

PARTNERSHIP FOR TRANSPARENCY FUND

PHILIPPINES

Participatory Monitoring for Barangay Infrastructure and Health Projects in the Province of Isabela

Project Completion Assessment

Background

Isabela province is located in the northeastern part of Luzon. Its Governor, Grace Padaca, is one of the country's young reform minded politicians who is currently serving her second term as Governor of the province. The Governor wished to see a strengthening of citizens' participation in governance, specifically in improving transparency and accountability in the use of public funds and local service delivery. Each year the provincial government provides financial assistance to many of the over 1,000 barangays (villages) for the implementation of small projects but the provincial government lacks the capacity to monitor the use of these funds sufficiently closely.

To support the provincial government in these efforts, the civil society organization InciteGov proposed to PTF the Participatory Monitoring Project. On 24 June 2008 PTF approved a grant of \$25,069 for the Project to be disbursed in three tranches. A completion report on the project prepared by InciteGov was submitted in August 2009 and supplementary information was received on 24 November 2009.

The purpose of this report is to assess whether the purposes of the grant were achieved and to draw out lessons for InciteGov and PTF. The report is based on a review of available reports

In this report the following questions will be addressed:

1. Has the project achieved its objectives?
2. What is the project's impact? Can it be quantified? Can it be sustained?
3. What lessons can be learned from the project? Can the project be replicated elsewhere?
4. What follow-up actions are needed?

1. Achievement of Project Objectives

The general objective of the project was to increase transparency in the use of provincial funds allotted to municipalities and barangays for infrastructure and health projects (in the case of the latter, particularly for the procurement of medicines for the provincial and district hospitals).

Specific project objectives were:

1. Introduce monitoring and evaluation of end users for village level infrastructure and health projects; and
2. Establish standards for transparency in the allocation and utilization of public funds at the local level.

Ultimately the project intended to set up, in partnership with the provincial government, systems to improve transparency in the use of public funds at the local level, and to empower civil society organizations as watchdog to ensure appropriate and efficient delivery of basic services. A specific result of the project would be the passing of an ordinance by the Sangguniang Panlalawigan (provincial board) adopting a standard for transparency in the allocation and use of funds.

Achievements

Under the project, 70 volunteer monitors were trained and organized in monitoring teams, 3 infrastructure teams (one less than the 4 teams envisaged in the project design) and 2 health teams. The infrastructure teams monitored 18 projects with a total value of P13.7 million (\$285,000). The health teams monitored drug procurement practices, including questions such as what drugs were bought, whether the needed drugs were bought at the right time and at the right price, and how they were distributed.

The monitoring of selected infrastructure and health projects by the volunteers resulted in an interaction with and exposure to the government personnel involved in these projects. In the process local government personnel have become used to community members attending and asking questions during the *Ugnayan ng Bayan* (community assembly) sessions. Both parties appear to acknowledge and appreciate the importance of transparency and accountability and the participation of community members in these projects. At two problem solving and one synthesis session the findings of the teams were reported and discussed.

The completion report does not provide evidence that standards have been developed or systems set up, the second objective of the project. Also, no ordinance was passed by the provincial council.

2. Impact and Sustainability

The training of volunteer monitors during the project and their later deployment to monitor specific projects were important and will have sensitized both government officials and volunteers to the importance of transparency in procurement and project implementation.

However, since no standards were developed, no systems set up and no provincial ordinance passed, there are serious doubts about sustainability. Moreover on 8 December 2009 the provincial governor Grace Padaca, who was a key figure for the initiative, was removed from office by the Commission on Election in favor of former governor

Benjamin Dy, who had contested the results of the 2007 elections. This must cast further doubts on the sustainability of the work initiated under the project.

3. Lessons Learned and Replicability

The project concept was a sound and important one. Large amounts of money are spent on local infrastructure projects and improving the transparency in the way these funds are spent is critical. However, the project shows that merely training and deploying volunteers is not sufficient. More efforts should be put into designing systems that ensure sustainability. The fact that InciteGov is based in Manila and relied on local partners in distant Isabela province to implement the project may partly explain why not sufficient effort was put into creating more durable monitoring systems.

The project finally demonstrates that seemingly strong political support can evaporate quickly.

4. Follow-up

No request was received for a follow-up project.

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