

CCAGG in Participative Governance**

Good morning. I come from a twenty-six year old civil society organization in Northern Philippines. We call ourselves Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government which traces its beginnings during the presidential snap election of 1986.

CCAGG targeted good governance as its goal. We are a people deprived of participation in governance work and frustrated by non-disclosure of public funds being poured into our government coffers.

Understandably, CCAGG showed its bias for people empowerment. CCAGG believed that an empowered and vigilant citizenry is the number one ingredient in fostering transparent, accountable, and democratic government.

We drew our inspiration from Section 23, Article II of our Philippine Constitution of 1987 which enshrined in its State policy the participation of non-government organizations in governance. It said "The State shall encourage non-government, community-based or sectoral organizations that promote the welfare of the nation."

This State policy opened the avenue for citizens' participation in the development process. Under the administration of President Cory Aquino, the National Economic & Development Administration (NEDA) started the Community Employment and Development Program (CEDP), a pump-priming program to generate employment in the countryside. Our organization and other NGOs were directly tapped by the NEDA to monitor the project implementation of the CEDP.

If you will dissect CCAGG's engagement in the project, you will find that it exercised its responsibility first by responding to the invitation of the national government "to complement and supplement local development work."

In the same breath, CCAGG exercised its right as a claim holder by providing check and balance on government power to ensure that funds allotted for development work will be used judiciously and its fruits be enjoyed by its constituents.

** A presentation of Ms. Pura Sumangil to the ASEAN Conference on Promoting Social Accountability on Nov. 14, 2012 at the New World Hotel, Makati City

Our initial participation with the NEDA was followed by many more engagements. Small successes in our advocacies for transparent and accountable governance in fact made of us a bolder organization of the people. Mistakes made on the way, though painful, made us wiser and in the end, happier.

For the longest time, we worked and have developed expertise in participatory monitoring of infrastructure like roads and bridges, irrigation systems, school buildings which tracks expenditures and oversee the execution of government projects from conceptualization, procurement to implementation and evaluation stage.

In 2002, the Commission on Audit (COA) and CCAGG signed a joint MOA to pilot- test Participatory Audit (PA) in Abra province. This was the first ever experience of COA in involving a CSO in its operational and audit works. The joint endeavor was adjudged a success and as a consequence, PA was replicated in three other provinces in the country. PA was shelved for awhile but it will again be revived next year.

Let me demonstrate further how CCAGG works using as example a program called "Water for Waterless Communities" in eight towns in Abra. This program was funded by the Dept of Health (DOH) to the tune of P203M. We underscore its importance as it is part of the Philippine Government's commitment to the Millennium Development Goals "to reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water".

DOH's involvement in the implementation of the eight water systems in Abra province came about with the outbreak of water-borne diseases during the typhoon months of September 2009 in the country. DOH does not have the expertise to implement water system projects so it entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with two other national government agencies, the Dept of Budget and Management (DBM) and the Local Waterworks and Utilities Administration (LWUA). DOH's allotment is disbursed by DBM to LWUA which executes the projects.

2010 was election year and to facilitate the release of project funds and not be covered by the election ban, shortcuts to approve these water system projects were resorted to.

- a) Of the eight municipalities, only one reflected in its development plan its need for a water system.
- b) Only one local legislature (Sangguniang Bayan) submitted a petition to LWUA to put up a water district in the area.

- c) There were only two towns which called for community assemblies to ascertain the need of water projects.
- d) Six local chief executives handpicked the Board of Directors who should in fact be nominated by the people.
- e) Without actual survey, program of work and schematic designs were allegedly done by some LWUA personnel to fast track release of funds.
- f) Despite its huge funding of which P36M was the biggest and P22M is the smallest, no project biddings were allegedly conducted in the water districts contrary to the procurement law.
- g) When truckloads of HDPE pipes started to arrive in the areas, people were caught by surprise. They were told by the workers that these were for their water system of which they were not informed nor involved in project identification,
- h) Structure like break pressure chamber was programmed in three (3) water projects even though it was not needed.

As an advocate of transparency, accountability and peoplesø participation, CCAGG rallied the people to uncover the truth. Community meetings were conducted where we decided on the following:

- a) We invited our partner government oversight body like the Civil Service Commission (CSC) for ethical and values formation for the various stakeholders,
- b) We also partnered with the Dept of Interior and Local Government, (DILG), the Commission on Audit (COA) and Philippine Procurement Network (P2N) in the conduct of a seminar ó training on procurement processes,
- c) Simultaneously, we requested LWUA to furnish us bidding documents (minutes of biddings, abstract of bids, successful bidders, etc.), program of work and project designs,
- d) We reached out to the local executives, board of directors of the water districts and other residents. We organized the latter into community-based monitors.

When the requested documents were finally released by LWUA, seminar-workshops and field visits were conducted with the stakeholders:

- a) CCAGG taught them how to read and understand the program of work and schematic design,
- b) At the same time, we noted missing safeguards in the designs and recommended institution of perimeter fence around the water source as protection from human activities and roaming animals and lid to cover impounding dams or water basins to keep falling leaves and other debris from contaminating the water source.

- c) We did countless field visits to the proposed project sites during the summer months to check suitability of site, and sustainability of water source. We measured the volume of water per second to see if it can supply the households in the service areas,
- d) Water source tapped by 2 water districts is not enough to supply the water demand of the communities during summer,
- e) We inventoried the materials and scrutinized their costing as reflected in the program of work, and compared them with what could be obtained locally to find the difference,
- f) We also questioned bloated cost of storage facilities as reflected in the program of work. We consulted local contractors to ensure judicious costing.
- g) We critiqued and recommended revision of a programmed spring box because the source is not a spring but a creek. A mini dam was constructed instead.
- h) We also mentored and coached them on the technicalities of constructing water systems particularly on judging when to use pressure breakers and on the correct diameter of pipes for transmission and distribution lines and laying of the same

At the end of our ten month-monitoring program of the water projects, we conducted a public monitoring report in Bangued attended by the Provincial Governor, government oversight bodies, Board of Directors of the WD, provincial officials and other stakeholders. This event was amply given coverage by the broadcast and print media. We reported the following:

- a) Two WD are now functioning, happily serving their constituents in eighteen villages.
- b) One WD decided to terminate the contract of their contractor because of unjustifiable delay in project implementation. Said WD is now finishing the project.
- c) Civil works were started in four other water projects while water pipes worth P8M pesos were delivered to the 8th WD.

The oversight bodies like the COA, CSC and NEDA pledged to train the BODs and other personnel to sustainably manage their water districts.

- a) CSC will help build their capacity to administer and properly manage their water districts,
- b) COA will train the WDs on Accounting and Auditing rules and regulations. At the same time, it will issue to the contractors computation of liquidated damages for their delay in project implementation,

- c) Send a copy of the report to DPWH Secretary Rogelio Singson, the Water Czar of the government. Another copy of the report will be sent to the Office of the Ombudsman. Three months later, we read in a Philippine daily that the Administrative Officer of the LWUA is facing charges for the corrupt implementation of the water projects in Abra province.

Such is a milestone for constructive engagement between a civil society organization like the CCAGG and government oversight bodies.