



Helping Department of Education Improve Procurement and Distribution of Textbooks

CSO:	G-Watch
Years:	2003 - 2013
Country:	Manila, Philippines
Amount:	\$ 169,000 USD
Sector:	Delivery of Social Service

Corruption Problem:	The books provided by the Department of Education were poorly made and often delivered several months late, if at all.
Tools Employed:	Awareness raising, training local CSOs citizen monitors, local information hubs

G-Watch is a program of the Ateneo School of Government (ASG), organically a unit of the Ateneo de Manila University. In 2001 and 2002, G-Watch conducted a study of 32 school districts. The study found many problems such as: about 40% of the textbooks procured could not be accounted for; the scheduling of deliveries was plagued by problems as there were no clear guidelines on when to deliver and where; the principals were not notified about the deliveries of the books; and there were no penalties for late delivery.

The study found a receptive audience in the new reform minded leadership at the Department of Education (DepEd). Following consultation, a DepEd and civil society collaborative program, known as Textbook Count, was launched to improve efficiency and reduce corruption in textbook monitoring and distribution. The G-Watch activities in the Textbook program were supported for ten years (2003-2013) by 5 PTF grants totaling about US\$169,000.00. Although PTF funding has ended, G-Watch continues to engage with the DepEd and is discussing proposals to ensure sustainability. The program achieved significant results. These are documented in project completion reports

submitted to PTF and independent evaluations carried out by PTF. This program is also discussed in the PTF book “Citizens Against Corruption: Report from the Front Line” (2013). In addition, the Textbook Count was subjected to a research study under the ‘Innovations for Successful Societies Program’ of the Princeton University. We gratefully acknowledge that this chapter draws heavily on the Princeton study (2013) in addition to the PTF materials.

Corruption Problem Addressed and Project Objectives

G-Watch study found that the procurement and distribution of textbooks by the DepEd was affected by corruption and weak quality controls. The books had poor bindings, printing defects, and missing pages. Without a fixed schedule, publishers sometimes delivered textbooks several months after the start of the school year or failed to deliver them; 21% of difficult-to-reach elementary schools did not receive any shipments. Studies documented that nearly 40% of the books were never delivered. In 2002 DepEd reached out to CSOs to help address these problems. G-Watch responded by piloting “Textbook Count” project in



partnership with other CSOs, including the Boy Scouts of the Philippines (BSP) and the Girl Scouts of the Philippines (GSP). In later years the program was expanded to cover monitoring of school construction. The G-Watch program evolved from a very successful effort to reduce the costs of textbooks and ensure their delivery to the remotest of schools to an ambitious program of addressing school construction and furniture procurement at the local level.

Approaches, Methods and Tools Used to Address the Problem

To ensure transparency and integrity in procurement, G-Watch trained and deployed volunteers to attend bid openings and witness deliberations of the department's Bids and Awards Committee, which evaluated bid proposals. This was in accordance with the 2003 Procurement Law.

G-Watch and other NGOs were also invited to inspect physical quality of textbooks before the books were shipped to schools. G-Watch sent detailed instructions to volunteers before the start of the deliveries. With volunteers in place, G-Watch coordinated warehouse inspections with DepEd as the textbooks were getting printed and bundled. Department officials, G-Watch, NAMFREL, and community volunteers inspected the textbooks' physical quality including misprints, double prints, blank pages, and missing pages. After inspecting the shipment, they would sign an Inspection and Acceptance Report, noting any errors or discrepancies. DepEd asked publishers to rectify any defects detected before making deliveries.

In 2005, the project piloted innovative approaches for delivering textbooks using Coca Cola delivery trucks, the BSP and GSP, and creating human chains as delivery mechanisms, to get the books delivered from district offices to local schools.

In 2010, the G-Watch project piloted use of citizen monitors to observe all stages of the procurement process at the regional/divisional level and expanded monitoring to include procurement for school buildings and school furniture as these take place at the regional/divisional level while the textbooks are procured at national level.

In 2011, with PTF support, G-Watch introduced Division level Local Hubs. The idea was that the local hubs could use the methodologies previously developed by G-Watch projects for monitoring procurement of textbooks, school construction and school furniture. G-Watch recruited local CSOs and trained the staff that would be assigned to the local hubs. The local hubs in turn worked with the school-based monitoring teams, which monitored projects in their schools, processed the monitoring results and sent reports to the National Coordinating Groups.

Results Achieved

Overall textbook count initiatives have had significant success over the years. Leakages in service delivery were greatly reduced. Due to due diligence and, systematic monitoring and the safeguarding of best practices in procurement, Textbook Count has been able to reduce the prices of textbooks and reduce the time allotted for procurements. The results achieved under the Textbook count program are comprehensively documented in the Princeton study, completion reports by G-Watch to PTF and the independent evaluation assessment by PTF. As noted this program was a collaborative effort among multiple partners. It is thus impossible to attribute results to any one partner. With this caveat the summary of results is presented below:



The G-Watch program resulted in institutionalization of the approach. In 2007 DepEd issued Order No. 59 entitled “Institutionalizing NGO and Private Sector Participation in the Department Procurement Process” in effect taking responsibility for ensuring CSO participation in the DepEd’s procurement process. Features including access to information, capacity-building activities, easy-to-use tools with clear performance indicators to generate hard data, mechanism for public-private coordination, a quick response mechanism, and a space for government-civil society processing of monitoring results obtained.

By 2013, a public opinion survey by Social Weather Stations found that the DepEd is regarded among the three least corrupt departments in the government.

The program along with introduction of international competitive bidding process the decreases the average cost of many textbooks. The average price of textbooks had fallen by more than half, to 37 pesos in 2003 from 90 pesos in 200. The average price had risen to 46 pesos by 2005 because of the addition of supplementary lesson guides and teacher manuals. Over the three years, however, overall prices had fallen by 50%, binding and printing quality had improved, and volunteer observers reported 95% error-free deliveries.

The success of the textbook projects gave G-Watch the capacity to tackle more complicated terrain in developing pilots at the regional and divisional level that looked at school construction and school furniture, in addition to ensuring textbooks were continuing to reach local schools.

By November 2004, G-Watch, the Boy Scouts, the Girl Scouts, and NAMFREL had successfully mobilized 8,000 field monitors in 85% of the 7,656 delivery sites. With publishers rectifying reported errors in deliveries,

DepEd recorded 100% distribution to high schools and district offices within 12 months.

By November 2005, DepEd had successfully procured 1.2 million textbooks at 46 pesos each. NGOs had assisted DepEd in 19 of 25 inspections and checked 165,023 textbooks, or 13% of total shipments. DepEd again recorded 100% distribution to delivery sites within 12 months.

The number of textbooks monitored grew over the years. The 2006 project monitored distribution of 12 million textbooks to 4,844 districts.

Publishers had raised the quality of their book paper to the standard 70 grams per square meter from 54 grams. And DepEd reported that the average shelf life of textbooks had risen to four or five years by 2007 from two years prior to 2002.

The time for a complete textbook cycle, from bidding to delivery, had shrunk by 50% to 12 months. G-Watch reported 95% accurate deliveries on average by the end of 2003.

Publishers were correcting errors reported by monitors, leading to a 100% success rate in textbook delivery by the end of Textbook Count 3 in 2011. And DepEd’s serious reform efforts and its partnership with NGOs had created a transparency that bolstered all steps of the process.

What worked well and what did not?

In sum, the following can be noted in the G-Watch Initiative:

Constructive engagement. G-Watch developed a strong working relationship with DepEd that started in 2002 and continues in 2014. DepEd saw the benefits of working with G-Watch in terms of the public’s improved perception of its transparency and accountability. Given



that textbook procurement is handled centrally, DepEd and G-Watch were able to jointly implement programs that substantially reduced textbook cost and dramatically improved textbook availability throughout the country.

Citizen Engagement. What worked well was that the 6 G-Watch projects all featured significant participation by individuals (volunteers) and local CSOs. The Textbook Count and Textbook Walk projects mobilized more than 6,000 volunteers. Typically, volunteers were elementary and high school students and boy and girl scouts and their parents. Female volunteers were relatively more active.

However, certain aspects in volunteer services did not work well. By 2010 (the 5th project) level of participation of the trained volunteers in observing DepEd's procurement processes was relatively low. The low attendance of CSO observers in Textbook procurement was in line with the overall trend of low participation by independent observers in procurement despite the provisions in the Procurement Law. One of the reasons for low volunteer participation could be lack of funding provided to the CSOs, and by them to the volunteers, to cover their transport costs, food, etc. Since some procurement meetings can last 3 days, lack of funds to cover the minimum cost of attendance could have affected CSO participation.

In some cases, monitors would not be present either (1) when deliveries were late, or (2) after school hours, or (3) on weekends. In some schools, the principals were initially suspicious of the monitors and resented their presence. However, this was resolved once they understood that that monitors were present only to assess the performance of the textbook suppliers.

Capacity-building of volunteers: All parties reported that the training was well delivered and effective. DepEd

regional officials confirmed that the trained CSO volunteers were better BAC observers than the untrained volunteers. However, the numbers trained was not enough to meet demand as there is a growing need for more trained CSO volunteers, given the size and recurring nature of procurement.

Indicators of success: Some indicators of project success were clear and powerful e.g. cost per book; % of allocated books reaching designated schools; timeliness of delivery; quality of binding; and time from bidding to delivery. Results measurement could have been better. Compilation and sharing of data on these served to measure success in real time and build support and motivation for the program. However, independent evaluations noted that the results monitoring could have been better in tracking the numbers of procurements by type and value actually monitored by CSO observers and monitoring whether the transparency of procurement in the regions is improving or deteriorating.

Champions: Motivated and dedicated pioneers in DepEd and G-Watch initiated the program. But once those champions are out of office, sustaining and scaling up program became a challenge. Moreover, funding for sustaining the program was not forthcoming despite G-Watch efforts once the PTF grants ended. Many civil society members also raised the question as to how long the civil society needs to do such procurement monitoring and who will/should fund the costs?

Lessons Learned

In our assessment, there are six lessons that can be learned from the G-Watch program that can shed light to CSOs as they confront impinging challenges and issues in anti-corruption.



Joint and constructive effort between government and civil society produces concrete results: In G-Watch program all key actors entered into a Memorandum of Agreement (MoA) that clarifies the expectations and responsibilities of all parties involved. The constructive approach ensures civil society's access to critical information and dialogue with authorities that are more inclined to be responsive as they were involved right from the beginning;

A preventive approach can engender success: G-Watch monitoring clarifies standards at the outset and allows monitors to see if the standards are met while the service delivery is ongoing. This way monitoring serves as affirmative action, a gentle push to support compliance while allowing opportunities for immediate remedy of deviations detected in the course of monitoring through a quick feedback mechanism integrated into the system. CSO monitoring cannot aim to be at par with the bureaucracy in terms of achieving regularity, stability and extensiveness. CSO participation must be sustained, not to be bureaucratized but in order to take on a supplementary monitoring once deemed necessary. The accountability efforts of the government must not be hampered by the presence or absence of CSO participation.

A community-based monitoring approach involving beneficiaries as monitors is strategically important to address two things: Scale and Empowerment: The key to this is utilizing beneficiaries and communities at the local level, while mobilizing national- and regional-based CSOs to cover other areas of service delivery such as procurement, warehouse inspection, etc. Volunteers, as proven by the project, can be mobilized in early phases and motivated by visible efforts. However, sustaining volunteers' interest requires compensating them for their expenses and providing non-financial incentives. It appears that as irregularities diminish over time (a targeted result of monitoring), so is the

volunteers' drive to monitor government processes, as they may not see the need to monitor anymore. Sustainability, in the monitoring initiatives spearheaded by G-Watch, is premised in the spirit of volunteerism.

Citizen monitoring is more effective when easy-to-use tools are used: G-Watch introduced checklists with clear points for monitors to assess what they should be looking for. It provides the necessary space to jot down actual observations and all details required to support the observations made.

Evidence-based advocacy works: G-Watch used evidence and data by citizen monitors for continuous advocacy, recommending reforms, and soliciting a public sector response that addresses shortcomings;

In pursuing anti-corruption, the role of a social intermediary is vital: G-Watch played a key leadership and catalytic role in mobilizing, building capacity, coordinating and followed up community-based monitors. This illustrates the need for a capable social intermediary to serve as coordinating body that will enable monitors to carry out monitoring activities. Although spirit of volunteerism is important for community/citizen monitoring, it needs to be supported by funding for social intermediary (usually CSOs or Community Based Organizations) to sustain coordination, aid in the preparation of reports, capacity building activities and, as noted above, to meet out of pocket expenses of volunteers.

Sustainability

After leading and implementing the Textbook Count project for 5 years (2002-7) G-Watch focused on how to institutionalize the program and made suggestions to turn over the responsibility to DepEd. With G-Watch's reduced role, civil society organizations did not collaborate and monitor deliveries to the extent that



they had from 2002 to 2007. And because of limited resources and other priorities, no central civil society partner emerged to assume day-to-day management of the program.

According to the Princeton study, in April 2007, G-Watch and DepEd initiated Textbook Walk, an annual event designed to supplement the Textbook Count and help move books from district offices to elementary schools. Volunteers, teachers and school officials carried textbooks from the district office to elementary schools on foot, or via motorcycles, tricycles, boats, and wooden carts. In some areas, they formed human assembly lines to transport textbooks. G-Watch estimated that volunteers transported 60,000 textbooks worth 2.5 million pesos (about US\$48,000) to 110 elementary schools in 2007.

DepEd continues to find ways to embed monitoring of textbook deliveries in its normal operations. The Princeton Study concluded, "Although civil society organizations remained committed to ensuring that textbooks reached schools, they had to consider the burden on their own limited resources. The success of future deliveries would therefore rest on the actions of both DepEd and communities that receive textbooks."

In early 2014 G-Watch submitted a report to DepEd on "Lessons and Recommendations in Sustaining School-Based Monitoring of Education Services: The Government Watch Experience." The paper presents the lessons from the various sustainability efforts conducted by G-Watch. G-Watch also puts forward a proposed strategy for sustainability, which centers on enabling school-based monitoring and some specific recommendations in line with the proposed strategy which include: (1) strengthening of DepEd's monitoring capacity, (2) building of intermediary CSOs' capacity, and (3) enabling of school-based monitoring.

In line with the above-cited strategy, the paper presents the Local Hubs model as a way to enable school-based monitoring. A Local Hub is a division-level intermediary mechanism expected to (1) activate and coordinate school-based monitoring, (2) provide capacity-building for monitoring and (3) serve as a transmission belt of information from the central office of DepEd to schools and reports and feedback from the schools to the regional and central offices of DepEd. G-Watch recommends the national adoption of the Local Hubs to enable and sustain school-based monitoring.

The search for funding to continue civil society role in school based monitoring to improve transparency and accountability of textbook deliveries and other school activities continues. Experience has shown that such civil society role is needed on a continuing basis to complement (not substitute) the government role.

References

- Partnership for Transparency Fund. (2013) *New Book – Citizens Against Corruption – Report from the Frontline*. (2013, April 15). Retrieved August 3, 2015, from <http://ptfund.org/new-book-citizens-against-corruption-report-from-the-frontline/>
- Princeton.edu. (2015). *Princeton.edu*. Retrieved 24 June 2014, from <http://successfulsocieties.princeton.edu/publications/promoting-accountability-monitoring-services-textbook-procurement-and-delivery>

For More Information.

- The CSO homepage that can be accessed at <http://gwatchDepEd.wordpress.com/>
- A case study of the G-Watch 2003, 2005, and 2006 projects can be found at <http://ptfund.org/2012/04/textbook-deliveries-corruption-philippines/>, accessed January 2015.
- Project completion and evaluation reports of the PTF funded projects can be found at <http://ptfund.org>, accessed January 2015.



- “Promoting Accountability, Monitoring Services: Textbook Procurement and Delivery, The Philippines”, 2002- 2005 A Princeton University case study accessed on 24th June 2014 at <http://www.princeton.edu/successfulsocieties/content/focusareas/CS/policynotes/view.xml?id=151> .

Due to the success of the project, there are various publications and materials available, including:

- Yes, Pigs Can Fly! Facing the Challenges of Fighting Corruption in Procurement. Procurement Watch and the United States Embassy.
- Government Watch (2010). Bayanihang Eskwela Manual.
- Acheron, J. et.al. (2008). Government Watch Manual.
- Gonzalez, H. (2004). Agencies’ Actions on and Policy Responses to the G-Watch Report. Commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme. (Unpublished paper)
- Gregorio, S. (2006). Institutionalization Study: Going Beyond Textbook Count. Commissioned by Government Watch. (Unpublished paper)
- Government Watch. Government Watch Localization Framework. United Nations Development Program.
- Acheron, J. (2010). Sustaining Citizen-Government Engagement, Transforming Governance. A Paper Presented in UNDP’s RePubliko: Knowledge Sharing Week.
- Acheron, J. (2008). The Textbook Count Story (PowerPoint Presentation). Asian Development Bank.
- Acheron, J. (2011). Politicization of Allocation and the Persisting Problem of School-Building Shortage in the Philippines. (Unpublished paper)
- Government Watch (2010). G-Watch Monitoring of School-Building Projects: A Comparative Study of the Different Modes of SBP-Construction. The World Bank.
- Government Watch (2010). Philippine Education Under Construction: A Policy Study on the Government School Building Program. United Nations Development Program.
- Government Watch (2011). G-Watch Assessment of the Responsiveness of the Education Budget Allocation for 2009. The World Bank.
- World Bank. Textbook Count. Retrieved from <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTFIDFOR/Resources/4659186-1206285405516/1cEAP-PR.pdf>

Prepared by: Willem Struben, PTF Adviser