



Improving Education and Curbing Corruption by Monitoring Textbook Deliveries in the Philippines

CSO:	Government Watch (G-Watch)
Years:	2003 (project 1) 2005 (project 2) 2006 (project 3)
Country:	Philippines
Amount:	\$ 24,727 USD (project 1) \$ 29,472 USD (project 2) \$ 22,555 USD (project 3)
Sector:	1) Civil Society Monitoring of Public Procurement 2) Controlling Corruption in Delivery of Social Services: Education

Corruption Problem:	Leakages in procurement and failed distribution of textbooks pose an impediment to public services in the area of education
Tools employed:	Capacity Building, Constructive Engagement, Survey, Advocacy, Community Empowerment, Coalition Building, Awareness Raising, Third Party Monitoring, Coalition Building

Government Watch (G-Watch), a social accountability program connected to the Ateneo School of Government, has established a cooperation with the Department of Education (DepEd) and Civil Society Organizations nationwide to implement the “Textbook Count” project. The project was started in 2003 and has continued over the years. It is geared toward eliminating corruption in textbook procurement, systematizing textbook deliveries nationwide, making suppliers more responsive to clients’ needs, and mobilizing citizens for monitoring and inspection to achieve greater transparency. Results achieved include the successful safeguarding of the bidding process, ensuring textbook quality and the right quantity and quality of textbook deliveries to the right recipients at the right point of time.

Corruption Problem Addressed

In 2001 there were a plethora of reports, disclosing that billions of pesos were lost in textbook scams, corruption in procurement, ghost projects in

textbook delivery and school-building construction. In that year, G-Watch reviewed public sector performance in two key areas: textbook delivery and school-building construction.

- G-Watch findings on textbook delivery included:
- ✓ 40% of textbooks cannot be accounted for
 - ✓ Suppliers deliver books seemingly randomly, anytime anywhere
 - ✓ Recipients were not notified about deliveries
 - ✓ No feedback mechanism regarding schools’ receipt of books
 - ✓ Documents were not properly filled and filed
 - ✓ No effective sanctions for late deliveries
 - ✓ 21% of difficult-to-reach elementary schools did not receive any shipments.

In addition, the prices of textbooks procured by the Department of Education (DepEd) were unreasonably high and the physical quality of the textbooks was poor with the apparent use of sub-standard materials in their production.

Actions Taken by G-Watch

The basic premise underlying the approach adopted by G-Watch in addressing corruption in the DepEd is that active participation of citizens in the critical process of governing results in more transparency and higher performance standards, minimizing corruption and deviations from rules and standards.

At the outset, a few young researchers of G-Watch conducted a pilot monitoring exercise in several parts of the country, using an easy-to-use tool that compared what was expected in terms of time, quantity, quality, cost and process of the textbook delivery with the actual values observed. In response to the findings, a pioneering initiative was launched, “Textbook Count”, that was jointly conceptualized by the DepEd leadership and G-Watch. G-Watch facilitated the first four annual rounds of monitoring and then stepped back to allow the program to continue as a government-community partnership. The key players are the DepEd’s Instructional Materials Council Secretariat (IMCS) and the Textbook Count Consortium of CSOs that organize civil society participation.

The G-Watch social accountability approach involves five elements that address the common challenges and issues confronting anti-corruption efforts in civil society.

1) The focus is on a joint and constructive effort between government and civil society. All key actors enter 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, to processes and to DepEd officials, an important prerequisite for monitoring government service delivery.



Volunteers and officials receiving textbooks

2) The approach is preventive. G-Watch monitoring clarifies standards at the outset and allows monitors to see if the standards are met while the service delivery is on-going. 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.

3) The approach is community-based and emphasizes involving beneficiaries as monitors. This is a strategic response to address two things: Scale and Empowerment. A preventive monitoring program of a nationwide service delivery requires monitors to be present where and when service delivery happens. 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. The capacity-building of beneficiaries to act as monitors, raising awareness as to what are their rights and entitlements, addressing a critical cultural problem in the country: Many citizens have a “clientelistic” attitude, feeling they “owe” the politicians or government officials (the patrons) they receive services from. Turning beneficiaries into monitors strengthens their sense of rights and

equips them with a constructive way to express their demands.

4) Fourth, G-Watch’s approach places emphasis on keeping citizen monitoring as simple and straight forward as possible through easy-to-use tools. Often tools are 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.

5) Finally, and to ensure objectivity as well as follow-up to the observations made by monitors, G-Watch highlights the importance of evidence and data gathered using the monitoring tools to then use the data for continuous advocacy, recommending reforms, and soliciting a public sector response that addresses shortcomings.

Impact and Results Achieved

The textbook count initiatives have had significant success over the years. Leakages in service delivery were greatly reduced. Due to due diligence and, systemic 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.

At the procedural level, and in close coordination with the DepEd, G-Watch was able to institutionalize a system for citizens to check and monitor the delivery of services. The system established builds on a variety of tools and strategies to solicit a response of concerned agencies and support of the public. 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.

The initiative has been highly successful activating, capacitating and mobilizing citizen organizations and citizens as monitors. G-Watch observed an increase in participation of CSOs through “Textbook Count” and similar engagements with government. Awareness raising and capacity building conducted through the course of the projects has strengthened citizens’ ability and propensity to voice their concerns and improve their understanding of the complexities of governance. The atmosphere among monitors during project activities was generally hopeful, optimistic and festive – owing to the immediate gains they could observe: Textbooks delivered on time and in good conditions. As pointed out by one of the monitors: “to monitor is perspiring, but inspiring.”



Loading of textbooks onto a truck for shipment to a difficult-to-reach elementary school

Another result is the growing openness in the government to involve citizens in their “internal” and possibly delicate affairs such as financial management. One of the most significant results is the improvement in public perception toward the education department: Due to its proactive involvement in the Textbook Count project, the DepEd has leaped from being perceived as one of

the top three most corrupt agencies to one of the highest publically trusted agencies in the government.

Sustainability:

For these gains to be sustained and to have impact on education outcomes, the social accountability tools employed will have to be sustained and become engrained cultural practice. While the program has been adopted as a regular program within the DepEd, sustaining the participation of civil society continues to be a challenge. Involving the community is one specific response toward sustainability that relies on empowerment to be self-perpetuating, i.e. citizens would use the knowledge and skills they have acquired to obtain quality and responsive services from the government and pass this knowledge on. Developing such culture entails however extensive and long-term re-orientation and capacity-building efforts, including addressing citizen's immediate concerns and priorities that are most often economic in nature. To reach the grassroots, national enablers like G-Watch and its counterparts in the national government will have to replicate themselves and their kind of engagement at the sub-national level. Mobilizing support and resources for this strategic endeavor of G-Watch's work in the education sector is the next order of battle.

While the task may seem insurmountable and overwhelming, the assessment in fact means something positive: G-Watch's work has gone past demonstrations and pilots and is transforming practices and institutions that can change the politics of governance in the country as we know it.

Documentation

Project completion reports (PCRs) and Project completion assessments (PCAs) can be accessed at www.ptfund.org under the "Where-we-work" tab.

G-Watch's website can be accessed at <http://gwatchdeped.wordpress.com/>

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

- Procurement Watch, Inc. (2008). 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
- Aceron, Joy, et.al. (2008). Government Watch Manual
- Gonzalez, Hilda (2004). Agencies' Actions on and Policy Responses to the G-Watch Report. Commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme. (Unpublished paper)
- Gregorio, Simon (2006). Institutionalization Study: Going Beyond Textbook Count. Commissioned by Government Watch. (Unpublished paper)
- Government Watch. Government Watch Localization Framework. With support from UNDP.
- Aceron, Joy (2010). Sustaining Citizen-Government Engagement, Transforming Governance. A Paper Presented in UNDP's RePubliko: Knowledge Sharing Week.
- Aceron, Joy (2008). The Textbook Count Story (PowerPoint Presentation). With support from the Asian Development Bank.



- Acheron, Joy (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 (2010). Commissioned by The World Bank.
- Government Watch (2010). Philippine Education Under Construction: A Policy Study on the Government School Building Program (2010). With support from UNDP.
- Government Watch (2011). G-Watch Assessment of the Responsiveness of the Education Budget Allocation for 2009. With support from The World Bank.
- World Bank. Textbook Count.
<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTFIDFOR/Resources/4659186-1206285405516/1cEAP-PR.pdf>