Dean, Mary Jane R. Homena, and Raizsa Mae M. Anayatin. The Finance and Administration Assistants were Christopher H. Tan, Jessica Jose-Teves, and Violeta R. Cesar.

There were twelve Area Coordinators. For Mindanao: Alfredo Latasa, Jr., Grace Cebuala, Racquel Sanlucan, and Roy Consolacion. In Eastern Visayas, Efren C. Hipe, James E. Lopez, Josefa Pizon, Luz Amor M. Buenaventura, Mifael Llauderes, and Vincent Ben G. Avila. In Western Visayas: Mark E. Templora and Richard M. Lestino.
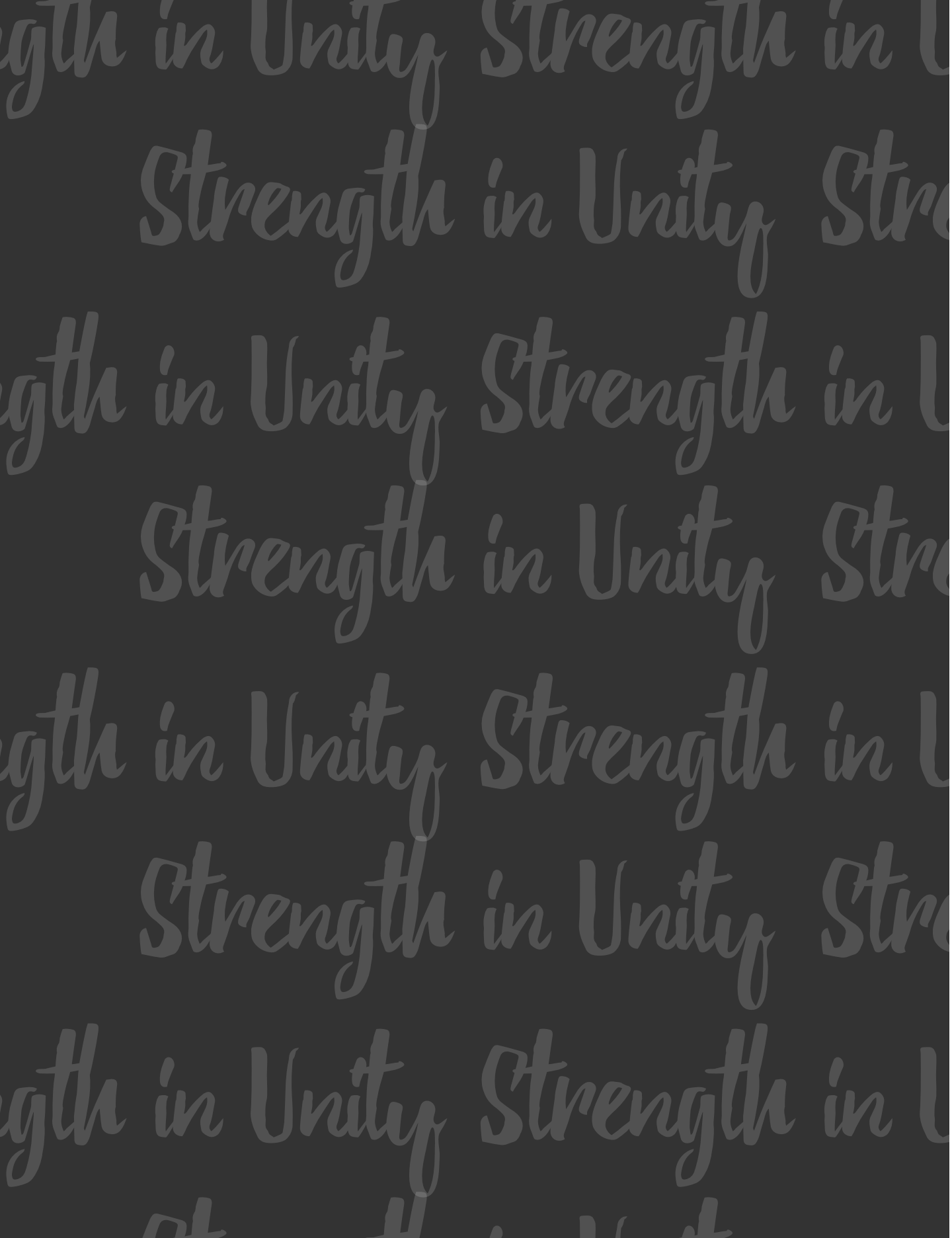
THE CITIZENS' PARTICIPATION IN MONITORING OF LGU PERFORMANCE AND DEVELOPMENT PLANNING FOR POVERTY REDUCTION (CML) PROJECT EXPERIENCE

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