

## PARTNERING TO MAKE BUDGETS WORK FOR THE PEOPLE

### Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government (CCAGG) – Philippines

CCAGG is a civic organization that works in the remote, rural province of Abra in the northern Philippines. Established in 1987, CCAGG specializes in monitoring the implementation of infrastructure projects in the province. Their community-based approach relies on the voluntary efforts of area residents who verify whether bridges, roads, and other infrastructure projects are executed according to contract regulations. These citizen audits are then verified by civil engineers working with CCAGG and turned into evidence-based reports that aim to disclose potential corruption in the implementation of public infrastructure projects.

In 2000 CCAGG was awarded one of Transparency International's first Integrity Awards for its fight against graft and corruption at the local level. CCAGG's main activities include monitoring, evaluation, and auditing; training and networking with other civil society groups in the province; and designing and implementing development projects that will directly benefit the local community.

#### CCAGG's Participatory Audits Trigger Corruption Investigations

CCAGG's monitoring activities began in 1987 when President Corazon Aquino's administration implemented a development package called the Community and Employment Development Program (CEDP) under the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA). This new program allotted small projects to communities (e.g., health clinics, school buildings, irrigation systems, etc.) and employed the project beneficiaries. The innovative aspect of the program was that it tapped civil society organizations (CSOs) to monitor projects. CCAGG joined the monitoring effort through an agreement with NEDA and the Department of Budget and Management (DBM). NEDA trained CCAGG on project monitoring and gave it a list of projects, their locations, and implementing agencies. The DBM provided CCAGG with information on total project costs and schedules.

CCAGG subsequently began monitoring project implementation and provided regular feedback to NEDA and implementing agencies, including recommendations for resolving flaws in project implementation. In addition, CCAGG organized and trained

the project beneficiaries on the monitoring methodology in order to involve them in project oversight. CCAGG also used local radio and print media to inform local residents about the projects and their implementation status. This was a



**PHILIPPINES**  
Open Budget Index 2010  
Overall Score: 55  
Government provides some information to the public on how it manages public resources.

Availability of budget documents critical for effective public input:	
Pre-Budget Statement	No
Executive's Budget Proposal	Yes
Citizens Budget	No
Enacted Budget	Yes
In-Year Reports	Yes
Mid-Year Review	No
Year-End Report	Yes
Audit Report	Yes
<a href="http://www.openbudgetindex.org">www.openbudgetindex.org</a>	

groundbreaking development at the time, as people were used to "impenetrable secrecy" about government projects. The participatory monitoring activities

exposed a number of anomalies in CEDP projects. For example, projects not yet started or barely begun were reported as finished. Certificates of Completion were prepared and so-called finished projects were turned over to local government executives. During this time, an article appeared in a local newspaper boasting that the district Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) office had completed 27 successful government infrastructure projects in the region. Knowing that many of these projects had not been completed, CCAGG members decided to take action against the agency's misinformation.

To make a strong case against the agency, CCAGG developed detailed documentation on the actual state of projects that had been declared completed, including affidavits from residents of the project areas and photographs of the project sites. CCAGG submitted these findings to the national DPWH and demanded that the district DPWH office be investigated. The documents triggered an official government audit, which confirmed CCAGG's findings. An administrative case was filed against the accused DPWH engineers, with CCAGG members

serving as witnesses. While some of the engineers were convicted, the prosecuting lawyers argued for leniency on their behalf and asked that they receive only official reprimands as punishment. Outraged by this development, CCAGG members mobilized the public to flood the Office of the Secretary of the DPWH with telegrams from concerned citizens demanding that the convicted engineers receive more severe punishment.

The secretary finally relented, suspending 11 government engineers found guilty of dishonesty and misconduct. In addition, the chief and deputy chief engineer of the DPWH in Abra were barred from serving in the province in the future. This was probably the first case in the history of the Philippines in which a CSO's vigilance had resulted in the conviction and punishment of government officials on charges of corruption. As a result of this case, the regional director of the DPWH issued a directive to the district DPWH office in Abra requiring that projects in the province be funded only after they had obtained a clear monitoring report from CCAGG. Furthermore, in 1988 President Aquino gave CCAGG a Presidential Citation for "Outstanding Community Service"

for its distinctive contribution to the implementation of CEDP projects.

Recognizing the critical role the organization plays in preventing corruption, the national Commission on Audit (COA) entered into a partnership with CCAGG to conduct participatory audits of projects and programs.<sup>z</sup> This exercise was sponsored by UNDP and was described as successful by all the concerned parties, including the chairman of the COA. The lessons from the audit process were later incorporated into a manual on participatory audits, published by the COA. This partnership set an important precedent for citizen-government engagement.

In 2009 CCAGG accepted an invitation from the national Office of the Ombudsman to become a formal member of the government's Multi-Sectoral Anti-Corruption Council (MSACC). CCAGG is also chairing the Philippine Road Watch Initiative, which aims to ensure the transparency of DPWH procurement systems, and will be training CSOs around the country to implement its methodology.

## CCAGG's Participation in the Partnership Initiative

CCAGG has played an important role in reducing corruption in Abra, but it has limited influence outside of the province. With the support of the Partnership Initiative, CCAGG will strengthen its capacity to undertake local-level budget monitoring of public works and contribute to increasing the technical capacity of other organizations to replicate its work, promote good governance, and fight the rampant corruption that currently exists in the Philippines. CCAGG will organize, mentor, and train community members and civil society groups in three regions of the northern Philippines to undertake citizen monitoring of public works and participatory budgeting. These activities will be carried out through the development of a capacity-building scheme. CCAGG also will document and disseminate the results and lessons of citizen audits in order to raise awareness and motivate further civil society participation in monitoring public works and other government projects.

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*The IBP's Partnership Initiative is a collaborative effort that seeks to enhance the impact of civil society budget work in selected countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The initiative strives to contribute to the development of sustainable institutions; to increase public access to timely, reliable, and useful information; to enhance the effective participation of civil society in policy and budget processes; and to establish a platform of good practices on which future generations of civil society can build.*