



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

CSO:	INCITEGov
Years:	2008 - 2009
Country:	Isabela Province, Philippines
Amount:	\$ 25,069 USD
Sector:	Public Service Delivery

Corruption Problem:	Wastage of local government funds
Tools Employed:	Training and organizing monitoring teams

Isabela is the second largest province in the Philippines. In 2008, the then provincial governor, Grace Padaca, implemented a policy that monitored and evaluated the province’s Ugnayang Bayan (farm-to-market roads) project through its Special Project Office (SPO). The governor, however, wanted a closer monitoring of these projects as well as the procurement of medicines and medical supplies for the public hospitals in the province. INCITEGov proposed to create for the provincial government a participatory monitoring system that would be able to oversee the use of these funds. It received a grant from PTF to undertake such a project in 2008.

Corruption Problem Addressed and Project Objectives

The provincial government felt that its grants to the barangays through the Ugnayang Bayan were not being adequately monitored and was concerned about the efficient use of these funds. In addition, it was concerned that the procurement of medical supplies by public hospitals in the province was plagued by the incidence of emergency purchases that bypassed the regular bidding process requirements. This

procurement involved millions of pesos of provincial funds that may be lost or wasted due to corruption or inefficiency.

The general objective of the project was to improve the transparency in the utilization of provincial funds allotted to municipalities and barangays for infrastructure and health projects, particularly, the procurement of medicines for the provincial and district hospitals. Specifically, the project aimed to:

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

Approaches, Methods and Tools Used to Address the Problem

To address these problems, INCITEGov proposed a participatory monitoring project that would involve two types of participatory audits:



Barangay infrastructure monitoring of public infrastructure projects as they are being undertaken to avoid fund leakages and to identify inefficiencies in the process;

Drug procurement analysis which would:

- Scrutinize processes and documents in the procurement of drugs,
- Understand the reason behind emergency purchases,
- Detect cases of corruption committed.

INCITEGov initiated meetings with the Social Action Center of the Diocese of Isabela to begin to plan for how participatory monitoring could be carried out. It was decided that the project also involve the Provincial Alliance of Isabela for Justice, Democracy, and Good Governance (PAJDGG), a province-wide alliance of faith groups and NGOs, the chair of which was also the social action center's director. A memorandum of agreement among the three organizations was created defining each of their roles and responsibilities in the project.

The main activities of this project consisted of:

Training: A training on participatory monitoring designed and facilitated by INCITEGov with 70 participants from the PAJDGG and the provincial government in attendance. It provided the orientation, the technical knowhow, and the procedure that the volunteer community monitors need to be equipped with.

The monitors for the barangay infrastructure projects were trained on the CCAGG method for monitoring those types of projects. This included how-tos in observing construction of road projects, focusing on red flags, and reporting findings for greater scrutiny by engineers.

The hospital monitoring team was trained in procurement monitoring.

Organizing the Monitor Teams: Three district teams were organized to monitor projects located in the three districts of Isabela. The district teams were further broken down into municipal teams of three to five members each. The district team leader was usually an engineer.

Only two monitoring teams were created to look into the drug procurement process due to a lack of qualified volunteers. The teams were composed of two medical doctors engaged in community based health programs, a nun responsible for the community-based health program of her congregation, the Social Action Center community-based health program officer, and the dean of a nursing school in the province.

Signing of a memorandum of agreement (MOA) between the project implementer and the provincial government and the formal launching of the project with orientations conducted in the project areas.

Monitoring: Eighteen infrastructure projects were examined consisting of 15 Ugnayang Bayan projects and three provincial roads. The project cost a total of over 13 million pesos. Procurement monitoring was organized for two provincial hospitals, the Faustino Dy Provincial Hospital and Cauayan District Hospital. Holding of a workshop to synthesize the monitoring results and formulate recommendations for the Governor.

Results Achieved

Two "problem solving sessions" between the PAJDGG and provincial government representatives were conducted in which the results of the monitoring were discussed. Regarding the Ugnayang Bayan projects, it was reported that:



Roads were being constructed through "bayanihan" or shared labor, which was the counterpart of the barangay.

Funds released for project implementation were used to pay loans contracted by barangay captains to build the roads before the appropriated funds became available.

Certain construction practices and standards to ensure quality were not observed, apparently as a way to extend the roads over a longer distance than the available funds could cover.

On the hospital monitoring, the session was mostly to clarify the procedures and documents used for procurement. The issue of emergency purchases remained contentious, however.

The monitoring report also noted that:

- the Annual Procurement Plan (APP) and the actual purchases of the two respondent hospitals were not consistent with the PNDF.
- many doctors in the two hospitals found it hard to follow the Generics Act of 1988 that requires them to prescribe generic drugs using the PNDF.
- discrepancy was noted between the APP and actual purchases.
- there was no clear-cut policy on the standard usage of emergency fund.
- increasing emergency purchases was attributed to the delayed delivery of drugs and medicines to the hospitals.

What worked well and what did not?

Volunteer Training: The fact that the project was able to train 70 volunteers to monitor provincial government projects achieved part of the project objectives. 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 became 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.

Meeting Project Objectives. The project, however, failed to meet its objectives of setting up a monitoring system and establishing standards for transparency and accountability. Its lone accomplishment was the training of community volunteers who could look into barangay infrastructure projects and hopefully be able to determine if anomalies were being committed.

Lessons Learned

The project showed that training and deploying volunteers is not sufficient to sustain the monitoring of government delivery of services. 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 insufficient effort was put into creating more durable monitoring systems.

In addition, the INCITEGov noted the following lessons that it drew from its experience in this project:

- The recruitment of community volunteers is not easy as volunteers are often fearful of authority, have limited skills and previous experience, and lack the confidence to do monitoring work.
- LGUs and the teams that are supposed to monitor them should be jointly orientated so



that they equally understand the needs and implications of the undertaking.

- There is a need to involve the community in data gathering, planning, implementation, and evaluation as members can provide insights and other knowledge regarding local projects.
- The level of vigilance of community volunteers in monitoring projects creates conditions that make corrupt practices vulnerable to discovery.
- Partnerships between LGUs and NGOs maximizes the efficient and effective use of resources.

The project relied on the fact that Governor Padaca championed the project. Its failure to set up standards and systems for project monitoring, however, weakened any prospect of sustaining the monitoring effort when the governor was forced to step down at the end of 2009. In the words of the PCA, “seemingly strong political support can evaporate quickly.”

Sustainability

Some of the conditions for sustainability were put in place, such as the mobilization of local CSOs, the cooperation with local agencies and LGUs, and the training of local monitors. However, the project’s ability to sustain itself was severely put into question when Governor Padaca was forced to step down. In addition, the project’s failure to set up a monitoring system and to institutionalize community monitoring through a local ordinance contributed to this weakness in sustainability.