



Monitoring Road Construction in Abra Province, Philippines

CSO:	Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government (CCAGG)
Years:	2009 – 2011
Country:	Abra Province, Philippines
Amount:	\$ 22,500 USD
Sector:	Controlling Corruption in Infrastructure Services: Water & Roads

Corruption Problem:	Corrupt contractors build a sub-standard road and the oversight authority does not act decisively
Tools employed:	Capacity Building, Third Party Monitoring, Awareness Raising, Constructive Engagement, Advocacy, Community Empowerment, Research

Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government (CCAGG), a local CSO, set out to strengthen and enhance the transparency and ethical standards within the agencies involved in the water and irrigation systems sector in the Abra province. Key objectives of the “Abra Water and Irrigation Systems (AWIS) Watch Project” included improving public awareness on the extent of corruption affecting the water and irrigation system projects in the province and enhancing the capacities of CSOs, beneficiaries and communities in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating water and irrigation system projects. The community involvement resulted in successful monitoring activities such as the account portrayed in this case study, where CCAGG’s involvement has resulted in government action to hold service providers accountable and provide better services to the citizens living and working in Abra.

Corruption Problem Addressed

The volunteer monitors were heatedly arguing with the contractor’s workers. The volunteers counted 26 bags of cement being mixed with the aggregates. But the workers were insisting “It’s 36”. The volunteers suggested counting the fresh cement bags strewn around. The workers would

not hear of it. As a result the volunteers walked out of the batching plant and sought the shade of a nearby tree along the highway where the construction of a 4.5 kilometer road was in progress, currently in the process of laying the concrete. The volunteers waited for the transit mixer to pass by to see into which road station it would pour the concrete mixture. Eventually observing the pouring, the volunteers finally left.

A weak concrete mixture, a poor sub-base preparation, the use of oversized aggregates and the presence of longitudinal and transversal cracks as well as honeycombs were the observations that prompted CCAGG to request the Central Office of the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) to suspend the implementation of the 4.5 kilometer road concreting along the Abra – Ilocos Sur Road and to send investigators.

Actions Taken by CCAGG

CCAGG was monitoring the road construction as part of its Abra Water and Irrigation Systems Watch project (AWIS), implemented with grant support from PTF. DPWH knows CCAGG is a no nonsense group. In response, it sent its quality assurance team from the Cordillera region. However, this team seemed to be in a hurry and

dismissed CCAGG’s complaints lightly. The quality assurance team tried to appease the volunteers, insisting that the road project was still on-going, that the contractor however agreed to implement corrective measures at his expense. Angry about this half-hearted response, CCAGG sent another communication to the Secretary, urging the DPWH to send another team of investigators that could not be bribed into not investigating the veracity of CCAGG’s complaint. CCAGG also requested for a boring machine to take cylindrical samples and to subject the same to laboratory testing.

While CCAGG was waiting for the arrival of the requested experts, its own team of engineers and other volunteers did a straight line diagram of the finished stretch of road where they reflected all observed defects.

When the experts from the Bureau of Research and Standards from DPWH’s Central Office arrived in Abra, they brought with them the requested boring machine. A tedious process of ascertaining the truthfulness of CCAGG’s complaint followed which took several days. The investigators went over project documents, visited the project, and interviewed the project engineer and the engineer responsible for testing materials. Other stakeholder interviewed included the engineer of the contractor, residents along the highway, and CCAGG itself. When the experts asked for the exact location where the boring machine will pierce the pavement for the samples, the volunteer monitors readily acceded. Thirteen locations of the road were bored. Each slab was numbered and guarded to ensure that the samples would not be replaced by evildoers. When these slabs were brought to the laboratory, the CCAGG went along.

Findings of the tests included:

- ✓ Laboratory tests showed that the concrete mix used in the pavement had low compressive

strength. The samples met the required thickness but failed miserably in compressive strength. The required average compressive strength for concrete pavement should be equal to 24.12 MPa (3,500 psi) or more and no individual sample should be deficient by more than 15%. The low compressive strength was attributed to the oversized aggregates, and the unwashed and unscreened fine aggregates in the mix.

- ✓ Three major cracks were found.
- ✓ The road shoulders were not compacted simultaneously with the roadbed making it difficult to compact the shoulders using road rollers especially on sections where the roadway was already paved.
- ✓ Base materials were not used in some portions of the roadbed when the concrete was poured in the pavement.



A team of volunteers ready to jump into action

Recommendations by the experts included:

- ✓ The contractor should remove the concrete pavement with low compressive strength along the entire 1.5 kilometers, half lane intermittent sections and replace the same at his expense.



- ✓ The material engineer should redesign or make trial mixes of concrete that meets the required compressive strength.
- ✓ The materials engineer should explain in writing why the core samples taken from the replaced concrete pavement attained low compressive strength while the records obtained from the Regional Office attested they had met the flexural strength.
- ✓ The project engineer should explain in writing why the defective works were allowed to happen and.
- ✓ The chief of the construction division should also explain in writing why the contractor was allowed a slippage of -79% at the time of the investigation and that no catch up plan was required of him. A slippage of -20% generally merits the termination of a contract as per Dept. Order #102, series of 1988.

The secretary of the DPWH wrote a memorandum requiring the project engineer to explain the deficiencies of the project despite his presence. He was also tasked to observe how the contractor performs regarding the portions that failed to meet the required standards.

Impact and Results Achieved

After the issuance of the memorandum by the Secretary, no immediate action was taken by the DPWH Regional Office. What followed was like a game of ping-pong: The CCAGG urged the DPWH to act and come up with sanctions against the erring officials and not be content with just the required explanations in writing. The contractor in turn pleaded with CCAGG to withdraw its complaint but CCAGG remained steadfast in its decision. CCAGG

referred the matter to DPWH pressing the department to act. Finally, DPWH ordered the contractor to remove and replace the 1.5 kilometer stretch of substandard road at its own expense. Following this request, the project engineer resigned out of shame.

The above illustrates well how CCAGG's work makes a difference under the AWIS project. The project is nearly complete and discussions are being conducted with the regional offices of DPWH and other government agencies to report the monitoring findings and to probe into the reasons for the failures of the government's own accountability systems. This dialogue will also be taken up with the central offices of the concerned departments.

Documentation

Project completion reports (PCRs) and Project completion assessments (PCAs) can be accessed at www.ptfund.org under the "Where-we-work" tab.

The CCAGG website can be accessed at <http://www.ccagg.com/>

CCAGG's track record can be accessed at http://www.ccagg.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=19&Itemid=27

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