

Applying Open Contracting in the Department of Budget and Management's Digital Information for Monitoring and Evaluation (DIME) Project

Background

Civil society participation is an important element of good and open governance. It is also recognized that for civil society to meaningfully participate, information on government processes, projects, and policies must be accessible. Government contracting information, for one, is information that citizens and civil society organizations (CSOs) are interested in. Government contracting is an important process because it is a means for delivering goods and services to the people.

The DIME Project of the Department of Budget and Management is a fairly new initiative and CODE-NGO would like to take part in shaping its framework and mechanism for citizen and civil society participation. In its initial design, DIME is an internal management program of the DBM where on-going big-ticket public projects are tracked in terms of physical accomplishment using digital imaging technologies such as satellite imaging and drones, as well as tracked in terms of fund utilization through budget data.

The challenge that CODE-NGO aimed to address in this initiative is the lack of contracting information (e.g., project areas, costs, technical specifications, timeframe and contractor) of the big ticket or high-value government projects covered in DIME. This restricts civil society participation in providing appropriate and meaningful feedback through the DIME platform.

Methodology

CODE-NGO engaged government both at the national and local levels for this project in the course of 12 months. At the national level, CODE-NGO forged partnership with the DBM, particularly the Office of the Chief Information Officer who leads the implementation of DIME. At the local level, selected CODE-NGO members and partners engaged their local government units in order to conduct monitoring of infrastructure projects that are under Project DIME.

1. Training on DIME and Open Contracting

Five (5) organizations who are members and partners of CODE-NGO were tapped to participate in the training held on November 19-21, 2019. The training aimed to: a) raise awareness of participants on open contracting principles, public procurement process, and Project DIME, and b) Develop skills of participants to apply open contracting principles in monitoring projects under DIME.

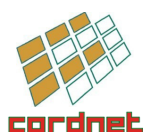
The 5 organizations who participated in the training were:



Coalition for Bicol Development (CBD)
a network of CSOs based in the Bicol Region



Philippine Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Areas (PHILDHRA)
a national network of NGOs working for rural development



Cordillera Network of NGOs and POs (CORDNET)
a network of CSOs based in the Cordillera Administrative Region



Partnership for Philippine Support Service Agencies (PHILSSA)
a national network of NGOs working for resiliency and the welfare of the urban poor.



Aksyon sa Kahandaan sa Kalamidad at Klima (AKKMA)
a national network of People's Organizations focused on mitigating disaster risks primarily through preparedness

2. Action Research/Monitoring

At the local level, the 5 partner organizations carried out action research/monitoring of infrastructure projects covered in DIME. They were given flexibility in terms of the methodology and tools to be utilized for monitoring. As a general guide, the local partners would use contracting information shared by the DBM during the training as reference and apply their learning in the training as they assess project data and present findings to government stakeholders and in their final reports. The monitoring would provide various models of CSO monitoring that DBM could consider in future partnerships with CSOs.

3. Consultation for DIME's Process Manual

At the national level, CODE-NGO led in the conduct of consultation with CSOs for the DIME Process Manual. Specifically, the DIME team sought inputs for its Functional Requirements Document which provides for the function that a component of DBM must perform in relation to monitoring and evaluation. Five (5) organizations participated in the online consultation held on June 5, 2020. The scope of the consultation is as follows: a) Gathering comments on projects and receiving feedback/responses to close the loop (for online and offline modes), and b) Engaging CSOs for validating projects –types of support needed by CSOs, technical capacity needed, and mode of engagement or partnership.

Project Outputs

1. Results of Monitoring of Projects under DIME

Because of differences in scope and methodology, the monitoring results varied. It is worth noting that there were partner organizations that focused on quantitative analysis, while there are those that employed qualitative analysis.

1. In general, all projects monitored were found in the specified locations and were still being used.
2. There were minor discrepancies between data provided by the DBM and the actual, observed findings of the partner organizations. For instance, in terms of physical target, the length of some roads measured by the partner organization is 100-200 meters less compared to the length specified in project data.
3. There were projects observed to already have defects, such as cracks and surface scaling.
4. Based on interviews of project beneficiaries, all projects provided benefits to the communities, such as ease of transport of goods resulting to lower transport cost, lesser travel time, and better accessibility of far-flung communities.

Since the monitoring was done in a limited span of time and with limited resources, there were findings or observations that needed unpacking or in-depth analysis. For instance, an access road leading to Busuanga Airport is not yet fully completed as observed by the monitors, and yet, the local officials were not able to explain why since the project was not turned over yet to them. There were also projects with high project costs as reflected in the DIME data set, but differed on the project cost posted in the project board/tarpaulin found in the community.

2. Outputs from the CSO Consultation on DIME's Process Manual

Under CODE-NGO's commitment in 5th NAP as partner CSO of DBM, CODE-NGO led the conduct of online consultation to gather feedback for the participatory mechanism of DIME.

For the first part of the workshop, participants were asked for inputs on how the DBM could gather comments or feedback on projects under DIME. Further, they were asked how responses to the comments or feedback could be relayed back to close the feedback loop. The mechanisms for gathering are through online and offline modes.



Table 4. Gathering comments on projects and Receiving feedback/responses to close the loop

1) Gathering comments on projects		2) Receiving feedback/responses to close the loop	
a) How can citizens and CSOs give comments on projects under DIME?	b) What pre-conditions or requirements should be in place to ensure that comments are effectively received?	a) How can the DIME team relay the response/feedback on the citizens and CSOs' comments?	b) What pre-conditions or requirements should be in place to ensure that comments are effectively received?
ONLINE			
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Crowd-sourced platform 2. Through social media platform (Facebook page, Twitter, Viber, etc) 3. DIME Website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stable internet connection • Data is accessible • Assigned platform manager • Info dissemination plans, include user training • Platform should be inclusive and user-friendly • Develop a chatbot • Standards/manual of operations, including clear feedback mechanism and provisions on security of users 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through website • Social media platforms • Satisfaction rating system • Consolidated report published on a regular basis (through website and social media) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designated staff • Tracking system • Standards/manual of operations, including system for prioritization of comments • Training of staff for the tracking system
OFFLINE			
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Telephone (phone call) 2. Text hotline (may utilize existing citizens' hotline of government) 3. Snail mail 4. Localized radio program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designated staff (to attend to calls/messages, to validate comments) • Info dissemination plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telephone (phone call) • Text messages • Periodic release of consolidated responses via radio program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designated staff • Training of staff • Standards/Manual of operations, for validating and processing comments • Tracking system/database of comments and responses

The second part of the workshop sought inputs on needs of CSOs in case they would be tapped in validating local projects. The summary of workshop outputs is shown in Table 2.

Table 5: Support for CSOs in validating projects

Types of support required by CSO	Possible mode of partnership
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Capacity building on the following topics: use of DIME portal, geo-tagging, basic data analytics and visualization, basic building/infra standards (ex: standard width and thickness of farm-to-market roads), data-driven advocacy 2 Financial support – for communications/accessing internet and travel 3 Personnel support – focal persons from DBM for coordination 4 Provision of equipments/gadgets (where possible) 	<p>Institutional partnership through Memorandum of Agreement:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. NGA-CSO-Academe 2. NGA-CSO-LGU

Policy Recommendations

With the wealth of information and experience gathered by CODE-NGO and its partner organizations in engaging DBM, the following recommendations are put forth for the DIME team's consideration:

- 1. There are various types of non-government partners that can be tapped by DBM based on the skill and capacity required in the undertaking.** Academic institutions and business groups can be engaged for researches, determining project impacts, and generating innovative ideas. CSOs, particularly those with networks or presence in various geographic areas, can be engaged for project validation, conduct of surveys, and outreach activities.
- 2. Community-based CSOs are in a good position to conduct monitoring or validation of infrastructure projects.** They are familiar with site locations and can leverage their existing partnerships with local governments to get project information. They can also provide local context on the projects to be monitored. As seen in the reports of partner organizations, they were able to effectively validate the presence and usability of the projects under DIME.
- 3. Depending on the scope of monitoring and monitoring tools to be used, capacity building of CSOs is imperative.** To effectively conduct project monitoring in the context of DIME, the areas where capacities of CSOs need to be enhanced are in geo-tagging, data analysis, and infrastructure standards.
- 4. The Memorandum of Agreement between local CSOs and DBM (or other agencies) on project monitoring should include allotment of resources, especially for the conduct of the monitoring field activities.** Local CSOs are willing to provide counterpart contribution in terms of volunteer time, sharing of monitoring tools, and other expertise that are inherent to the organization (ex. translation of project documents or tools to local dialect).
- 5. Security and protection of partners conducting monitoring should be taken into account in the DIME Operations Manual.** Measures in this regard can be cited in the institutional partnership agreement forged between the DBM and the partner organization. For instance, local monitors can undergo training with the DBM and once the training is completed, they are deputized or endorsed. Therefore, any form of threats or aggression towards the local partners can be

reported to the DBM or its partner agencies, with equivalent action.

- 6. Offline and online modes of gathering inputs can both be utilized by the DBM.** As an effect of the pandemic, most communication and implementation of activities have shifted online. But still, there are areas with connectivity challenges and these are the areas where consultation and project monitoring are needed. An offline mechanism for consultation and monitoring that can be implemented by the DBM Regional Offices may be considered, since the regional offices are nearer and more accessible to local-based CSOs.
- 7. The development of the DIME Operations Manual is a good initiative, and subjecting it to a participatory process will result to a more responsive and people-centered system. We encourage the DBM to continue the conversations with the non-government sector, especially local-based ones.**
- 8. The DIME Transparency Portal/website should include not only complete project information, but updated or timely information as well.** The website has the potential as an information and advocacy tool for various non-government stakeholders. The DBM should look into not only the supply side of it (i.e., disclosing the data) but the demand side as well (i.e., making sure that someone is using the disclosed data). Thus, the **need for outreach and communication plan for DIME.**

What is project DIME?



Monitoring high value government projects has been a challenge. A big chunk of our national budget is appropriated yearly to infrastructure projects such as construction of roads, bridges, school buildings and health facilities. Having said that, it is essential to ensure that allotted budget for these agencies are implemented and felt by the Filipino people.

In March 2018, the Department of Budget and Management in partnership with the Department of Science and Technology launched Project D.I.M.E (Digital Imaging for Monitoring and Evaluation). It uses existing technologies such as satellites, drones and geotagging in monitoring the status, program and activities of big ticket government projects. Overseeing in far-flung areas wherein physical inspection would prove difficult is especially dependent on these technologies to ensure the government and the people's money is well spent.