

**Engaging Citizens in the Struggle against Corruption:
The Case of a People's Organization in the Philippines¹**

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Abstract

Corruption has been, and continues to be, among the major challenges confronting the politico-administrative system of the Philippines in the continuing quest for good governance. The Philippines continues to rank very low in the anti-corruption perception index, ranking a very low 126 among the least corrupt countries in the world and 25th in the Asia Pacific Region. In spite of the many laws that have been enacted to address corruption, and in spite of the many anti-corruption bodies that have been organized and set up, graft and corruption continues at various levels. Reforms to curb corruption over the years have obviously failed.

Taking off from a paper written earlier by the authors published in the (IPMR 12:2, "Restoring Trust and Building Integrity in Government") where we suggested areas for reform (institutional and structural; paradigms, values and behavior; leadership and political will; and citizen engagement), we will focus on the imperative for active citizen engagement not only to support, but also lead the efforts to curb corruption, especially at the local level. More specifically the paper will examine the case of the locally-based, citizen-initiated people organization in the province of Abra in the Cordillera region of the country, the Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government (CCAGG). The work of the CCAGG has been recognized by, among others, the Transparency International when it was awarded the prestigious Integrity Award for civil societies and groups fighting graft and corruption in pursuit of Good Governance. Starting off as a citizens arm to monitor elections in the late 80s, the CCAGG has evolved into one of the most successful people initiated organizations in the Philippines that has served as a model for citizen-engagement in the fight against graft and corruption towards the goal of good governance

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I. Overview

The people power revolution in 1986 that culminated with the removal of the Marcos dictatorship opened the doors for direct people's participation in the processes of governance. The enabling framework was provided by the 1987 Constitution that provided that

“The State shall encourage non-governmental, community-based, or sectoral organizations that promote the welfare of the nation.”³

In a subsequent article in the Constitution, the following provision may be found:

“The State shall respect the role of independent people's organizations to enable the people to pursue and protect, within the democratic framework, their legitimate and collective interests and aspirations through peaceful and lawful means. People's organizations are bona fide association of citizens with demonstrated capacity to promote the public interest and with identifiable leadership, membership and structure.”⁴

This principle was reiterated in the Local Government Code of 1991 that provided the following:

Section 34. Role of People's and Nongovernmental Organizations. - Local government units shall promote the establishment and operation of people's and nongovernmental organizations to become active partners in the pursuit of local autonomy.

Section 35. Linkages with People's and Non-Governmental Organizations. - Local government units may enter into joint ventures and such other cooperative arrangements with people's and nongovernmental organizations to engage in the delivery of certain basic services, capability-building and livelihood projects, and to develop local enterprises designed to improve productivity and income, diversify agriculture, spur rural industrialization, promote ecological balance, and enhance the economic and social well-being of the people.⁵

It was within this context that President Corazon Aquino launched what was called the Community Employment Development Program (CEDP). The CEDP was essentially a massive job generation program of the Aquino administration to pump prime the economy mostly through the construction of roads, bridges and other infrastructure program that would create jobs and employment especially in the rural areas. The design and implementation of CEDP was marked by the governance principles of transparency and participation. This was consistent with the pronouncements and image of the newly installed government of President Corazon Aquino catapulted into power by the people power revolution of 1986 in the Philippines. The CEDP aimed to harness the energies and potentials of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and people's organizations (POs) and groups in monitoring the implementation of infrastructure projects. Over the years, NGOs, POs and citizens groups have been lumped together under the broad category of “civil society.”

³ Section 23, Article II, Declaration of Principles and State Policies

⁴ Section 15, Article XIII, Role and Rights of People's Organizations

⁵ Chapter 4, Relations with Peoples and Non-Governmental Organizations.

Among the groups that volunteered and participated in the CEDP was a people's organization in the province of Abra called Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Governance (CCAGG). Initially organized as a citizens group, the CCAGG evolved into one of the most successful nongovernmental organizations that became a model for promoting accountability and good governance through the prevention of corruption.⁶

It is within this context that this paper examines the role of citizens initiated groups, POs and NGOs in preventing corruption.

Indeed, corruption has been a continuing problem in many countries in the world. The prevention of corruption has always been central to the governance agenda of most countries in the world. In the Philippines, corruption has reached such alarming proportions that current President Benigno S. Aquino has used it as battlecry in his quest for the presidency in 2010 when he claimed that poverty and corruption are inextricably linked: "*kung walang kurap walang mahirap*" - literally: if there is no corruption there will be no poor.⁷ With this, under his administration, the overarching theme of the Medium Term Philippine Development Plan (MTPDP) of 2011-2016 focuses on the promotion of good governance and anti-corruption to achieve inclusive growth, to create employment and to reduce poverty.

It has been widely recognized that corruption saps resources available for development, distorts access to services for poor communities, and undermines public confidence in the government's will and capacity to serve the poor, an anticorruption strategy is an essential complement (Bhargava, n.d.) to complement any government programs. Developing countries, such as the Philippines, have embarked on citizen's participation as a mechanism to promote accountability, integrity and transparency (AIT).⁸ With the end goal of proposing a reform imperative for corruption, this paper shall contribute to the analysis of corruption in the Philippines and will argue that a major handle to the fight against corruption is the imperative to encourage participation and most especially to engage the citizens in the fight against corruption. It will take off from a framework earlier developed and refined by the authors⁹ (Brillantes and Fernandez 2010; 2011a, 2011b, 2011c). This paper shall examine how civil society participation as part of the framework has been effective and shall cite the case of the Concerned Citizen's of Abra for Good Governance

⁶ We had the privilege to work with the CCAGG and its Executive Director Ms Pura Sumangil as early as 1987 when we headed a research project at the then College of Public Administration of the University of the Philippines that studied NGO participation in governance, then an emerging trend in the Philippine public administration and governance as a result of the 1986 people power revolution. Since then, we have had the privilege of participating in a number of CCAGG's activities, nationally or locally in Abra. After over two decades as one of the most successful models of people participation in governance, CCAGG was recognized locally and internationally by many international organizations, including Transparency International.

⁷ Although this has been argued by others as vice versa. If there is no poverty, there is no corruption i.e. making poverty as an excuse to corruption.

⁸ The UN lists accountability, integrity and transparency as well as participation as elements of good governance.

⁹ Brillantes and Fernandez 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2010, 2008.

(CCAGG). It discusses some significant activities and strategies of the CCAGG as an NGO in being directly involved in government processes and procedures, specifically in monitoring public funded infrastructure projects. It also points out the imperative of continuous capacity building on the part of the NGO to sustain its active engagement in governance processes. It ends with some

II. Contextualizing Corruption in the Philippines

In the 1950s, the Philippines was one of Asia's more promising countries and was praised by the World Bank for its economic growth. However, it "fell from grace" and became one of the poorest Asian countries in the 1980s (Andrews, 2001: 150 as cited in Quah 2010: 4). Corruption in the Philippines has grown into alarming proportions with its peak in the Gloria Arroyo presidency. The Philippine Public Transparency Reporting Project (PPTRP) revealed that an estimated PhP250 billion is lost to public sector corruption every year. In addition, the WB report cited the estimates of the Office of the Ombudsman of the loss of some \$48 billion to corrupt practices over the last 20 years (up to fiscal year 2001). It likewise cited the figures of the Commission on Audit that about 2 billion (Philippine pesos) are lost to government corruption every year. The WB claims that corruption in the Philippines is systemic and deep rooted and shall take many years to overcome (World Bank, 2001). In the Corruption Perception Index, the Philippines continues to be ranked very low: 134th among 192 countries and 25th among 33 countries in 2010. A review of the Philippines' CPI over the past 13 thirteen years in relation to the rest of the world may alarm the Filipinos for two distinct reasons: first, Philippines' CPI has consistently gotten worse since 1999, improving slightly only in 2001 and 2003 and 2010. Secondly, 37 of the 47 countries that at one time or another ranked beside the Philippines have outranked the country (See *Annex 1, Philippine CPI from 1995-2008*). Indeed, corruption has its costs from a thriving economy in the 50s and 60s, the Philippines has lagged behind its Asian neighbors. Corruption benefits only few and deprives the rest of the people. Among the social costs of corruption include undermining the rule of law and violating political legitimacy. Disadvantaged people are deprived of fair treatment which increases poverty and that corrupt practices jeopardize the welfare of the people (Brillantes and Fernandez, 2008). Widman (2005) suggests that corruption may be seen as a function of a particular culture. For instance, poor countries are poor because they have a culture that accepts corruption. This is supported by Tapales (1995:407), who claimed that corruption is a "cultural and psychological phenomenon in a country marked by incompatible legal and cultural norms." Nonetheless according to him the foremost challenge for all these reform strategies is countering corruption. Indeed the struggle against corruption in the Philippines is one that has been going on for over half a century.

In the Philippines, various sectors of the society have been involved and engaged in the fight against corruption to enhance government efficiency, effectiveness and accountability. Institutions have been set up and several laws were enacted to fight against graft and corruption. In fact, the Philippines has very many – over ten - coordinating bodies on anti-corruption which include: Office of the Ombudsman, Presidential Commission Against Graft and Corruption (PAGC), Civil Service Commission (CSC), Sandiganbayan, Commission on Audit (COA), Supreme Court, National Bureau of Investigation (NBI), the Anti-Money Laundering Council, among others. Quah (2010) has warned that "too many crooks spoil the brew." An additional question is "who coordinates whom?" Such a basic management question leads to the situation where responsibilities ending up without really nobody in charge and ultimately responsible in the fight against

corruption. Quah (1999) also cited that the Philippines is the Asian country with the most number of anti-corruption measures (Quah 1999; Brillantes and Fernandez 2010). It will be recalled that the earliest laws against corruption were passed as early as 1930 (over 80 years ago) with the Revised Penal Code of the Book 2, Title 2, 4 and 7 (1930) that specified the crimes committed by the public officer such as malfeasance and misfeasance in the office, fraud, forgery, malversation of public funds or property, infidelity of public officers.

- Republic Act (RA) 1379 (1955) This act declared forfeiture in favor of the state any property found to have been unlawfully acquired by any public officer or employee, and provided for the proceedings.
- RA 3019 (1960) Anti-Graft and Corrupt Practices Act This act provided for the repression of certain acts of public officers and private persons alike, which constitute graft or corrupt practices or which may lead thereto, also known as Anti-Graft and Corruption Practices Act.
- RA 6713 (1989).Ethics and Accountability Law: provided for a Code of Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees

As shown above, the laws vary from defining the prohibited and punishable acts, laying down specific penalties, and identifying the agencies responsible for the implementation of the laws. However, the long list of corruption-related laws is still a long way to go since more recently there were fairly recent (2007) enacted laws such as the Anti-Red Tape Act (ARTA) of 2007. The challenge for the Philippines is how to enforce these laws with more teeth.

III. Our Reform Framework

Various reform efforts have been introduced to combat corruption. In 2002, we were privileged to be involved in a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) supported program in the Philippines aimed to improve governance in various agencies of the country.¹⁰ The program involved strengthening and sustaining institutional capacities of government agencies for sound development management and oversight of the public sector by responsible citizens and civil society groups. A major component of the framework stressed the imperative to enhance civil society's capacity to effectively engage the public sector in strengthening institutional integrity, transparency, and accountability. The methods may include prevention of corruption practices, prosecution of corruption cases and imposition of stricter penalties, and promotion of a culture with corruption-intolerant sensitivity. Combating corruption is not only the problem of the government. The energies and potential of civil society – NGOs and POs as provided for in the constitution - can be tapped. Rose-Ackerman (1999) asserted that a mobilized civil society could act as an effective counterweight to bureaucrats and personnel in the public sector who try to pursue their private interests at the expense of public duties. In the Philippines, there is a basis for prosecuting public officials for promoting their private interest. This is clearly stipulated Section 2 of RA 6713:

Declaration of Policies. - It is the policy of the State to promote a high standard of ethics in public service. Public officials and employees shall at all times be accountable to the

¹⁰ The National College of Public Administration was the implementing partner of the Fostering Democratic Governance program supported by the UNDP from 2004 to 2008.

people and shall discharge their duties with utmost responsibility, integrity, competence, and loyalty, act with patriotism and justice, lead modest lives, and uphold public interest over personal interest.

Addressing the problem of corruption requires the expansion of targets of reform, going beyond the enactment of new laws or the creation of new bodies. In addition to institutional reforms that include reforms in policies, structures, systems and procedures, reforms should also include those targeted at changing mindsets, behaviors and values of the governance actors (government, business and civil society). Reforms should also be targeted to strengthen leadership and political will of implementors (at the national and local levels). Finally, reforms should also aim at encouraging citizen participation and engagement in addressing corruption. The above framework is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Reform Framework for Good Governance: Focus on Anti-Corruption



For the purpose of this paper, we focus on the fourth quadrant that recognizes the imperative of active citizens engagement in the crucial fight against corruption.

IV. Focus on Citizens Engagement

Citizens engagement promotes the demand-side approach of governance. Governance is not the sole responsibility of government but it involves the private sector and the civil society as well. Civil society can spur community support and provide continuous public pressure which shall put the government on guard. Although considered as a debatable issue, the strength of the Philippine democracy is on its citizens. Citizens participation through NGOs and POs has risen in 1987 which was brought about by the 1986 People Power Revolution. To date, there are more than 60,000 registered NGOs in the Philippines, most of which are focused on exacting transparency and accountability from the public sector. For instance, the Philippine NGO sector has developed a

strong reputation for the delivery of basic services to the urban and rural poor. This has been recognized by national and local government, by other NGOs in the region, and by donor communities. In fact, NGO participation in all aspects of governance is enshrined in the Philippine constitution. The past administrations of President Aquino and President Ramos have included NGOs in local and national consultations on important issues and have encouraged them to participate in the governance processes of the country. This is what others call as the rise of “accountability industry.” The transformation of NGO work from service provision to advocacy has unleashed their real power in social discourse in the global arena (Songco, n.d.). This accountability industry has also been used by the donor institutions and countries to help in instituting democracy and development, decentralization (3Ds) in developing countries.

Engaging civil society and citizens’ groups in public management have promoted accountability of the public sector. It has given the people greater opportunities to influence policy-making processes and the implementation of policies and programs. The idea of engaging the people in the management of public affairs is a key dimension of good governance (Brillantes and Tiu Sonco II, 2007). Decentralized arrangements that mainstream citizens’ participation paved the way for institutional and behavioral changes among local politicians and service providers - which provide an enabling environment for service improvement and pro-poor services. A significant and laudable change is the transformation of a service delivery system from being input-oriented and supply-driven to one that is determined based on user needs and feedback. Local governments increasingly see the citizens and civil society as partners and part of the solution – not as adversaries and part of the problem. Citizens participation in performance management coupled with access to accurate and reliable information have also helped in de-politicization of service delivery – where resources for services have been commonly allocated by politicians or government officials on the basis of personal gain or party affiliations rather than the needs of the people in their constituency. (Mangahas, 2005). The above are some of the avenues where citizens could be tapped.

The Philippines has an active civil society participation that addresses issues concerning human rights, social welfare and anti-corruption. As suggested at the outset, it was the 1986 Constitution and the 1991 Local Government Code that provided the enabling framework that led to the flourishing of many NGOs and POs in the Philippines founded on the principles of good governance to promote accountability and transparency. Among such groups are Transparency and Accountability Network (TAN), Transparency International, media groups such as the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, professional groups like Procurement Watch, Social Watch and the the province-based Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Governance (CCAGG) among others.

TAN performs a significant role in anti-corruption. It is a civil society coalition that serves as an umbrella organization formed primarily for the purpose of exchanging information on developments and initiatives in transparency and accountability. It has a membership base of 21 organizations composed of academe, private sector, and civil society groups with strong interest in anti-corruption and good governance. The coalition envisions the country with transparent, accountable, and efficient public institutions and an empowered citizenry intolerant of corruption.

Another NGO is the Transparency International (TI) Philippines which conducts several programs and projects such as orientation seminars and workshops to heighten awareness on corruption. TI Philippines has been a key partner of UNDP and Civil Service Commission in the implementation of its project, “Building Integrity in the System of Governance.” In terms of promoting

accountability, efficiency and transparency in the implementation of government funded projects such as purchase of books, delivery of social services, we have Procurement Watch, Inc and the Social Watch, Inc. In promoting accountability and transparency in infrastructure, we have Road Watch “BantayLansangan” The media is also an important partner in combating corruption such as the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) and the Newsbreak that both that conduct and expose investigative cases on corruption including high-profile ones (Brillantes and Fernandez, 2010).

From among the more than 60,000 registered NGOs in the Philippines, the The Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government is one of the most famous if not the most awarded NGO in the Philippines. To name a few, Transparency International awarded the CCAGG the prestigious Integrity Award for civil societies / groups fighting graft and corruption in pursuit of good governance in Ottawa, Canada in 2000. CCAGG was one of the 4 awardees all over the world. As early as 1988, a year after it was established, it was named by President Corazon Aquino as the “Most Outstanding NGO in Region 1 for its active participation in community development. It was also awarded in 2005 as one of the Outstanding OMB Civil Society Organization Partners. CCAGG has not only fought corruption, it has also explored ways to improve governance in the province of Abra. It was responsible for organizing a series of public discussions and dialogues in Abra on the issue of Cordillera Regional Autonomy since 1987. It is also an active member of the Regional Development Council (RDC – CAR) as one of the NGO voting members.

V. CCAGG as Watchdog in the Province of Abra¹¹

The province of Abra belongs to Club 20 which means that it is one of the twenty poorest provinces in the Philippines. An explanation to this is graft and corruption and the political unrest. This is one of the reasons why a non-partisan and non-profit organization called the Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government was born. Although it was an offshoot of National Citizens’ Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL)¹² for clean election during the presidential snap election of 1986. As mentioned in the outset, it was also one of the major citizens groups that participated in monitoring the implementation of infrastructure projects that was launched by President Corazon Aquino. Although the organization was initially involved in elections and referenda in national, regional, and local levels, its goals and objectives went beyond electoral concerns to include: (1) monitoring the performance of elected officials and their government; (2) projects and programs; community organizing for citizenship building; establishment of permanent structures for regular and direct consultation with the people on their needs, problems and interest; ensure that the peoples’ interest are in the political agenda by dealing effectively with agencies; and advocacy through the mass media to popularize issues and help form public opinion (Sumangil, 2001). CCAGG was also born during the democratic wave in the Philippines in 1987 upon the installation of a new democratic government. President Corazon Aquino introduced a development package under the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) called Community Employment and Development Program (CEDP). The CEDP allocated projects in the communities such as farm to market roads, school building, irrigation system among others. Its unique feature is the involvement of non-government organizations to monitor its project implementation. Consequently, a memorandum of agreement was signed between the NEDA, Department of Budget

¹¹ Information gathered from CCAGG website and Sumanguil, 2001.

¹² Namfrel is an accredited election watchdog in the Philippines.

& Management (DBM), and CCAGG. The MOA includes training on monitoring and the listing of projects, their location, implementing agencies, etc, with the CCAGG in-charge of the monitoring of project implementation and providing feedback to NEDA and DBM.

Trials and Triumphs of CCAGG

In 1987, long before social accountability became a byword in the Philippines, the Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government (CCAGG) was already a trailblazer. It was lauded for its efforts in tracking public expenditures particularly on infrastructures like roads, bridges and irrigation systems. CCAGG were bold and partial in the conduct of monitoring of the projects of the CEDP. Agency implementors were threatened by the mere presence of the CCAGG in the monitoring sites. A typical practice in the local government was that most of the contractors were local government executives with the dummy contractors fronting for them. There was also an instance that CCAGG was bribed in order to give a passing mark in the project evaluation. Although it was a long, life-threatening, and tedious task, CCAGG's monitoring activity has paid off since it has daringly expose anomalies. Its initial success has been recognized when it uncovered massive malfeasance which led to the prosecution of eleven (11) engineers of the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) of Abra which has led to their suspension from office for periods ranging from one to nine months without pay. The engineers reported 20 unfinished and unstarted projects as "completed" and was turned over to local government executives even without completion. CCAGG bravely pressed the leadership of DPWH for an impartial investigation. Exposing this case was a challenge for CCAGG since some officials has intervened and tried to whitewash the case but strong community support especially from the clergy and business sector thwarted it. In order to protect their safety and to do away from the clout of politicians who are protectors of the accused, CCAGG requested for a litigation of the case outside the periphery of the Abra Province. As a result, an audit team came to validate the report of CCAGG; hence its validation. The accused were charged guilty but were punished lightly with only four to nine months suspension from office without pay. Although the civil society was not happy with the punishment, they considered it an initial victory- a moral victory - since it was the first time in the history of Abra to punish a government official. This small victory has made a huge impact i.e. a reform has been initiated in the DPWH itself. It has decreed that no payment for projects in Abra Province will be released without the monitoring report of the CCAGG. This initial success of the CCAGG has emboldened the community-based monitors in their crusade against corruption. For this, the CCAGG was awarded a citation by no less than then President of the Philippines, Corazon Aquino. Shortly after, the DPWH came out with a memorandum to its Abra District Office that henceforth, the CCAGG monitoring report becomes a requirement for projects to be paid. It was also invited to sit in the Pre Qualifications, Bids and Awards Committee.¹³

Since then, the CCAGG gained the confidence and approval of the citizens. The organization grew and has been active in monitoring public works and in several accountability initiatives such as the following:

1. The "remove and replace" order to the contractor of Abra – Ilocos Sur Road. This was a 6.8 kilometers of road concreting project in San Quintin and Pidigan towns along Abra – Ilocos Sur

¹³ Drawn from the report of Pura Sumanguil at the the 2nd Global Conference on Fighting Corruption & Safeguarding Integrity at the Hague, Netherlands from May 28 – 31, 2001

Road. The contract cost was P8, 335,107.98. It was bid out by DPWH – CAR. The winning contractor was D & D Construction of Bangued, Abra. The project duration was 160 days. However, work began only three months later. To make up for the delay, the project contractor was making short cuts, which meant savings from budgeted items. CCAGG reported that the sub-bases were poorly prepared oversized aggregates and unwashed gravel and sand was being used. Honeycombs and longitudinal and transversal cracks were found and the riding public did not yet use these. CCAGG monitors pointed the defects to the government-supervising engineers but they were indifferent and did not seem to care enough. Because of this, the CCAGG petitioned the DPWH Secretary to:

- a. Suspend the implementation of the concreting of Abra – Ilocos Sur Road and
- b. Send an investigating team to verify the veracity of our complaint.
- c. Conduct in site sampling of concrete pavement for laboratory testing.

The core samples were subjected to laboratory tests. Of the ten core samples, “all miserably failed”, hence the order to the contractor to “remove and replace” a considerable length of the road project.

2. In many occasions, the vigilance of CCAGG saved vast amounts of government resources from graft and corruption. One example was the concreting of Abra – Kalinga Road in Nagpawayan, Baay Licuan. Its program of work identified Lagangilang as the source of gravel and sand which is some 51 kilometers away from the project site. The volume of aggregates and the distance for hauling was therefore running into millions of pesos. However, CCAGG’s field monitors discovered that the contractor was extracting the aggregates just nearby which makes the hauling cost cheaper.¹⁴

The CCAGG reported the matter to the NEDA who in turn invited the implementing agency to look into our computation and to act accordingly. Investigation followed after which the DPWH ordered the contractor to extend the road project using the savings realized from the item on hauling of aggregates.

3. Administrative and criminal cases were filed against erring government officials and contractors by the CCAGG. However, another challenge in the Philippine judicial system is its slow grind of judicial process.

CCAGG’s efforts have not been without costs. In 2008, the young volunteer lawyer of CCAGG, Atty George Tugade was shot dead. There are some sectors that believed that the murder was somehow related to his work at the CCAGG due to its bold, brave and confrontational stance in exposing corruption in the province.¹⁵

CCAGG’s Collaborative Partnership with other Accountability Networks

The work of CCAGG in actively promoting responsible and accountable government has gained the attention of other institutions and organizations and has been replicated by other entities as well.

¹⁴ The cost modifier for a haul of aggregate in our locality runs to around 10 % of the base cost for every 10 kilometers of additional haul distance. This means that a thousand cubic meter of aggregate with a base cost of P500.00 per cubic meter will be more expensive by quarter million pesos 51 kilometers beyond

¹⁵ See Manila Bulletin, November 27, 2008.

CCAGG has also partnered with the UNDP and the the Commission on Audit (COA) in the Enhancing Public Accountability Program (EnPAP) through Participatory Audit. The objectives of EnPAP were the following:

1. To assist the Government of the Republic of the Philippines specifically the Commission on Audit (COA) to undertake general assessment of its public accountability program;
2. To improve COA's capability to effectively discharge its constitutional mandate of enforcing public accountability in the Philippines;
3. To help the COA identify problems particularly in government auditing and national government accounting systems, identify and prioritize reform measures, examine possible approaches to deal with them and formulate action program like the promotion of transparency in the conduct of audit through the participation of non-government organizations (NGOs) and people's organizations (POs).

The Critical Role of Continuous Capacity Building and Capacity Development

The above can be understood and located within the context of a major thrust of the CCAGG: continuous capacity building. Aware of its modest origins and its limited capacities, and the impact it has had not only upon the local but also international arena, and the growing expectations upon it as a good and best practice and model for the prevention of corruption and promotion of accountabilities at the local level, CCAGG focused its efforts upon capacity building in order equip itself to meet the technical demands upon it. For instance, they were required to monitor the implementation of infrastructure projects. Mostly trained in the social sciences, the leaders and members of CCAGG took extra efforts to equip themselves with the appropriate technical and basic engineering knowledge and skills so as to be able to credibly monitor the infrastructure projects. Then there is the accompanying program of having to learn the ins and outs and unique (and many times un-understandable) fiscal and accounting procedures of government. Coming from the NGO community and the private sector, CCAGG leaders and staff had to be familiar with government accounting rules and processes if they were to be able to monitor and account for the use of government funds. It is within this context that CCAGG did not neglect continuous capacity building as indicated in the following section.

Capacity Building and Training Undertaken before the Actual Audit Engagement

CCAGG has therefore conducted internal capacity building efforts to enable it meet the even incresing challenges to promote good governance and accountabilities at the local level. For instance, in the area of local fiscal administration, the members underwent a five day training on Value for Money Audit preceded the actual audit engagement. Its focus was on the three (3) Es of audit: economy, efficiency and effectiveness. This program is done with the support of the government's audit body, the Commission on Audit.

During this training, artificial and imagined barriers between the government and the NGO are broken down. The COA and the CCAGG get to know each other and how each perform their work. COA and CCAGG are groups that come from diverse backgrounds, audit approach and experiences. A question that kept coming back during this training was: Between the CCAGG approach and COA system, which one should prevail? The answer by then Commissioner

Emmanuel Dalman was “CCAGG’s method is beautiful and has been tested. Its fusion with compliance and financial audit of COA will make it more enduring”.

Other observations have been drawn from the training and dialogue between the COA and CCAGG. This include the following::

- a) COA is more for post audit which begins only upon the completion of a particular project , or after a percentage of a project had been attained. Auditing is made only after the disbursement of funds with complete documents attached. Post audit also looks into the project’s compliance to rules and regulations.
- b) CCAGG is concentrated on the project construction per se by the communities. CCAGG engineers lend support to community findings by its re-evaluation and analysis on the latter’s observation and findings.

CCAGG’s approach is corrective. If it finds irregularities in the course of its monitoring (be it at the start or at the middle of the construction period), a dialogue starts right at the project site with the contractor’s representative or with the government’s supervising engineer. In their absence which sometimes happen, a monitoring report is sent both to the implementing agency and contractor to inform them of CCAGG’s findings. More often than not, the monitoring report is acknowledged. At any rate, the monitors’ mere presence in the project site thwarts evil designs.

The areas covered by Participatory Audit were the Local Government Units, the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). This program almost did not take off because the top most elected officials wrote the COA Chairman to revoke the MOA with CCAGG. They believed that CCAGG is politically motivated and might use the audit results against them. To allay their unfounded fears, the Commission recommended postponement of the audit of local government units until after the election of this year.

Insights and Learnings about Participatory Audit

Another dimension of CCAGG’s work to promote accountability and prevent corruption at the local level is its thrust for citizen participation in the audit process. These observations, drawn from the publications of CCAGG and its Executive Director Pura Sumangil include the following:

1. Participatory Audit had written mutual benefit to both the participants, e.g. COA and CCAGG. It introduced a new and more dynamic approach to government auditing. This is because for the first time, a civil society organization that monitors with unrelenting commitment and a government body that delegates work with appreciable concern to bureaucratic and political avenues had been blended to offshoot a more refined discipline that will address successfully the sensitive need of auditing.
2. The introduction of a civil society organization revolutionized the present auditing system. It made noted changes in the organization of the audit report in a way that CCAGG had introduced the social impact evaluation agenda and an extensive graphical manifestation of recommendation to the technical audit findings.

3. The presence of a civil society organization working in collaboration with COA auditors has added a critical element by which Value – for - Money Audits had been operationalized. CCAGG’s participation in this engagement and by virtue of their being residents of the place where the projects were implemented, facilitated the gathering of views, opinions and perceptions of the project beneficiaries. Experience has shown that honest assessments of projects and how these projects impact into people’s lives are certain to surface if trust and mutual acceptance had been established between the auditors and the program recipients. Auditors who are total strangers to the place may not be able to generate responses as factual and truthful as they should be.
4. The often perceived anomalous relation between an agency being audited and COA could be neutralized by the presence of a third party like CCAGG which is known for its pro people stance. Its being an advocate of transparency and accountability holds a promise of true check and balance, and of safeguarding the resources of the government. The participation of an NGO like the CCAGG in government audit activities to enhance transparency and accountability is new, a break through. NGOs and POs and the communities as a whole could be auditors, and could help the government in ensuring that projects be properly executed / implemented in the fields. NGOs as deputized auditors will open a window of opportunities for the citizens’ increased participation in government affairs. This could guarantee an improvement in governance.

CCAGG has been in the limelight for more than two decades and it has evolved from purely local NGO to an internationally renowned NGO. In spite of its poverty, CCAGG continues with its commitment of promoting citizens' participation in curbing graft and corruption as well as in promoting good governance.

As suggested early on in this paper, the Philippines has not been lacking in laws addressed at preventing corruption. It is a matter of implementing and enforcing these laws. In terms of too many actors in corruption with fragmented efforts, it is a matter of coordinating and orchestrating efforts.

VI. Some Concluding Notes

Corruption continues to be a major scourge if many developing countries including the Philippines. The Philippine experience as shown that the enactment of laws alone is not enough to prevent address corruption. It has also shown that this cannot be addressed by the creation of more anti-corruption bodies. The sheer number of laws and anti corruption bodies as a matter of fact can dilute and diffuse anti corruption efforts leading to their overall ineffectiveness.

We suggested a framework that efforts to prevent corruption should be more comprehensive and widespread, going beyond the usual ways of enacting laws and creating bodies, which is basically an external intervention. We argue that this has to be complemented and reinforced by the following: (1) Efforts to change the value system, behaviour and paradigms of not only of those entrusted with power (government officials) but of the people as well: paradigmatic changes must focus on the internal; (2) leadership by example, one marked by the serious political will of the leadership to implement existing anti-corruption laws; and (3) active citizen engagement. This was the focus of this paper. Engagement of people to prevent corruption is a key factor to prevent, or at

the very least, discourage corruption and promote accountabilities. This is what a people's organization in the province Abra – the Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Governance - has shown. Its success has been recognized not only locally but internationally as well, and it has become a model for other local governments in the Philippines. The following are some of the factors behind the CCAGG's success as a people's organization in addressing the problem of graft and corruption and promoting accountability at the local level.

- (1) The presence of an enabling framework – in this case, the 1987 Constitution of the Philippines and the Local Government Code of 1991. This was further operationalized with the CCAGG's involvement initially as an election watchdog, and then as a monitor of implementation of government infrastructure projects.
- (2) A strong sense of community volunteerism rooted in plain and simple old fashioned patriotism expressed through love of their province and their commitment to restore and promote good governance. The determination and commitment of the leadership to pursue the struggle in spite of the many challenges and obstacles – ranging from lack of resources, lack of capacities, and death threats and even murder of its lawyer – further strengthened their resolve in their struggle for good governance. The determination and commitment of the leadership of CCAGG must also be recognized.
- (3) Continuous capacity building on the part of the NGO if it is to be able to sustain its engagement with the government. The UNDP points out that capacity development is the process by which individuals, organisations, institutions and societies develop abilities (individually and collectively) to perform functions, solve problems.¹⁶ Capacity development focuses not only on developing the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the leaders and members of the NGO, as illustrated by the case of CCAGG, but also the need to strengthen relations between and among institutions, including government, civil society and business¹⁷
- (4) Support and affirmation by the local and international community and coalitions. The role of the international organizations, such as Transparency International, the UNDP and the Transparency and Accountability Network played a key role in the success of CCAGG. As pointed out by Cheema in his foreword to the UNDP report,¹⁸ “capacity development is becoming the central organization and donor institutions in the 90s.” Their country assistance programs and strategies have focused on the promotion of good governance including capacity and institutional development. The affirmation and support of international actors has been key to the success of CCAGG. It is within this context that the

¹⁶ Refer to UNDP Report on Capacity Development, UNDP, Management Development and Governance Division, Bureau for Policy Development, 1997.

¹⁷ GOP and UNDP 2002 Portfolio on Enabling Environment: Poverty Reduction through Good Governance, 2002-2004 as cited in Brillantes and Mangahas, 2006, “Philippines: Restructuring Reorganization and Implementation,” pp. 54-105, in *Rethinking Administrative Reforms in Southeast Asia*, edited by Ho Khai Leon, Singapore: Marshall Cavendish, 2006.

¹⁸ Cheema in his foreword to UNDP Report on Capacity Development (2007)

documentation of their cases is important. Said documentation can also be used as powerful capacity building instruments.

Indeed the fight against corruption should be multi-pronged. It cannot be led by one sector, much less the government and its anti-corruption agencies alone. It must have the support of the top leadership¹⁹ accompanied, by changes in behaviour and mindsets of all stakeholders, government and citizens alike. Finally, as the case of CCAGG has shown, citizen involvement and engagement is critical if it is to be sustained and successful.

¹⁹ The determination of current Philippine President Benigno “Noynoy” Aquino III to stamp out corruption has given hope to many sectors in the Philippines. The recent conviction of the Chief Justice of the Philippines has illustrated the political will of the Aquino administration.

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