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Pitfalls of Aiming to Empower the Bottom from the Top: The Case of Philippine Participatory Budgeting

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Cover Photo: When the author visited the Department of Agriculture (DA) in Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) for an interview in January of 2016, she noticed this huge pile of documents related to BuB projects, which represented some Php 1 billion in investment. Credit: Joy Aceron.

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Acronyms | 4 |
| About the Author..... | 5 |
| Acknowledgements | 5 |
| Summary | 6 |
| I. Introduction..... | 7 |
| II. Philippine Decentralization and Civil Society Participation in Local Governance | 8 |
| III. Designing Participatory Budgeting for the Philippines..... | 12 |
| IV. BuB Implementation Process, Major Gains and Key Misses | 17 |
| V. Centralized Implementation Design | 25 |
| VI. The Civil Society Empowerment Pillar was Constrained and Weakened..... | 29 |
| VII. Failure to Enable Downward Accountability..... | 32 |
| VIII. Recap, Concluding Analysis and Final Reflections..... | 36 |
| Endnotes | 38 |
| References | 41 |
| Annex 1: BuB Menu of Programs | 47 |
| Annex 2: What Percentage of Counterpart Funds are Required from Local Government in BuB? | 50 |

Acronyms

| | | | |
|-----------------|---|--------------|---|
| ADM | Assistance to Disadvantaged Municipalities | LGC | Local Government Code |
| ARMM | Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao | LGSF | Local Government Support Fund |
| BuB | Bottom-Up Budgeting | LGU | Local Government Unit |
| CCAGG | Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government | LPRAP | Local Poverty Reduction Action Plan |
| CLMP | Citizen-Led Monitoring Program | LPRAT | Local Poverty Reduction Action Team |
| CODE-NGO | Caucus of Development NGO Networks | LSB | Local Special Body |
| CSO | Civil society organization | MSI | Multi-stakeholder initiative |
| DBM | Department of Budget and Management | NACP | National Anti-Poverty Commission |
| DILG | Department of the Interior and Local Government | NCDDP | National Community-Driven Development Program |
| DSWD | Department of Social Welfare and Development | NEDA | National Economic and Development Authority |
| FGD | Focus group discussion | NEP | National Expenditure Program |
| GGACC | Good Governance and Anti-Corruption Cluster | NGO | Non-governmental organization |
| GIFMIS | Government Integrated Financial Management Information System | NPRAT | National Poverty Reduction Action Team |
| GIFT | Global Initiative for Fiscal Transparency | OGP | Open Government Partnership |
| IRA | Internal Revenue Allotment | PB | Participatory budgeting |
| IRM | Independent Reporting Mechanism | PIDS | Philippine Institute for Development Studies |
| KC-NCDDP | Kapit-Bisig Laban sa Kahirapan-Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services-National Community-Driven Development Program | PMO | Project Management Office |
| LDC | Local Development Council | RPRAT | Regional Poverty Reduction Action Team |
| | | RTD | Roundtable discussion |
| | | SGLG | Seal of Good Local Governance |

About the Author



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Summary

Pitfalls of Aiming to Empower the Bottom from the Top: The Case of Philippine Participatory Budgeting

This paper explains why and how a reform program that opened up spaces for participatory budgeting was ultimately unable to result in pro-citizen power shifts that transformed governance. The study reviews the design and implementation of Bottom-Up Budgeting (BuB), the nationwide participatory budgeting (PB) program in the Philippines, which ran from 2012 to 2016 under the Benigno Aquino government. The findings underscore the importance of institutional design to participatory governance reforms. BuB's goal was to transform local government by providing more space for civil society organizations (CSOs) to co-identify projects with the government and to take part in the budgeting process, but it did not strengthen CSO or grassroots capacity to hold their Local Government Units (LGUs) accountable.

The BuB design had features that delivered positive gains towards citizen empowerment, including: (1) providing equal seats for CSOs in the Local Poverty Reduction Action Team (LPRAT), which are formally mandated to select proposed projects (in contrast to the pre-existing Local Development Councils (LDCs), which have only 25 percent CSO representation); (2) CSOs identified their LPRAT representatives themselves (as opposed to local chief executives choosing CSO representatives, as in the LDCs); and (3) LGUs were mandated to follow participatory requirements to receive additional funding.

However, several aspects of the institutional design shifted power from local governments to the central government. This had a “centralizing effect”—namely: (1) there was a decision to bypass local government's LDCs and create a new structure that was dependent on the central government; (2) the approval of each proposed project was subject to a tedious bureaucratic process and requirements by the national government which inadvertently created numerous veto players; (3) CSOs were limited to a pre-set menu of options of projects determined by national government agencies; (4) coordination was transferred from the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC) to the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), and (5) the design failed to support a strong civil society component with a monitoring system that was well-coordinated, well-integrated, and had effective CSO oversight.

This study argues that because of these design problems, BuB fell short in achieving its main political reform agenda of empowering the grassroots—particularly in enabling downward accountability that could have enabled lasting pro-citizen power shifts. It did not empower local civil society and citizens to become a countervailing force vis-à-vis local politicians in fiscal governance. BuB is a case of a reform that provided a procedural mechanism for civil society input into national agency decisions but was unable to improve government responsiveness. It provided civil society with ‘voice’, but was constrained in enabling ‘teeth’.

Finally, the paper echoes the results of other studies which find that PB programs become successful when complemented by other institutional and state democratic capacity-building reforms and when they are part of a broader progressive change agenda. The BuB experience suggests that to bolster citizen oversight, it is essential to invest sufficient support and resources in citizen empowerment and in creating an enabling environment for citizen oversight.



I. Introduction

The Benigno Aquino government implemented a nationwide PB program in the Philippines from 2012 to 2016 called Bottom-Up-Budgeting (BuB). While the program provided space for civil society to identify projects to be prioritized by the government, it had certain design flaws that ultimately limited the program's transformative impact.

This paper begins by reviewing how the designers of the program envisioned BuB as a reform initiative of the new Aquino government. It goes on to compare it to the design of PB initiatives in other countries to highlight its envisioned political reform goals. The implementation process of BuB is then presented, followed by BuB's key achievements and shortcomings, underscoring the perennial problem of backlogs and uncertain impact of civil society participation.

The next two sections explain the two key challenges faced by the BuB program in improving government responsiveness in the Philippines: the centralizing effect of its design, and its weakened citizen empowerment pillar. The paper describes how the design of the program, which was supposed to facilitate bottom-up participation, ironically ended up keeping or redirecting power to the center. The paper then describes how the citizen empowerment program, which was meant to be the central feature, was actually weakened in the course of implementation. Finally, the paper concludes with a section on the weak or absent downward accountability that is an indicator of the BuB program's failure to achieve its political reform agenda of empowering the "bottom".

To situate the BuB reform more broadly, we start with a quick review of the Philippine governance context—specifically the country's experience of decentralization and civil society participation.



II. Philippine Decentralization and Civil Society Participation in Local Governance

After the end of the two-decade dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos in 1986, the goal of the newly installed government of Corazon Aquino was to re-establish the democratic order, starting with a Constitution that would provide principles, mechanisms and institutions for the exercise of both direct and representative democracy. Policies that further democratize politics and governance and enable citizen participation in governance were passed over the six years that Corazon Aquino was president, including the Local Government Code (LGC) in 1991.

Described as the “most radical and far-reaching policy” that is meant to address the country’s “over-centralized politico-administrative system” (Brillantes 2003:329), the LGC was not only designed to enhance the authority of the country’s sub-national units, but also to institutionalize citizens’ participation in local decision-making.

Decentralization law widens participatory spaces

The LGC has five major features: (1) devolution of the responsibility for the delivery of basic services previously being undertaken by the national government; (2) enforcement of certain regulatory powers; (3) broadening of the revenue base of LGUs; (4) vesting LGUs with the authority to undertake entrepreneurial and developmental activities; and (5) the active participation of civil society in local governance (Panadero 2006).²

The LGC also attempted to extend democratic reform by recognizing and institutionalizing space for the participation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and people’s organizations in municipal decision-making. As noted by Cristobal, “[a]long with other provisions on local governments, such as the more equitable sharing of the national wealth and income, local autonomy or decentralization became a constitutional policy that would democratize power and authority, and thereby strengthen democracy in local communities” (1997:257).

The LGC provides numerous and wide avenues for people’s participation, which include:

1. Local Development Councils (LDCs). LDCs plan and prioritize local programs and projects. They are mandated to include members from accredited NGOs to comprise as many as one-quarter of the membership.
2. Local Special Bodies (LSBs) such as Local Health Boards, Local School Boards, the Bids and Awards Committee³ and the Peace and Order Council.
3. Local legislatures (*Sanggunian*). Three seats are allocated for sectoral representatives from women, workers and other sectors identified by the council. Policy and budget deliberations of the local legislature are also open to the public.
4. Initiatives and recall. The Constitution and the LGC provide for this process of direct people’s participation to ensure accountability in public office.
5. Referendum. A proposition is presented to the public for their ratification.
6. General Assemblies. A gathering of people initiated by themselves or by the local government for consultation and dialogue (Tapales 2003:348–49).
7. Mandatory consultations with NGOs/people’s organizations (POs) by national government agencies prior to the implementation of development projects (Tigno 1997:123).

Philippine Local Government Code has had mixed results

More than two decades after the LGC was passed into law, assessments have pointed out the strengths and weaknesses of the Code itself and its implementation, as well as the issues and challenges facing the decentralization reform process.

A review of various assessments of the performance of the LGC, by Filipino academic Ronald Holmes, was published in a recent edited collection on the state of Philippine democracy. In his review, Holmes (2016) identified indicators where Philippine decentralization has performed well according to numerous studies. One strength is the expansion of fiscal space at the local level through the Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA), constituting 40 percent of the national revenue, which has endowed local governments with more resources. Aside from automatically receiving 40 percent of national revenue (allocated according to a formula that takes into account population and land area),⁴ the LGC empowers LGUs to raise finances through the local capital market and collection of taxes, including property tax, business tax, amusement tax, franchise tax, and taxes on professional fees.

Holmes, meanwhile, identified four constraints to the impact of decentralization. The first includes LGC mandates that are not implemented, such as the provision on Local Special Bodies. The second is the “archaic and limiting” fiscal governance framework. The power of LGUs to levy and collect taxes is limited. Advocates of local governance would also point to the incomplete process of decentralization because of still-centralized resource allocation, with national agencies continuing to control a big chunk of the budget and with *Malacañang* having the “power of release” over budget that is sometimes used to control local governments (La Viña and Acheron 2009).

The third constraint facing LGUs is organizational, and largely concerns capacity and human resource constraints. Some consider that the volume of functions devolved to local governments is not matched with the capacity and resources needed to carry out these functions (Preschle and Sosmena 2005). A study by the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) points out that “short-term political interests and concerns were given priority over longer-term development goals” in development planning at the local level, which has cast doubt on the prospects of local governments to address local patronage and rent-seeking (NEDA, cited in Tigno 1997:125).

The final constraint identified by Holmes is systemic, which he describes as the prevalence of the “patrimonial oligarchic state” (2017:129–33). This pertains to a

long-standing analysis that the Philippine state continues to be controlled by elites that hold both economic and political power.

Underutilized spaces for civil society participation in local governance

CSO capacity across the country is uneven. This partly explains the uneven results of participatory programs such as the BuB. The diversity of Philippine civil society (Acheron and Isaac 2016) has been both a strength and a weakness in civil society engagement in local government. There are many different types of civil society groups in the Philippines, from those that are linked to social/political movements to those created by the government. This diversity has enabled a wide variety of actions, but has also led to fragmentation and distractions due to a variety of issues, including competition in sourcing funds (Tigno 1997:129–30).

Meanwhile, almost three decades after the LGC was passed, the minimum legal requirements for civil society representation remain unobserved in many local governments. Some of the mandated participatory bodies, including some LDCs, remain non-functional (interview with Richard Villacorta, Director, Project Management Office, Bottom-Up-Budgeting/ Assistance to Disadvantaged Municipalities, February 9, 2018). The 2017 result of the Seal of Good Local Governance (SGLG) shows that 54 percent of provincial development councils (44) received a ‘high’ rating and 41 percent received a ‘medium’ rating in overall LDC functionality, while 30 percent (442) of municipal development councils (MDCs) received a ‘high’ rating and 51 percent received a ‘medium’ rating in overall LDC functionality.⁵ An exploratory study by Acheron et al. in 2013 shows that only around 70 percent of Local School Boards in cities comply with the minimum requirement of civil society participation.

The reasons documented in studies as to why the participatory bodies in local governments remain weak, under-performing or non-functional are mostly supply-side problems: the lack of sanction for non-compliance with participation requirements (Tigno 1997:124); intervention by local chief executives (Cariño, 2007); LGUs creating their own NGOs (Tapaes 2003:552); and challenges in LGU accreditation (Tigno 1997:125).

Decentralization enabling accountability and vice versa—in theory

Various Filipino scholars and advocates view decentralization as a promising mode and process of local governance whose ultimate goal is economic and social development, or in particular, the socioeconomic transformation of LGUs (Padilla 1998:83). It “promises genuine and meaningful local autonomy to enable local government units to attain their fullest development as self-reliant communities and to make them more effective partners in the attainment of national goals” (Lijauco and Mendoza 2005:177). Furthermore, through decentralization, the government is brought closer to the people, making it more likely to be responsive and accountable, enabling downward accountability to citizens.⁶

Yilmaz and Venugopal contend that since decentralization reform creates discretionary spaces that are political, administrative and fiscal, ensuring the appropriate use of those spaces would require the setting up of mechanisms for both upward and downward accountability (2013:228). Downward accountability refers to a directionality of accountability relationships where “elected leaders are presumably held accountable downward to voters, in contrast to vertical hierarchies in which bureaucrats, workers, or soldiers, are held accountable upward in a chain of command” (Fox 2007:31). It is widely assumed that downward accountability is enabled more in a decentralized set-up because governments become closer to the people. The practical constraints (such as distance, resources and information) for citizens to engage, monitor and exact accountability from governments are expected to be lesser if governments are more literally accessible to citizens. These mechanisms can be used for social accountability, which can complement public accountability mechanisms, though they may only be effective if civil society has the capacity for vertical integration—i.e., to engage different levels of decision-making using a wide variety of approaches and coalescing with a broad array of actors in state and society (Fox 2016; Fox and Aceron 2016; Aceron and Isaac 2016). Especially in contexts of deeply entrenched particularistic interests controlling economic and political power, there is a need to enable state–society synergy that leads to a virtuous cycle of reform.

Yilmaz and Venugopal (2013) explain that the supposed enabling of accountability in decentralization reform

has been challenging in the Philippines because of the problem of “elite capture at the local level” due to the “entrenched culture of power accumulation and patronage”. They argue that “political, administrative and fiscal discretion and accountability systems become vulnerable to the instability caused by the excessively politicised system of rewards and allocations” caused by elite capture and are further exacerbated by the national institutions’ weak ability to hold local government to account. Meanwhile, though there have been relatively successful civil society campaigns to pass progressive policies, social accountability campaigns that are vertically integrated in the Philippines have been relatively rare (Aceron and Isaac 2016).

Ziegenhain (2016) affirms the problem caused by the presence of political monopolies in achieving the intended gains of decentralization, including the deepening of democracy. He contends that in the Philippines, the decentralized set-up contributed to the further entrenchment of political monopolies. This is so because “local clan leaders exert control over the access to state institutions, public offices, franchises, and business opportunities in a quasi-monopolistic fashion ... and local government positions are often used to redirect or gain privileged access to local public resources and to control the bureaucracy” (Ziegenhain 2016:61). Ziegenhain’s observation points to a seeming contradiction in Philippine decentralization, where instead of contributing to downward accountability, decentralization has made some local political monopolies (referred to in the Philippine as ‘dynasties’) even more powerful.

Philippine democratic reforms have consistently faced counter-resistance from political elites

The other empirical question is the extent to which the aim of democratization within the decentralization law has been achieved. One stark reality in Philippine democratization and reform is the presence of interests that endeavor to stop pro-people and pro-accountability reforms. To better understand reform dynamics in the country, it is important to note that democratic measures, such as decentralization and civil society participation, face constant counter-resistance at all levels of government from political elites that are against reforms and the deepening of democracy.

In a 2001 article, Kent Eaton showed how national legislators have tried to curtail decentralization to avoid losing their control over local politics entirely, given the decentralization law. Aside from passing recentralizing policies and conceding to decentralization only because of their dynasties' stronghold of local governments, he finds that the design of the LGC includes measures that allow legislators and the national government to maintain strong control over local governments. This includes constraints in fiscal policymaking, as well as top-down impositions of mandates.

In another article, Eaton showed how political society has prevented civil society from making more substantive impact on policymaking, preventing the passage of political reform policies (2003). This shows that from the very start of the post-Martial Law period in 1986, despite the vibrancy of Philippine civil society, political elites have been neutralizing, weakening and stopping what civil society can achieve substantively in democratic consolidation.

Elite capture plagues both national and local governments

The popular characterization of local governments in the Philippines as “captured” likely explains the widely held academic and policy idea of national government being better than local government. Yet, remarkably, this seems to be founded solely on a generalized observation or assumption, and the situation of elite capture is not unique to local governments.

While it is widely cited in literature that Philippine local governments are “captured”, the extent of this situation (i.e., how many local governments are captured by which interests and how many are not, how widespread within and across provinces, how intense) is yet to be empirically established. The most relevant study is the one conducted by the Asian Institute of Management (Mendoza et al. 2012), which states that 50 percent of legislators in the House of Representatives can be considered dynastic. However, this study pertains only to congressional district seats and not local government posts. There is no study which shows the extent of elite capture across local governments.

The symbiotic relationship between and among elites at the national and local government levels also needs to be factored in. Political dynasties at the local level are able to wield more control and power because of their connections at the top, and vice versa. These connections (often family members who hold national government posts) provide local dynasties with resources and connections from the central government, which they use to maintain and expand power. In turn, local dynasties provide support to these national political players through votes in elections or access to deals in their locality (PODER 2010). This symbiotic elite relationship clarifies that if there is elite capture of local governments, it is not only by local elites, but by a network of elites at all levels of government, especially at the national level, which makes elite capture something that is not exclusive to local governments.

Since elite capture is not specific to local governments, it is therefore hard to argue that national governments are necessarily better than local governments, which was the prevailing perception of national policymakers who wanted to limit the power of local governments or who continue to push for centralizing policies. When it comes to elite capture, the situation exists and persists at all levels, from the national to the local. In fact, an analysis of satisfaction surveys over time has shown generally satisfied constituencies on local government performance (Holmes 2016:127–28). There are also surveys which show that different kinds of local observers perceive national government officials as more corrupt than local officials (World Bank 2005).

In addition, there have been numerous good practices in local governments which prove that they can deliver, sometimes even better than national governments (La Viña and Akeron 2009). *Galing Pook*, an award-giving body established in 1993, has given countless awards to high-performing local governments. Though the problem of sustaining these “patches of green”, “models” or “island of good governance” has been pointed out (ibid.), the presence of best practices shows that not all local governments are captured.

It was in this broader context of decentralization and civil society participation that PB was introduced in the Philippines.



III. Designing Participatory Budgeting for the Philippines

Government reformers holding Cabinet posts under the Benigno Aquino government conceptualized the BuB program in response to this elite capture of local governments and weak civil society vis-à-vis local political elites. It was a reform initiative that was envisioned to change the budgeting process in the Philippines from being overly centralized—with “state leaders and officials exclusively deciding where the public funds should go”—to being open, participatory and transparent (Abad 2012). Aiming to give “voice and vote” to citizens in the process of crafting the national government budget (Abad 2012), BuB was introduced by the Aquino administration shortly after its election in 2011.⁷

BuB aimed to rearrange power relationships at the local level

The BuB was a key element of the reform strategy of the Aquino administration, which centered on the fight against corruption. The administration looked at “the budget as a political tool” (Abad 2014) because the budget served as a lever to influence change in behaviors and attitudes of other political actors, particularly bureaucrats. Recognition of these reforms by international groups such as the Open Government Partnership (OGP) and the Global Initiative for Fiscal Transparency (GIFT)—for example, receiving the Gold Open Government Award for Grassroots Participatory Budgeting in New York in 2014—became a means for the Aquino administration to legitimize its reform image domestically (Aceron, Aguirre and Crismo 2016). Observers expected these awards to positively affect the perceptions and attitudes of investors and lenders to the Philippines, creating a favorable business environment crucial to economic growth and development.

The agenda for nationwide adoption of BuB was set, designed, orchestrated and enabled by the reformers⁸ in the Aquino administration. Reliant on the “power of the center”, BuB was a central government-led reform aimed at effecting reforms in the national government’s budget process for local projects.



Credit: Philippine Institute for Development Studies
pids.gov.ph

The reason for the strong role for the national government in BuB is best explained by one of the leading thinkers behind BuB and Aquino’s reform agenda, former Budget Secretary Butch Abad, who himself was a crossover from the “social liberal” section of civil society:⁹

... There are existing participatory mechanisms at the local level through the Local Government Code, but they are “captured” by vested interests. There is a need to introduce a national program that will shift the balance of power with the central government facilitating the participation of CSOs [civil society organizations] on the ground and their engagement with LGUs [local government units], ensuring that the latter will comply through enforcement of standard processes and incentives. (Abad 2014)

Joel Rocamora, who formerly headed the NAPC (the lead implementing agency for BuB in its inception), explains the program’s rationale in a paper he co-authored with colleagues (Cayadong et al. 2018).¹⁰ Rocamora (who was another key thinker of the reform agenda under the Aquino administration coming from another tradition, the popular democrats),¹¹ explains that because

the existing local government mechanisms for citizen engagement were viewed as “captured”, the BuB reform strategy aimed to “rearrange” relationships at the local level, facilitated by central government: “By placing CSOs on the same footing as municipal governments, BuB has done more for people participation in the last four years than in the past quarter of a century since the decentralization law was passed” (Cayadong et al. 2018). Rocamora further explains, in a personal communication, that “BuB challenged civil society to build its municipal base, providing it with the institutional base for doing so”.¹²

These visions of BuB’s designers were also captured in their Results Framework, which served as a guide to BuB implementation. The Results Framework clearly states that:

Unlike other programs that tend to focus on the supply side of governance reforms, Bottom-up Budgeting focuses on strengthening the citizens’ demand for good governance. It seeks to establish supportive policies and create mechanisms that enable citizens and grassroots organizations to increase their demand for improved local service delivery and a more accountable government . . . The program will help transform relations between citizens and government, from one which is largely patronage-based to one where citizens become more empowered to effectively hold their government accountable for better and more responsive service delivery.¹³

The BuB results framework specified its focuses mainly on the demand side of governance by strengthening citizen voice and claiming entitlements. To this end, BuB promised to provide support and mechanisms. The results framework further asserted its goal of transforming the relationship between government and citizens from one that was based on patronage and clientelism to one based on accountability. This clearly articulated the intent of enabling downward accountability,

making local governments accountable to citizens and furthering the decentralization process.

Reviewing how BuB’s architects conceptualized the reform, it is clear that their intent was to create space for a power shift at the local level by empowering civil society specifically. The program had a clear political reform agenda: disrupt local elite control over budgeting by empowering civil society. Because “local governments are captured” by vested interests (as asserted by BuB framers), the local participatory mechanisms provided in the LGC had to be bypassed with reforms introduced from the center, in the form of a mechanism or process for civil society participation in budgeting—a “bottom-up” budgeting process. The budget to be allocated through the BuB process was national budget lodged on participating national government agencies. Civil society had equal (50 percent) representation in the Local Poverty Reduction Action Team (LPRAT) formally created to finalize the localities’ proposed projects. Representatives of civil society in this body were elected/ identified by civil society themselves. Civil society was also represented in sub-national and national decision-making bodies of BuB. The reform was also supposed to come up with a capacity-building program that would support, organize and capacitate Philippines civil society in light of the assessment that it was weak vis-à-vis local political elites.

In sum, the BuB aimed to reconfigure power relations at the local level by being a mechanism for civil society participation in the budgeting process. Such a mechanism was supposed to empower civil society by giving citizens a voice on public spending, ensuring that projects undertaken by government were those that responded to felt-needs of communities and citizens.

To further examine the BuB vision and design, the section that follows compares it with the PB mechanism that worked in Brazil (particularly in Porto Alegre) and was replicated all over the world, exploring the possible implications of the differences and similarities.



A 200-meter hanging footbridge was funded by the Department of Agriculture through its Bottom-up Budgeting (BUB) Program, connecting Brgy. Poblacion and Brgy. Tagoyango, Sibagat, Agusan del Sur. 2016. Credit: Government of the Philippines, Department of Agriculture

The envisioned Philippine participatory budgeting mechanism was part of broader reforms, emulating successful participatory budgeting initiatives elsewhere

Because of the success of PB as a participatory innovation, many communities and governments have adopted it and come up with their own PB program. Baiocchi and Ganuza trace the global uptake of PB in “1,500 cities around the globe in serpentine path” to “unravel the puzzle of its seemingly endless adaptability” (2015:188). Their study points to an important aspect of the original PB model that got lost or diluted as it travelled across the globe like a “mutable mobile”—something that maintains the form but loses its essential elements (2015:188) akin to the idea of “isomorphic mimicry” (Pritchett, Woolcock and Andrews 2010). That essential element is the holistic institutional reform package of which PB is just one part. Baiocchi and Ganuza observe that over time, the adoption of PB “got delinked from progressive institutional projects” (ibid.). Instead of a political strategy to enable popular power, there are numerous cases where PB became a toolkit, an isolated reform divorced from social movements and other relevant administrative reforms (ibid.:198).

Philippine PB—as envisioned by its framers—was part of a broader institutional reform agenda, including for public financial management, under the Good Governance and Anti-Corruption Cluster (GGACC) of the Cabinet, as well as the broader open government commitments made by the Aquino government in the OGP (Aceron et al. 2016). While it was clear how BuB was part of a broader public financial management reform program of the Aquino government, there was less clarity about how these other reforms complemented BuB’s goal of empowering civil society or the demand side of governance reform, and how successful were the implementation of these reforms.¹⁴

Building existing local government initiative and capacity was crucial in other successful PB initiatives, but the BuB was designed to bypass existing participatory municipal planning processes

The recent study by Touchton, Sugiyama and Wampler (2017) on Brazilian democracy further confirms the accompanying reforms needed to make participatory institutions like PB work. In understanding “how

democracy works to improve well-being”, Touchton et al. point out that the interaction of participatory institutions, social programs and state capacity enables a democracy to contribute to human development. Specifically, the state capacity-building reforms include fiscal transparency, additional state institutions that improve federal monitoring and oversight and financial incentives (ibid.:73).

The BuB reform comes alongside other public financial management reforms that aim to build the Philippine government’s capacity to more efficiently and effectively manage its budget. However, there is a difference; the administrative reforms identified by Touchton et al. all pertain to enabling local administration. They highlight the importance of “the ability of local administration to implement policies”, engage with and respond to inputs from citizens and to “provide useful information that informs public deliberation” (ibid.:74) in supporting participation institutions and social reform programs. Philippine PB, on the other hand, was designed to bypass existing local planning processes because the latter were viewed as captured and non-functional.

This difference between the design of Philippine BuB and PB initiatives that worked elsewhere becomes more crucial if viewed in the light of a critical perspective on PB, such as that raised by Melo (2009). Melo contends that while democratic innovations such as PB are created as supposed alternatives to the failing traditional representative institutions of the local legislatures, they do not address problems of representativeness and clientelism at the local level. According to Melo, because Brazil’s PB is administered by the local executive, it ends up shifting the balance of power away from the legislative branch of local government, rather than making it more representative. Melo explains that this is because the innovation exists in the same context, involving the same actors and power dynamics.

Philippine BuB opted to superimpose a new mechanism, bypassing existing mandated local participatory processes such as LDCs or long-standing national government programs that include a PB element, like the Kapit-Bisig Laban sa Kahirapan-Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services.¹⁵ Similar to Melo’s point, BuB existed within the same context as that of mandated local participatory bodies, which makes BuB

susceptible to the same problems that the other mechanisms or programs confront.

Identification of projects involving organized groups (instead of individuals) supports collective claim-making but only if the groups are autonomous and independent

The other point of departure of Philippine PB from the original PB in Brazil is the manner in which citizens identify projects.

In Porto Alegre’s PB, individuals identified the projects. This was to veer away from social movements that became problematic for other cities of Brazil because of the need to negotiate with a presumed base of support (Baiocchi and Ganuza 2015). In the Philippines, projects were identified by organizations in a civil society assembly at the municipal/city level. Representatives of civil society then defended these choices in joint bodies, which include representatives from local governments and national departments at the municipal/city and regional levels, before going forward to the central government level for further approval.

The different approach taken by Philippine BuB has its pluses and minuses, according to recent studies. Baiocchi and Ganuza (2015) view the individual-level decision-making of PB as a “rationalization of demand-making” where “individual participants are not unfairly swayed or overwhelmed by organized groups and there is a value-neutral way to adjudicate between competing demand” (ibid.:200).

However, Baiocchi and Ganuza also point out that in Brazil, this system for rationalizing individual demand-making existed alongside demands and protests from social movements and organized groups from whom the PB idea originated (2015:200–201). The presence of social movements creating demands outside state participation institutions like PB is crucial given the importance of “autonomous organizing” in the success of PB. This is one of the key findings of the book *Bootstrapping Democracy* (2011) by Baiocchi, Heller and Silva. Its investigation of what PB contributed to democratic deepening discovered that “whether civil society

had the capacity for autonomous organizing before the reforms is crucial in the type of democratic regime that emerged” (Baiocchi et al. 2011:17). With a program that tapped existing organized groups, BuB hence was on the right track, with an assumption that the organizations to be tapped had the capacity for autonomous organizing, and demands from social movements or organized groups continued to interplay with the systematized civil society demands through BuB.¹⁶

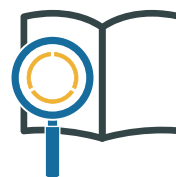
Original PB abroad allows local variation while Philippine PB was one-size-fits-all

The original PB model allows for and builds on local variation because it was municipal-led. Philippine PB was a national program, focused on enabling citizens to choose from a menu of options offered and funded by national government agencies. Its adoption by local governments was mandatory and ordered by the central government through a joint Department Order that detailed the exact process to be followed by local actors from civil society, government and national departments—while keeping the final project approval

and spending decisions in the hands of national government agencies. Baiocchi et al.’s book *Bootstrapping Democracy* highlights what is not commonly known about PB in Brazil, which is the “agency (and flexibility) of administrators in strategically drawing on and modifying the repertoire of previous experience” (2011:10). Meanwhile, the Philippines adopted a one-size-fits-all, top-down design with centrally mandated standard processes that made citizens choose from predetermined projects of national government agencies.

In sum, the broader democratic political/institutional reform intent of the BuB design is similar to the PB that worked in the municipalities of Brazil. However, intent is different from actual results. BuB’s design had several key points of departure from models like Brazil’s PB. Also, it was unable to consider different challenges in implementation which makes the BuB another case of good intentions not translating to reality.

The next sections look into the standard BuB process, its gains and misses, and the two elements that made BuB extremely limited in achieving its political reform agenda.



IV. BuB Implementation Process, Major Gains and Key Misses

The BuB program was introduced by the Aquino administration in 2011,¹⁷ shortly after it was elected. It was initiated by the Cabinet's GGACC as part of a broader set of public financial management and open government reforms. At the inception of BuB, the NAPC was the lead implementing agency. In 2014, this role was transferred to the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG).

The BuB program received an increasing budget allocation from 2013 to 2016 (see Table 1). It was implemented in 609 cities and municipalities in its pilot year in 2013, with Php 8 billion budget; in 1,233 cities and municipalities in 2014, with Php 20 billion; in 1,634 cities and municipalities in 2015, with Php 20.9 billion budget; and Php 24.7 billion budget in 2016, covering all local governments except Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).¹⁸

Table 1. BuB program budget, 2013–2016

| Year | # of localities | Budget allocation | # of projects |
|-------------------|---|----------------------------------|---------------|
| 2013 (pilot year) | 595 cities and municipalities | Php 8.4 billion (\$ 163 million) | 7,282 |
| 2014 | 1,226 cities and municipalities | Php 20 billion (\$408 million) | 19,253 |
| 2015 | 1,590 cities and municipalities | Php 20.9 billion (\$427 million) | 14,099 |
| 2016 | all local governments except the ARMM (1,514) | Php 24.7 billion (\$504 million) | 14,317 |

Source: Compiled by the author with assistance from Perigine Cayadong NAPC and Rechie Tugawin (G-Watch) using Department of Budget and Management data in 2016.

Though BuB created new mechanisms with equal CSO–government representation to select project proposals, approvals involved long, rigid processes with many government actors

The standard BuB process, as illustrated in Figure 1, started every round since 2013 with the setting of guidelines and planning by the central government. Participating national government agencies would prepare their menu of options—a list of projects that civil society groups could choose from. This menu of options was attached in a policy document (Joint Department Order) that was distributed to local governments.

Responsible national government agencies, the NAPC (in 2013) and the DILG (since 2013) then convened CSOs

at the municipal/city level in a gathering called the CSO Assembly. In the CSO Assembly, civil society's priority projects were identified from the menu of programs, and CSO representatives to the LPRAT were elected.

The LPRAT was a joint LGU–CSO body formally convened by the mayor, with an equal number of representatives from LGUs and CSOs. The LPRAT decided on the localities' priority projects and monitored implementation of BuB projects. The priorities proposed by the municipal/city-level process were forwarded to a joint government–civil society review team at the regional level called the Regional Poverty Reduction Action Team (RPRAT) composed of representatives from the LGUs, national government agencies and CSOs.



The Local Poverty Reduction Action Team (LPRAT) of Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya conducted a surprise monitoring and evaluation of the Bottom-up Budgeting (BuB) beneficiaries of 2015 BuB project of the same LGU on February 22, 2017. Credit: Government of the Philippines, Department of Trade and Industry

After the RPRAT finalized the regional list of priorities, national processes followed. The regional lists were submitted to the National Poverty Reduction Action Team (NPRAT), a multi-agency body which finalized and approved the national BuB list, with a Project Management Office (PMO) based in the DILG Central Office serving as its secretariat.

The consolidated list of projects reviewed and accepted by the NPRAT was then transmitted to the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) for integration of the BuB projects in the annual budget proposals of the national government agencies. This was done specifically by the Budget Management Bureaus (BMBs) in the DBM. The BMBs sat down with the concerned implementing national agencies in the integration process to finalize the annual budget proposals that then formed part of the National Expenditure Program (NEP).

The NEP is the President's budget. The NEP budget, which contained the BuB list of proposed projects integrated in the national agencies' plan, was submitted

to the Senate and House of Representatives for adoption. Like any other law, it went through three readings in both Houses separately before it was deliberated and passed in a joint session. Following the principle of checks and balances, the Congress-passed budget bill would go to the President for signing into law, referred to as the General Appropriations Act.

The list of BuB projects included in the General Appropriations Act would be included in the programs and projects to be implemented either by the national agencies or local governments. The funds then formed part of the agency budget, which was to be disbursed to local governments for implementation. Funds were disbursed to local governments only after several requirements and conditions set by national agencies were met. Before the budget is released to local government, the national agencies check compliance with requirements, in cooperation with the RPRAT and the PMO.

The requirements varied across agencies. Table 2 lists the key requirements.

Table 2. Key requirements of national government agencies that local governments must comply with in the BuB program to download funds after the budget approval process

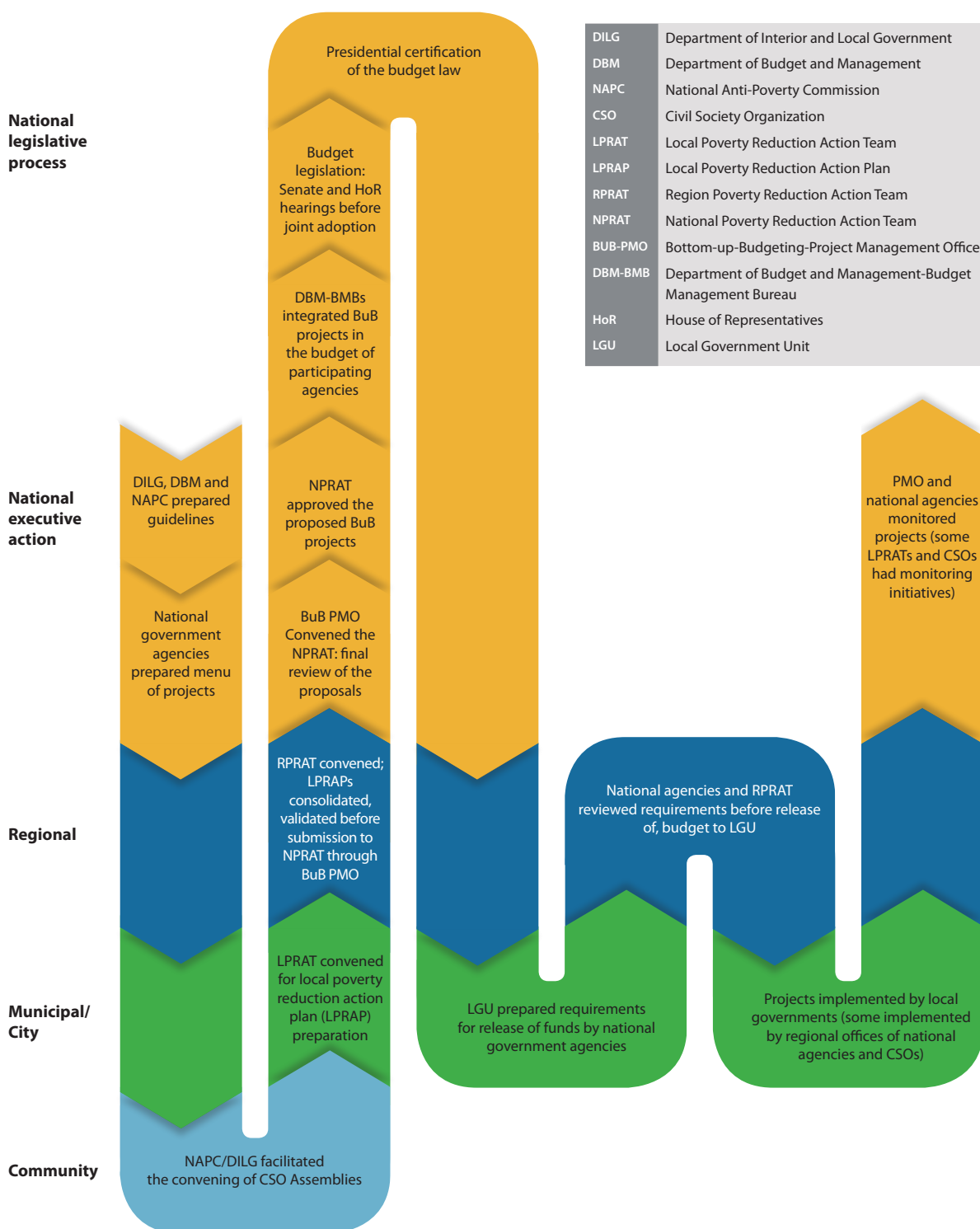
| Requirement | Description |
|---|---|
| Transparency and public disclosure requirements | DILG required LGUs to proactively disclose certain financial transactions such as the budget and procurement. Local governments must at least achieve Good Financial Management level in the Seal of Good Housekeeping/Seal of Local Governance. ¹⁹ |
| Public Finance Management Improvement Plan | Required by the DBM, this plan contains what the LGU intends to do to improve its financial management. |
| Required LGU counterpart funding for BuB projects | In 4 rounds, there were changes in the definition of LGU counterpart. For the first year, it was not required unless required by law given the nature of projects. For the second year (2014), the LGU counterpart was defined according to LGU socioeconomic classification. In the third (2015) and fourth (2016) rounds, the percentage of the combined BuB and KALAHI-CIDDs (community-driven development program of the government to reduce poverty) funding to the local government's Local Development Fund, which constituted 10% of the whole local government budget, determined the counterpart. See Annex 2 for more on counterparts. |
| Compliance with BuB processes that ensure meaningful participation of citizens and grassroots | Conduct of CSO Assembly Convening of LPRAT with 50% representation of CSOs Conduct of LPRAT workshops |
| Validated and audited Commission on Audit (COA) reports | One of the requirements is not to have any adverse findings in their COA report. ²⁰ |

Source: Compiled by author, based on BuB Memorandum circulars and various interviews.

There were instances in the first years when the national government agencies directly implemented BuB projects, but this was reportedly discouraged in the succeeding BuB cycles to empower LGUs. The processes through which CSOs could directly implement BuB projects remained unclear.

Figure 1 shows the multiple decision-making stages in the BuB process.

The many steps and veto players in the BuB project decision-making process



Source: Compiled by Joy Aceron, with assistance from Perigine Cayadong (NAPC) and Rechie Tugawin (G-Watch).

Mixed results on whether BuB delivered projects that responded to citizens' felt-needs

The most common BuB projects implemented from among the menu of options were water systems and environmental projects, basic services and common services facilities, livelihood projects, infrastructure and others. (NAPC Policy Unit in Cayadong et.al. 2018 142-244). See Annex for the complete set of menu of options.

Periodic evaluations of the BuB program have noted mixed results (Development Academy of the Philippines 2012; Ateneo Institute of Philippine Culture 2013; Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) 2014, 2015, 2016; Orient Integrated Development Consultants Incorporated 2017). All recognized how the BuB enhanced civil society participation in project identification and how most of the projects identified reflected the felt-needs of communities and civil society groups. In all the roundtable discussions (RTDs) convened by G-Watch²¹ for this paper, participants recognized the value of BuB as a mechanism where projects identified by civil society members themselves get prioritized. There is a general appreciation of the value and gains from BuB. People looked at BuB as an additional space and mechanism to propose projects that they deemed crucial for their communities and localities.²² However, the predetermined nature of the menu of options, according to the consultations done by G-Watch and the formal assessment papers, has significantly constrained CSOs' project choices. In the 2017 study by the PIDS, 91 percent of survey respondents thought that "aside from the BUB projects that were actually implemented in their local communities, there are other projects that are more needed by their communities".

The PIDS impact assessment on the BuB program (Manasan, Adaro and Tolin 2017) showed that "85% of household respondents believed that the BUB program was effective in helping the poor in their community".²³ The same study also concluded that the "character of CSOs participation in local governance (particularly in planning/ budgeting processes) has improved" through BUB in terms of: CSO members' /officers' extent of participation, CSOs' motivation/interest to participate, CSO members' /officers' confidence in their capacity to participate, the degree of CSO influence in their *barangays*

(*village or most basic political unit*), and the degree of CSO influence in their municipalities/cities (ibid.).

However, the official BuB evaluation reports (as cited at the start of this subsection) also found challenges to the quality and inclusiveness of civil society participation, slow completion of projects, and tension in the interactions between and among civil society, government agencies and local governments.

After the Aquino administration lost in the 2016 presidential elections, BuB was discontinued. The Php 35.2 billion (approx. USD 704 million) allocated to the program for 2017 was withdrawn by the NEP. A new program, called the Assistance to Disadvantaged Municipalities (ADM), was introduced in the proposed 2017 NEP, with a budget of Php 19.4 million. While some government offices, like the DILG claim that ADM is the new BuB with just a different name and only covering poor municipalities (interview with Richard Villacorta, Director, Project Management Office, Bottom-Up-Budgeting/Assistance to Disadvantaged Municipalities, February 9, 2018), the early versions of the ADM guidelines removed the detailed process of CSO participation that was present in BuB, such as CSO Assembly, poverty reduction teams, and citizen-led monitoring. The guidelines only require that the ADM Plan submitted by municipal governments be signed by a CSO representative (DILG-DBM 2016), which some CSOs criticized as a dilution of participatory processes that used to be guaranteed in the BuB (Aceron 2017). The DILG, however, claims that the ADM incorporates lessons learned from the BuB, including the activation of LDCs (interview with Richard Villacorta, 2018).

There were efforts by some CSOs to keep the BuB, but they did not succeed (CODE-NGO 2016a). In a statement calling for the budget department to reconsider the scrapping of BuB, a CSO raised the benefits that all CSOs gained from engaging with BuB, which included projects that were beneficial to citizens on the ground (CODE-NGO 2016b).

Project implementation was consistently delayed

The perennial challenge facing the BuB program was the backlog in project completion. BuB had a low or

slow delivery rate. 'Delivery rate' was defined as the percentage of the total number of projects that were completed and had started, which means that requirements had already been complied with for some money to be released. 'Completion rate' referred to the percentage of the total number of projects that were completed. Undelivered projects were those approved and budgeted, but that had not yet started.

Table 3 shows the delivery rate and completion rate for the BuB program across all years of implementation as of the second quarter of 2018. The data, however, are incomplete; they cannot be derived from the online portal and the author's government contact could not provide them.

Table 3. Delivery and completion rate of BuB program across time

| Year | End of 2014 | | End of 2015 | | End of 2016 | | Q3/ Q4 of 2017 | | Q2 of 2018 | |
|---------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|---------------------|------------|------------|
| | Delivery | Completion | Delivery | Completion | Delivery | Completion | Delivery | Completion | Delivery | Completion |
| 2013 Projects | 41.5% | 32.6% | 64.8% | 58.9% | Not available | Not available | | | | |
| 2014 Projects | 26.6% | 12.1% | 59.9% | 41.2% | 71.1% | 60.6% | | | | |
| 2015 Projects | | | 37.1% | 12.1% | 72.5% | 48.1% | 86%/ 89% | Not available / 71% | | |
| 2016 Projects | | | | | 31.4% | 12.8% | 64% | Not available | 75% | 57% |

Source: Compiled by the author with the help of Perigine Cayadong (NAPC) and Rechie Tugawin (G-Watch) using OpenBuB data, except Q3 of 2017 data, which is from NPRAT Meeting Status of BuB Implementation PPT Presentation and Q4 of 2017 and Q2 of 2018 data, which is from the DILG.

The table clearly shows the perennial challenge of backlogs over time, revealing the systemic nature of the problem that in general delayed the impact of reforms.

Given currently available data, the average completion rate of BuB projects a year after approval is 12.3 percent: 12.1 percent for 2014 projects, 12.1 percent for 2015 projects and 12.8 percent for 2016 projects), which means 87.7 percent had not been completed or had not yet started a year after approval. The average completion rate of projects two years after approval is 41 percent: 32.6 percent for 2013 projects, 41.2 percent for 2014 projects and 48.1 percent for 2015 projects, which means that more than half remain unfinished or had yet to start after Year 2. Finally, the average completion rate of BuB projects three years from approval is about 62 percent, given currently available data: 58.9 percent

for 2013 projects, 60.6 percent for 2014 projects, 71 percent for 2015 projects and 57 percent for 2016 projects. After the third year, 38 percent of projects were either incomplete or yet to start. Table 4 shows the average completion rate for all BuB rounds given currently available data.

Table 4. Low completion across rounds

| | Average completion rate |
|--------------|-------------------------|
| After Year 1 | 12.3% |
| After Year 2 | 41.0% |
| After Year 3 | 60.6% |

The delivery rate was better than the completion rate, but still problematic, and highlights the systemic problem in getting BuB projects to start. On average, 25 percent of projects had not yet started after Year 3 of implementation: 35.2 percent for 2013 projects, 29 percent for 2014 projects, 11 percent for 2015 projects, and 25 percent for 2016 projects. The average delivery rate after three years of implementation is 75 percent. An average of 40.8 percent of projects had not yet started after Year 2: 59.5 percent for 2013 projects, 40.1 percent for 2014 projects, 27.5 percent for 2015 projects and 36 percent for 2016 projects. An average of 68.3 percent of projects

had not yet started after Year 1: 73.4 percent for 2014 projects, 62.9 percent for 2015 projects and 68.6 percent for 2016 projects (Table 5).

Though the backlogs have been decreasing over time, the percentages of projects that had not yet started—68.3 percent after Year 1, 40.78 percent by end of Year 2 and 25 percent by end of Year 3—are significant. This is particularly so given that the program was supposed to respond to citizens' and communities' felt-needs.

Table 5. Slowly decreasing trend in backlog over rounds of implementation disrupted on the fourth round

| | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 |
|-------------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| Round 1 (2013 projects) | | 59.5% | 35.2% |
| Round 2 (2014 projects) | 73.4% | 40.1% | 29.0% |
| Round 3 (2015 projects) | 62.9% | 27.5% | 11.0% |
| Round 4 (2016 projects) | 68.7% | 36.0% | 25.0% |

Note that though there has been an improvement in the delivery rate or decreasing backlog over time from the first to the third round, for the fourth round/ 2016 projects, the backlog has increased again. Two explanations were given by program implementers interviewed for this study: the 2016 elections, and the introduction of a new funding source. According to the Director of the DILG, who headed the BuB program, the introduction of the Local Government Support Fund (LGSF) was not properly communicated, resulting in delays in the start of project implementation (interview with Richard Villacorta, 2018). It is also usual that project implementation (particularly for administration flagship programs) slows down during elections, as they may not be continued, depending on the result of the elections.

The backlog problem was crucial because while the program facilitated participation in the selection of projects, their slow completion rate could have undermined both incentives for participation and any political advantage that the program's architects hoped it would bring. As seen in the news, this was used by

the other main political party as a critique to the candidate of Aquino's party, and was the reason used by the current administration to cancel the BuB program (Gonzales 2016; Tupaz 2016; Cruz 2015).

The other common problem raised about BuB was whether civil society proposals ended up getting the funds and being implemented. Because of the long process and the slow delivery, this was hardly assured. The monitoring system of BuB did not gather data on this,²⁴ but the most recent PIDS study (Manasan et al. 2017) shows the percentage of CSO-identified projects in the LPRAP. It shows that there were local plans that did not have CSO-identified projects: 6.3 percent of LGUs in 2015 and 4.1 percent in 2016. However, 66 percent and 69 percent of LGUs (in 2016 and 2015 respectively) had LPRAPs with between 50 percent and 100 percent CSO-identified projects.

For a program that was meant to involve CSOs in the identification of projects, 31 percent to 34 percent of LGUs having LPRAPs with less than half of projects

identified by CSOs is a critical issue to grapple with. It means that while there has been progress in the extent to which LGUs have accommodated CSOs, this remains a challenge, despite proactive intervention from the central government.

The next section discusses the two major flaws in implementation of the BuB program that undermined its performance in achieving basic efficiency goals, causing backlogs and low CSO impact, but especially undermining the political reform content of the program.



V. Centralized Implementation Design

The biggest irony of the BuB program was that it was a reform meant to effect a bottom-up grassroots participatory process and to democratize budget decision-making, but it ended up contributing to centralization, and empowering actors at the top rather than at the grassroots. BuB implementation left national government agencies in charge of many key project decisions. How did this happen?

Veto players were inadvertently created, allowing national agencies to slow or block project delivery

BuB was a program that tried to enable local civil society participation in selecting local projects in a process controlled by the central bureaucracy of national government agencies. Because the funds were coming from central government agencies that had the power to set the requirements both before (menu of programs) and after “participatory” project identification, the program inadvertently created at least five sets of veto players in the reform process, leading to inefficiencies and backlogs:

- other members of LPRATs (who could turn down the proposals from CSOs);
- national government agencies (through their menu of programs and requirements);
- Congress (theoretically, through its power over the purse/ formal adoption of the budget);
- the President (who certifies the budget);
- LGUs (as they comply with the requirements).

As already described, the BuB process was cumbersome and the requirements were demanding. Project proposals identified by civil society in the CSO Assembly had to pass at least seven succeeding processes of approval or clearing: LPRAT, RPRAT, NPRAT, DBM integration with the agency, Congress (House of Representatives and the Senate), the President, and national agencies. In some instances, agencies had their own set of requirements

and project proposal formats that LGUs had to comply with. The complicated process involving a lot of ‘veto players’, as shown in Figure 1, slowed down implementation and constrained local actors. The BuB process became an easy victim to existing bureaucratic problems, which affected its efficiency and effectiveness.

There was an attempt to decentralize the flow of funds in BuB in 2015 by coursing it through the LGSF, which directly transferred funds from the budget department to the local governments; but this was short-lived and only involved a small percentage (13.5 percent) of total BuB funding in 2015 (Diosana et al. 2016). There was also the problem of immediately communicating these options to local governments, explaining the low delivery rate by end of 2015 when this was introduced (interview with Richard Villacorta, 2018).

There was also an effort to converge, in selected municipalities, BuB and another national program that has a PB element within it, KALAH-I-CIDSS-NCDDP (KC-NCDDP), in what was referred to as ‘Enhanced BuB’ in 2014 (Joint Memorandum Circular 2014). This was to make the most of the existing participatory mechanisms of KALAH-I that had been enabling participatory local planning and budgeting since 2003.

Unlike in BuB, where national government agencies set the requirements and menu of projects, in KC-NCDDP, the communities alone determine which projects are to be undertaken. In KC-NCDDP, after the barangays identified the projects and organized their governing body, funds were transferred directly to the bank accounts of the community organization, which was also responsible for conducting the procurement and monitoring of its own projects through the facilitation and oversight of personnel from the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) central office, with assistance from staff of the municipal government assigned to KALAH-I. Barangay and municipal government structures were engaged (not bypassed) in KALAH-I to ensure government responsiveness and sustainability (interview

with Alberto Suello, KALAH! region 7, March 16, 2018; RTD with San Miguel Bohol, KALAH! staff, March 19, 2018; RTD with KALAH! national program staff, April 24, 2018). According to Perigine Cayadong of NAPC, however, this initiative was not fully developed and integrated in the national BuB design (interview with Perigine Cayadong, NAPC Monitoring Chief, March 15, 2018). It is also important to note that although KALAH! tapped existing local government structures, the engagement it enabled between citizens and government was still limited within the framework and scope of the KALAH! program, a central government program.

The process of national agency control ended up disempowering local actors. As one of the CSO representatives in the LPRAT of Samal City shared in one of the G-Watch local discussions: “We are included in the process, but we have no control over what projects were actually implemented” [*kasama kami sa proseso, pero kung ano ang ma-iimplement na proyekto, hindi na namin kontrolado iyon*] (RTD notes, Samal, May 11, 2017). This has a lot to do with the cumbersome bureaucratic processes creating substantial delays in project implementation. A CSO leader in Bacolod succinctly summarized the problem: “You will join the long and taxing process to get projects, but the projects take a long time to be implemented. Sometimes, the projects were not even implemented” [*Sasali ka sa mahaba at masalimuot na proseso para makakuha ng proyekto, pero ang tagal bago dumating ng proyekto. Minsan pa ay walang nagagawa*].

More importantly, with many veto players in government (especially central government), the program ended up putting more power in the hands of government actors, including those who were against reform and citizen participation. In a context like the Philippines, where reforms would be met with many enemies inside or outside the system (including those who do not want to change the way things are because they are already used to it, such as some bureaucrats), the demanding process involving many players immediately disadvantaged the reform program.

The other centralizing design flaw was the requirement of counterpart funding. While according to the DILG (interview with Richard Villacorta, 2018), there were no instances when socio-economically disadvantaged LGUs were not able to provide counterpart funding,

such a mandated requirement automatically disadvantaged poor municipalities, undermining the anti-poverty purpose of the program. While BuB funds were a good incentive for LGUs to get their financial housekeeping in order, the chronic poor performance by some local governments became a serious bottleneck in the delivery of BuB projects. One example of this is in ARMM, where implementation was discontinued due to multiple problems, including huge backlogs in project implementation, as a result of the inability of local government to comply with BuB requirements (Aceron et al. 2016).

Central BuB authorities tried to use upwards accountability incentives to induce local governments to create more space for citizen input, but local dynamics stayed the same

One intention of BuB was to induce change in behavior and actions of local actors towards open and participatory government by offering BuB project funds as incentives. This was the reason why good financial housekeeping and compliance with participatory processes of BuB were requirements of LGUs before they would receive any funds. This worked in some instances. Some local chief executives were forced to comply with the BuB ground rules, enabling engagement between civil society and local governments. For instance, the Cebu local government initially refused to comply with the BuB. However, after not receiving BuB funding, it decided to open up to civil society participation through the BuB. This indicates the effect of BuB to “compel” LGU compliance—at least in the project selection phase (Aceron et al. 2016). Similarly, the various assessment reports on the BuB noted improvements in general openness of LGUs and improved engagement between LGUs and CSOs because of BuB (Development Academy of the Philippines 2012; Institute of Philippine Culture 2013; PIDS 2014, 2015, 2016).

However, this had a centralizing effect because of two things: (1) the participation and openness induced from the top bypassed existing local government bodies that were supposed to be participatory, so remained unchanged; and (2) change in behaviors and attitudes of local actors became dependent on stimulus/incentives from the top without any support that would expand favorable changes to other fronts of local decision-making.



The Integrated Community Food Production project, under the Bottom-up Budgeting program, is a strategy that aims to eliminate hunger by helping poor communities be more self-sufficient. Credit: Government of the Philippines, Official Gazette: <http://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2015/10/08/bub-project-helps-more-poor-families/>

The BuB program introduced a new set of uniform, one-size-fits-all centrally imposed processes. It bypassed existing mandated mechanisms for citizen participation in local government budget decision-making, such as the LDCs and local budget processes, because they were assumed to have been captured by vested interests.²⁵

While central government-induced participation worked in facilitating civil society participation in a central government program (BuB), local mandated processes remained the same (without meaningful participation, in most cases). As described by Cindy Uy, a G-Watch leader in Dumaguete City, “the local development fund was still being allocated by local government officials through local mandated participatory bodies even when there was BuB. It made things confusing” (RTD notes, Dumaguete, May 24, 2017).

Such dissonance was all because the central government program was being facilitated/ enabled by centrally imposed processes and centrally controlled incentives, while local processes remained controlled by the same local powers. Bert Aquino, a CSO leader in Dumaguete, described the compliance and cooperation of local governments as overly dependent on “national imposition” and centrally controlled incentives. To him, BuB became “a conditional assistance” of the central government that remained the “weaver and

source of power”. As a result, LGUs were only participatory to avail the incentives from central government (RTD notes, Dumaguete, May 24, 2017). BuB was not only another case of “islands of good governance in a sea of patronage politics”,²⁶ but in some instances, the good governance practices were a mere façade hiding the prevailing local order of patronage, bossism and clientelism in the same local governments.

The expectation that BuB would set an example for local budget processes to follow was premised on an unfounded optimism. As Bert Aquino of Dumaguete opined, “BuB was unable to transform local budget processes into becoming participatory” (RTD notes, Dumaguete, May 24, 2017). For one, there was no specific support and intervention that would achieve such an intended goal. Some LGUs, like Bohol and Naga, exhibited relatively good practice with PB, but this was already the case even before the BuB program (notes, G-Watch National Meeting, February 23–24, 2017) and these were outcomes of many sustained reform efforts.

It is widely recognized in the literature that wholesale decentralization has contradictory effects, empowering communities in some areas, while empowering local elites/political capture in others.²⁷ Differences in the actual capacity of local governments, as well as context, were not taken into account in program design. BuB was

not a decentralized program in contrast to many other countries with good experience of PB, such as Brazil, where design and progress depends on relatively autonomous municipal governments and their capacity for locally led learning and adaptation.

Roger Garinga, a CSO leader in Puerto Princesa, described the situation well: BuB was an “insult to local governance . . . Instead of pushing local governments to exercise their mandate according to the decentralization law, the national government centralized the reform” (RTD notes, Puerto Princesa, April 3, 2017).

In sum, because BuB funds involved central government funds allocated through a centralized process involving many veto players, the BuB process had to follow stringent processes set by national government agencies. This slowed down the reform process and constrained key actors, especially those from local governments and civil society, who were supposed to be empowered by the program. In other words, BuB was a case of a reform initiative intended to achieve community participation in local public investment decision-making that was made possible by reformer power at the center, but then sharply constrained by other elements of the same central bureaucracy.



VI. The Civil Society Empowerment Pillar was Constrained and Weakened

One of the main intentions of BuB was to empower civil society, especially at the local level, so that citizens could effectively engage the budget, an important public policy that determines who gets what, starting with a portion that was hoped to be expanded later on. In the context of the Philippines (as discussed earlier), this is a challenge because of powerful politicians holding local government posts and because of the absence of sustained support to civil society.

BuB intended to enable civil society participation in the budget process, but aside from the slow delivery of projects, the program also had problems ensuring that the projects that were funded were those identified by CSOs. This is because the BuB design acted as a constraint on civil society and because its civil society support component was discontinued. Ultimately, what BuB was able to provide was a space and mechanism for civil society to participate. But the design did not provide the needed leverage and other ways to effect the desired power shifts. Instead, BuB implementation was centralizing and governed by rigid regulations that constrained and weakened local actors. Worse, because of the many challenges—including a power shift within the government from pro-participation reforms to centrist-liberal technocratic approaches—affirmative support to civil society did not push through.

Centralized BuB project decision-making processes constrained civil society participation

One of the most criticized elements of BuB was the menu of programs that the participating agencies prepared at the start of every round. Civil society groups could only propose²⁸ projects that were included in that menu. In other words, the problems were not limited to getting official approval and disbursements; the initial participatory process for identifying priority projects was also very constrained.

The menu of programs²⁹ was heavily criticized by CSOs, given that the program was supposed to encourage “bottom-up” identification of projects (this was mentioned by participants in all G-Watch roundtable discussions). This is akin to “participation without devolution,”³⁰ where mechanisms are provided, yet power has not been given to local actors to enable them to control decision-making processes.

Perigine Cayadong, of the NACP, shares the perspective of government agencies: “Even from the start (inception), the setting of menu of programs/projects was a dilemma among the oversight agencies. Inasmuch as they wanted an ‘open menu,’ operationally this was not feasible considering the specific mandates of the implementing NGAs [national government agencies]” (personal communication, October 12, 2017). This highlights how requiring vetting and disbursement decisions by national government agencies constrained civil society participation.

Another constraining factor about the design of BuB was the fact that it was an exclusively local “invited space”. Invited spaces are defined as arenas for dialogue between authorities and citizens in which the terms of engagement are set by the authorities. “Claimed” or “created spaces”, in contrast, are spaces which have been “claimed by less powerful actors from or against the power holders, or created more autonomously by them” (Gaventa 2006:27; Cornwall and Schattan Coelho 2007).

With such a centrally controlled invited space involving a lot of veto players in the national government, participation in BuB has become bureaucratized and technocratized. CSOs were forced to follow the tempo, language, parameters and approaches of the government. The usual issue of “lacking CSO capacity” (BuB assessment reports; interview with Rey Maranan, City Director, DILG, Puerto Princesa. June 20, 2016; interview with Alfrainer Partido, BuB Focal Person, Abra, July 4, 2016) is framed from the lens of this bureaucratized and technocratized CSO participation. One CSO respondent said they were

“lost in the bureaucracy” with BuB, having to adjust to an environment that they were not used to, neutralizing their strength premised on flexibility, numbers and reach (focus group discussion (FGD) notes, Bacolod, May 26, 2017).

This constraining design made it more crucial for a civil society empowerment component that would capacitate, facilitate and support civil society, preparing CSOs for the kind of engagement needed to effectively claim the BuB space. However, the CSO support program also faced many problems.

Discontinued civil society support program weakened BuB’s capacity to effect pro-citizen power shifts

At the start of the BuB program, when it was still under the NAPC, reformers in the national anti-poverty agency who had come from civil society made several attempts to provide support to strengthen CSOs, both by providing funding and by deploying seasoned community organizers to promote informed participation. The NAPC is an oversight and coordinating agency of the government’s poverty reduction policies and programs, which was initially the lead implementing agency for BuB until that role was transferred to the DILG. After the transfer, the NAPC took charge of enabling civil society participation in different BuB phases and processes, including project monitoring.

Early on, BuB launched a program called the Empowerment Fund to provide resources to CSOs to enable their active participation. However, this was discontinued, at the same time the role of lead implementing agency was transferred from the NAPC to DILG, after the death of Jesse Robredo—a multi-awarded former local chief executive who was DILG secretary from 2010 to 2012 and was one of the key initiators of the BuB program. Cayadong et al. (2018) see this development as pivotal to the fate of BuB: “His [Jesse Robredo’s] tragic death in August 2012 altered the direction and pace of BUB development in significant but difficult to assess ways. If nothing else, the transfer of the BuB Project Management Office to DILG a few months after Robredo’s death placed the DILG central to BuB.”

The official line explaining the transfer of the lead agency role from the NAPC to the DILG was because the NAPC did not have the needed human resources. However, others would explain such a transfer as connected to an internal rift among two distinct factions in the Aquino government, between the dominant Liberal Party’s mainstream politicians and technocrats on the one hand, and the more left-liberal, formerly social movement-oriented popular democrats (PODER/G-Watch 2016).

The transfer changed the implementation approach for BuB from ad hoc and fluid involving independent community organizers, which the NAPC employed, to more formal and bureaucratic approaches that the DILG was more accustomed to. Though the DILG employed veteran CSO leaders as community organizers and local/regional coordinators, they were not able to do much because of the demands and constraints of the DILG bureaucracy. The CSO leaders who were recruited to BuB lost appetite and passion to push the boundaries of the program because there was no flexibility and space to maneuver. [*Nawalan ng gana and passion ang mga CSO leaders na palalimin at palawakin ang BuB dahil hindi naman sila maka-diskarte*] (FGD notes, Bacolod, May 26, 2017). Some of these bureaucratic demands included paperwork, approval processes for almost all that they do, and rules and regulations in their actions. While there were CSO leaders who were used to this, the complex reform process being endeavored by BuB was weighed down by these seemingly “mundane” administrative tasks.

What made the CSO support very weak was the human resources allocated for it. There were only around 110 personnel (33 in the NAPC and 78 provincial focal persons) working on the community empowerment component of BuB. These 110 personnel covered around 1,600 cities and municipalities. Given the context, how could grassroots empowerment efforts make headway with limited field organizers on the ground? This is strong evidence that there was not enough push from the top in most parts of the country.

Cayadong et al. (2018) narrates the other practical reasons for the limitations faced by the implementing agency of BuB, such as the NAPC-based PMO being built from scratch without direct funding, and the

undersecretary of the DILG in charge of BuB also responsible for another huge poverty reduction program.

There were other efforts to put up a funding facility for CSOs, but they did not push through for various reasons, including unwillingness of private donors to commit, conflict with existing laws, and competition among civil society (see Cayadong et al. 2018). The controversy on NGO corruption brought to the media limelight by the Napoles Scam (Arquiza 2013)—a large-scale corruption issue involving some legislators' discretionary funding—was arguably another factor that affected these efforts to provide state support to CSOs.

A summit conducted by the NAPC in 2015 yielded a recommendation for capacity building of civil society to be funded as part of the 2016 BuB, which could have strengthened municipal CSOs based on demand from civil society itself, but its funding was no longer secured before the elections (Joel Rocamora, personal

communication, October 12, 2017). Finally, there was also the issue of competition and division among civil society groups. “Many CSOs were worried that the design of the EFPG [empowerment fund] was such that it would favor only one set of CSOs. By channeling resources through ‘wholesaler’ networks, and requiring them to be certified by the Philippine Council for NGO Certification, mainly CodeNGO networks would qualify” (Cayadong et al. 2018).

The cancellation of the CSO empowerment fund, the transfer to a regular government agency and the very limited number of community organizers/enablers diluted or totally cancelled the ‘CSO empowerment’ pillar of the BuB program. This further tilted the balance of power in favor of the inertia of the central bureaucracy, undermining both the prospects for broad participation in project selection and the capacity of PB to deliver results.

VII. Failure to Enable Downward Accountability



Both centralized control and weak investment in citizen action prevented the enabling of downward accountability.

The political problem that the BuB intended to address was the control of local politicians over budget priorities and spending. The BuB addressed this by attempting to empower civil society—encouraging demands from below, galvanizing citizen action, facilitating engagement with government and civil society. The goal was to put checks on local governments to make governance more responsive to citizens. In other words, it aimed to enable downward accountability—to make local governments more accountable to citizens. This clearly sets the broader democratic and political reform agenda of BuB.

However, BuB failed to strengthen and harness independent civil society political clout at the grassroots despite the efforts undertaken towards this goal. Such autonomous civil society capacity could have provided the civic base needed for a reform program to survive a change in government. In other words, using the *Bibingka* strategy as a framework, which asserts that reforms are best won through the “symbiotic interaction between autonomous societal groups from below and state reformists from above”, BuB was ‘cooking a lot of rice cakes’ in between, with the fire from the top (*apoy sa taas*) limited to Cabinet-level initiation but weak in providing needed support in the course of implementation, while having almost zero fire from below (*apoy sa baba*). In his e-mail comment on an earlier version of this paper, Joel Rocamora admits that “from my vantage point, I ask myself, could we have done ‘*bibingka*’, waited for CSOs to push from below? Maybe we could have done the CSO summits earlier . . .”.

Aside from the weak accountability mechanism in BuB itself, there was no indication that there were pro-citizen/pro-civil society power shifts at the local level as a result of BuB. BuB had relied on upward accountability to check its performance, with its monitoring and reporting largely catering to actors at the national (Cabinet)

and international levels (e.g. OGP). Unfortunately, as a result, it had left downward accountability processes to citizens underdeveloped, weak and fragmented, unable to serve as a lever for civil society in influencing the direction of reform. Its inability to bring in a broad array of civil society groups, including social movements, also limited its capacity to enable downward accountability.

The findings of PIDS (Manasan et al. 2017) on the percentage of BuB projects in the LPRAP that were CSO-identified is clear evidence of the weak clout of CSOs in the program. Some of the plans did not have any CSO-identified projects, while 40 percent had less than half CSO-identified projects. While this finding can be interpreted positively, as 60 percent of local plans incorporating mostly CSO-identified projects, which is not bad given the baseline, BuB’s reason for being was exactly as a platform for incorporating CSO budget priorities. Having LPRAPs that are mostly identified by local government officials or other government actors could be argued to defeat the purpose of the innovation. Furthermore, the study did not measure how many of those projects were actually funded and implemented. Given the slow delivery and completion rates (as shown in Table 3), whether the projects that have not yet been completed or even started were CSO-identified projects is a good question to investigate, to further assess the weight of CSO participation in BuB.

While BuB provided space for CSOs in project identification, it did not enable citizen oversight of project implementation

BuB employed largely upward accountability, with very weak (if any) downward accountability. Implementers (LGUs and government agencies) reported to the concerned offices at the central government, while the latter reported to the Cabinet and international bodies, including the OGP,³¹ on performance indicators set by the concerned government agencies. There was also an

online portal (OpenBuB) that contained the status of projects.

While BuB had a clear mechanism to ensure civil society voice in the identification of projects, it was vague or weak in ensuring civil society participation in implementation and accountability. Civil society representatives in the poverty reduction action teams got to listen to the reports of implementing agencies and to ask questions, but their involvement stopped there. They could not validate the reports from government, nor check whether their inputs generated a response and resulted in any change in implementation.

There was a citizen-led monitoring program implemented by the NAPC starting in 2014, but it was “an uphill battle” with LGUs and national government agencies hesitant to disclose basic project documents, as well as delays in procurement and cases of LGU implementation without community/CSO consultation (Cayadong et al. 2018). The citizen-led monitoring program was implemented by the NAPC in partnership with CSOs. It had limited scale, covering only the local governments involved in the pilot.

Aniceta Baltar, of Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government (CCAGG), who took part in the Citizen-Led Monitoring Program (CLMP) of the BuB, said it did not cover the key indicators of meaningful participation, such as inclusiveness of invitations to meetings, how many CSO-proposed projects ended up in the official BuB plans, instances of political interference in the appointment of civil society members in BuB’s joint government–civil society decision-making bodies, and the Local/Regional Poverty Reduction Action Teams. These issues came out in the assessment meetings, but like the other respondents, Baltar wondered how and whether these critical issues were tackled/addressed by the government (interview with Aniceta Baltar, July 4, 2016). She later clarified that in instances when NAPC executives went down to their locality (Abra), key issues and challenges identified in the monitoring were significantly addressed (Aniceta Baltar, personal communication, September 13, 2017). Perigine Cayadong of the NAPC explains that this process is termed “LGU-CSO/community interphase”, which was “designed to undertake corrective measures on gaps identified in the monitoring of specific BuB projects” (P. Cayadong, personal communication, October 12, 2017).

Government-initiated project monitoring by CSOs involved no clout or teeth

It was also evident that official BuB monitoring was delinked from its political reform intent or goal of pro-civil society power shifts at the local level. The official monitoring and assessment system did not include an analysis of how the program was affecting patronage politics and bossism below and/or how it was enabling autonomous or independent capacity of civil society for claim-making. Its monitoring centered on technocratic indicators: mainly on how many projects were completed as reported by government implementers. Later assessments looked into the percentage of civil society-identified projects in the LPRAPs (Manasan et al. 2017), but not the percentage of civil society proposals that ended up being funded and implemented, which would have been a good indicator of CSO empowerment in the BuB. The PIDS later looked into the impact of BuB in its 2017 study, specifically on how the program contributed to building social capital and addressing poverty. The study, however, had a limited sample size, which included government respondents. Furthermore, it did not address an immediate outcome question central to BuB’s Results Framework: whether BuB helped local governments become more responsive and/or accountable.

The CLMP was “vertically disintegrated,” limiting CSO monitoring to local levels. Vertically integrated monitoring covers all the critical levels of official decision-making, allowing comprehensive national-level oversight by civil society (Aceron and Isaac 2016; Fox and Aceron 2016). The CLMP, on the other hand, involved a national government agency, the NAPC, tapping local CSOs, who then conducted monitoring in their respective areas using a standard monitoring tool (which was provided in NAPC guidelines covering BuB projects that were selected by the LPRAT). After monitoring and holding local-level discussions with concerned government agencies, local CSOs then submitted their monitoring results to the NAPC for consolidation at the national level, but these were not proactively disclosed, not even to local CSO monitors. As a consequence, local CSOs have no complete/national picture of the results of their localized monitoring, which would be necessary to account completely for program performance.

with the coalition in power, rather than more independent advocacy groups focused on oversight or those with a more contentious background, such as groups from social movements. This arguably limited the program's ability to harness "fire from below" in a *bibingka* strategy, which comes from or is enabled through an autonomous and independent organizing of civil society. As noted earlier, autonomous civil society organizing and complementary pressure from social movements were highlighted in the literature as important in the success of PB initiatives in other countries.

Edwin Balajadia, a former CSO leader who became local coordinator for BuB, recalled that there were very few CSOs with a "developmental framework", by which he seems to mean CSOs that are ideological or with a clear agenda to effect systems change. Balajadia shared: "If I am to estimate, those who participated in BuB with a developmental framework consisted only about 20 percent. Most were faith-based, associations, those created by the CSOs" (FGD notes, Bacolod, May 26, 2017). The purely 'invited space' character of BuB, with its constraining centralizing design, could explain the limited kind of civil society groups that were attracted to and engaged by the program.

Some potential CSO participants involved with mass-based constituencies could have created the social base necessary but declined to participate in BuB. One example is RIGHTS, a network of farmers' associations and groups that have been fighting for rural empowerment for several decades. In a discussion with RIGHTS, its leaders shared that their network did not engage BuB as a

collective because they viewed it as "too constraining", controlling when and how they do claim-making. They thought their access to participation in the BuB depended on whether they received information or invitations, which is often not guaranteed (RIGHTS, FGD notes, July 3, 2017).³² This was especially so in areas controlled by political dynasties where power asymmetries between government and civil society were high.³³

These perspectives from grassroots civic and social movement leaders on how BuB worked in practice contrast with the rights-based vision of BuB's original architects. NAPC executives highlighted the importance of CSOs ably engaging contentious politics: "BuB is no *bibingka*, its participants have been forced to behave in new, unfamiliar ways, often with considerable resistance. Because it involves some amounts of money that were big for small localities, it is 'hot,' and implementation has been highly contested" (Cayadong et al. 2018).³⁴ While this reality was well recognized at the top, the civil society groups participating in the program were not well prepared for such a highly contested reform process.

The BuB did not result in power shifts in the relationship between government and citizens. Ultimately, civil society and citizens remained unable to make their governments responsive and accountable and there is no indication that BuB made a dent on this during the period it was implemented, or could have made a dent even if the same implementation process and components had continued.



VIII. Recap, Concluding Analysis and Final Reflections

Budgeting in the Philippines has been controlled by politicians, in spite of decades since a decentralization law that broadened spaces for civil society participation. To address this, civil society strategists who joined the national government in 2010 designed a nationwide Bottom-up Budgeting program to encourage communities to identify local public investment priorities. This opening from above was intended to build a constituency by empowering civil society actors to fill that space from below and check local politicians' power over the budget. Yet the Philippine PB initiative failed to achieve this.

Philippine PB demonstrates how a progressive reform intent can get lost and diluted due to design problems and in the course of implementation, especially as it deals with the bureaucracy and the political dynamics of actors. What was conceived as a political reform citizen empowerment program became just a platform for CSOs to suggest projects. The suggested projects may or may not be approved or implemented, indicating the program's inability to deliver even on its responsive governance objective. The perennial backlog or slow delivery of projects is evidence that BuB had problems delivering even on its technocratic goal of efficient and effective project completion. In the end, this same problem was the evidence used by BuB's detractors to argue for its abolition.

The program design had huge problems. While it supposedly aimed for efficient and effective governance, it created many veto players in a centralizing process that significantly slowed implementation. While it was supposed to be a civil society empowerment program that would shift the balance of power at the local level, it did not include a sufficient support system and leverages to enhance civil society clout and enable independent and autonomous claim-making of citizens. This constrained what the program could achieve, contributing to the dilution of its political reform intent.

This paper contends that while BuB was able to provide a space for citizen voice in project selection, as "users and choosers", it was not able to ensure that such choices were carried through. While it provides a new space for CSOs to participate, it was ultimately unable to empower the grassroots and enable downward accountability to work on enhancing the responsiveness and accountability of government. This is because of two main issues: its centralizing implementation design and weakened empowerment pillar.

Because the BuB project decision-making process was designed to put most project approval, budgeting and planning decisions in the hands of national government agencies, it created many veto players. This slowed down the reform process and constrained key actors, especially those from local governments and civil society, who were supposed to be empowered by the program. For the 2013 and 2014 projects, for instance, between 29 percent and 35 percent had not yet started after three years of implementation. An average of 41 percent of projects in four rounds had not yet started after Year 2. Because of over-reliance on the power and good intentions of the central government, instead of triggering a virtuous circle of responsive government and community empowerment from below, its design triggered vicious circles, where citizen voice and local government proposals were in practice blocked by bureaucratic obstacles. BuB is a case of a reform that was intended to achieve community participation in local public investment decision-making made possible by reformers' hold at the center, but was then sharply constrained by other elements of the same central bureaucracy.

With a constraining design, it did not help that the empowerment pillar of the program also met so many challenges. A pro-participation faction within the government, which intended and attempted to fund large-scale field outreach to create enabling environments for participatory processes, lost power over the program early on. As a result, an ambitious program relied on few organizers with little outreach to achieve its civil

society empowerment goals. There was no civil society oversight of project implementation, which could have served as civil society leverage to put pressure on and even correct government inefficiencies. The national reformers seemed to have simply trusted national agencies to do their job and overlooked their own creation of multiple veto points that went unchecked due to the absence of effective accountability processes in the program.

One key potential lever for more accountable policy implementation is effective civil society monitoring. Studies show that civil society monitoring that engages at multiple levels serves as leverage that provides the needed clout and teeth to force government to respond and account for its actions. Given its accountability goals that go beyond the usual technocratic objectives of government programs, supporting civil society monitoring is one way for the government to create a conducive environment for an autonomous and independent civil society to emerge or develop. Not all the elements need be enabled by BuB itself (for instance, constituency-building is best done outside the invited spaces), but a participatory government program like BuB could have provided leverage through support to civil society in accessing information and taking part in the program's monitoring system, enabling downward accountability. Information and evidence generated through monitoring could have been used to organize and mobilize an independent and autonomous constituency that would demand more not just from the program but from others in governance, creating the "fire from below" that would fuel the virtuous cycle of empowerment. The lack of *bibingka*, given inconsistent fire from the top and lacking fire below, greatly weakened BuB's reform potential.

The importance of further enabling autonomous organizing of civil society around a particular reform measure is crucial because it supports claim-making and sustains demand that will push for the continuation of

the reform in a virtuous circle of state–society synergy, with drivers that continue to fuel *bibingka*. Especially in the Philippines, where civil society has been observed to be vibrant yet weak (especially in accountability, due partly to its dependence on government and external support), a program that relies on civil society participation must find a way to reaffirm and support the building of civil society autonomy and independence. This is tricky and seemingly contradictory, but it can be done by clarifying and specifying how exactly local actors (especially civil society) will become empowered and autonomous from the state in the process of reform. That should be the agenda, both for the state program and civil society actors.

A critical mistake in BuB design was that instead of opening up and bolstering existing participation institutions, BuB opted to bypass local mechanisms because of a generalized assumption on the state of elite capture of local governments, relying on the power of the center, which inadvertently created a re-centralizing intervention. It was also late in taking into account long-standing programs with a PB element. It paired conflicting institutional designs: central government budget with lots of central government veto players, without enabling downward accountability. This compromised its political reform intent from the outset. Downward accountability is best enabled in a decentralized setting with holistic reforms that enable democratic local governance.

This paper echoes the findings of other related studies that PB programs become successful mainly when complemented by other institutional and state democratic capacity-building reforms, and when it is part of a broader change agenda that has a clear and coherent progressive direction. The parts of the whole of the broader change agenda must make sense and must work according to an integrated democratic reform design. This is how participatory budgeting can become truly transformative.

Endnotes

1. Fox (2014) refers to “voice” as citizen inputs, feedback and action, while “teeth” refer to the capacity of the state to respond to voice.
2. The decentralization embedded in the LGC takes three forms: deconcentration, devolution and debureaucratization. (1) Deconcentration is the transfer of power, authority and responsibility to lower levels within the central government itself. (2) Devolution is the transfer of power and authority from the central government to the Local Government Units. The nature of power that is transferred is political, as well as financial, in contrast to administrative power in deconcentration. (3) Debureaucratization or privatization is the sharing of public functions and responsibilities with private entities or NGOs. For further discussion, see Brillantes (2003:324–25).
3. Prequalification has been removed from the procurement process in the new Republic Act No. 9184 or the Government Procurement Reform Act.
4. See Section 284 of the Local Government Code of 1991 for the formula for the distribution of allotment to different local governments: provinces, independent cities, component cities, municipalities and *barangays*.
5. Profile of Local Development Council Functionality in the Philippines. 2017. Seal of Good Local Governance Assessment. Unpublished report, Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG).
6. For a discussion on the positive effects of decentralization on democratization and governance, see Ziegenhain (2016).
7. Benigno Aquino III, son of former president Corazon Aquino (1986–1992), formed a government with leaders from the center-left and liberal civil society, technocrats and the centrist Liberal Party. He won under the platform of good governance in response to the previous administration of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, which became implicated in numerous corruption scandals and abuse of power. For more information about the historical context of the Aquino candidacy, see Acheron et al. 2012.
8. Reformers in the context of the Philippines generically refers to members of the Cabinet who were considered champions of reform in governance, most of whom were from civil society.
9. The ‘social liberals’ are those from civil society who came from the social democratic tradition before moving to the mainstream, specifically joining/engaging the Liberal Party. Unlike the conventional liberals, who are proponents of the free market, social liberals favor state intervention and regulation to address inequality brought about by the excesses of capitalism.
10. Thank you to Joel Rocamora for sharing the 2016 draft version of this paper.
11. The ‘popular democrats’ are mostly from the national democratic movement, who split from the latter to re-orient the Left movement to a more democratic direction, envisioning a more pluralistic political system and rejecting what it considered authoritarian tendencies in the national democratic movement.
12. Comment on earlier draft, Joel Rocamora, October 12, 2017.
13. BuB Results Framework, May 2014. Accessible on OpenBuB portal.
14. The Aquino Government has generally fared well in the assessment of the Independent Reporting Mechanism (IRM) of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) that is tasked to assess the OGP commitments of governments (see

Mangahas 2012, IRM 2016, and Acheron 2017). However, the government failed to deliver on two key open government reforms: the Freedom of Information Bill and the Government Integrated Financial Management Information System (GIFMIS), a critical public financial management reform that could have provided the needed structure for independent citizen oversight, like ‘follow-the-money’ kind of initiatives.

15. Kapit-Bisig Laban sa Kahirapan-Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services is a program by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) that aims to strengthen community participatory processes in local development planning. Adopting the community-driven development strategy in 2014, KALAHI-CIDSS has been enhanced into the KC-National Community-Driven Development Program (NCDDP), which aims to capacitate communities to be active partners in local development and to support improvement in local governance. Community capacity building in KC-NCDDP is done through a method called the Community Empowerment Activity Cycle, which involves the community in all phases of project management. As of May 2018, KC-NCDDP is present in 799 municipalities covering 18,760 barangays, targeted according to poverty situation. It has 22,119 approved sub-projects amounting to PHP 27.7 billion identified solely through participatory processes at the community level (Kalahi-CIDSS National Community-Driven Development Program Project Briefer, available at: http://ncddp.dswd.gov.ph/Media/uploads/KC_NCDDP_2.pdf; and https://ncddp.dswd.gov.ph/Media/uploads/Kalahi_CIDSS_Praymer_as_of_May_2018_.pdf).

16. Wampler (2008: 68-69) affirmed the importance of contentious politics in ensuring the success and sustainability of PB, particularly in avoiding the program being assimilated by traditional political culture. “Contentious politics gives citizens the opportunity to vigorously defend their projects in the face of governmental doubts and potential indifference . . . A history of contentious politics in a municipality makes it easier for civil society organizations to use direct confrontation inside and outside of Participatory Budgeting. In these cases, contentious behavior is not viewed as exceptional behavior, but as a legitimate means for citizens to express their political voice. When municipalities lack the presence of a ‘right to have rights’ movement or participatory public civil society organizations, there is an increased likelihood that participants will utilize political strategies of accommodation that reproduces traditional elite-mass relationship rather than contentious politics.”

17. There are different versions of the story on who initiated BuB and how was it initiated. One is that it was initiated by the then Secretary of the Interior and Local Government, the late Jesse Robredo, following the practice/ model in Naga City. The other says it has always been an agenda of the progressives/ reformers inside government, both those from the liberal and social democrats. The other account simply traces it to a decision made by the GGACC, whose membership included Jesse Robredo and all the key reformers.

18. There is no formal document that states why BuB in ARMM was discontinued in 2016. A PODER/ G-Watch study in 2015 documents the following reasons for the decision of the ARMM Regional Governor and BuB Executive Committee to discontinue BuB: too many funds managed by the ARMM Office of the Regional Governor (ORG), focus on the Bangsamoro Basic Law, and issues on liquidation of 2013/2014 projects.

19. DILG (2016) The Seal of Good Local Governance. DILG, Office of the Secretary, January 5, http://www.dilg.gov.ph/PDF_File/issuances/memo_circulars/dilg-memocircular-2016111_e820585515.pdf.

20. See Commission on Audit website, <https://www.coa.gov.ph/index.php/local-government-units>.

21. G-Watch began as a social accountability program of a university, founded in 2000, that has rebooted into a national action research organization embedded in constituencies of civic and advocacy-oriented organizations all over the Philippines aiming to contribute to the deepening of democracy through the scaling of accountability and citizen empowerment. G-Watch conducted a series of roundtable discussions to discuss the current state of poverty reduction programs right after the 2016 elections from June to September 2017. See www.gwatch.org for details.

22. Mentioned in all G-Watch roundtable discussions.

23. Respondents were sampled from 62 local governments purposively selected from among the 544 outside of ARMM and National Capital Region (NCR) that participated in BuB since 2013. In each of the 62 local governments, there were 3 local government officials, 3 civil society representatives belonging to poverty reduction teams and 50 households in two purposively sampled barangays of the local government.

24. Government monitoring of BuB, particularly that which was reported in NPRAT, GGACC and OGP and published on OpenBuB, focused mainly on the delivery and completion of BuB projects. See PODER/ G-Watch 2016 for more discussion on BuB monitoring system.

25. Though a 2011 study of the Asian Institute of Management says that at least 7 out of every 15 legislators (almost 50 percent) are members of families that can be considered political dynasties, there is no study that empirically establishes how many of the local governments are considered “captured” by vested interests. If the assessment of the DILG is to be referred to, a significant number of local governments have been improving their performance (based on Local Government Performance Monitoring Assessment and Seal of Good Local Governance reports (Department of Interior and Local Government 2016, 2017). Meanwhile, there is a survey on trust ratings of government agencies, but not all line agencies are perceived to be trustworthy by the public all the time. In fact, many are perceived as corrupt. There are no data on central reformers being considered trustworthy by the public either. These key premises of the program (captured local governments and national government being more trusted to lead reform), hence, are largely assumed by the designers, based on their own assessment.

26. This term is frequently used in conversations in the development community to refer to Philippines’ best practices in governance that are isolated and hardly sustained because of the lack of institutional reform that enables such best practices to be the norm, rather than an exception. See La Viña and Aceron 2009.

27. Thanks to Professor Jonathan Fox for this observation.

28. See Cornwall and Gaventa (2000) on how and why beneficiaries and participants of social policies, especially poor people, must be “makers and shapers” and not only “users and choosers”.

29. See Annex C of Joint Department Order for BuB 2014, Annex D of Joint Department Order for BuB 2015–2016. The Menus of Programs provided an extensive list of programs and projects, but assessment studies and consultations showed that there were still instances in which civil society proposals were not included in the list and the presence of the list made the process more complicated and not accessible or welcoming to CSOs.

30. Thanks to Suchi Pande for suggesting this term “participation without devolution”.

31. BuB was one of the commitments of the Aquino government in the OGP, an international partnership that generates and monitors open government commitments by national governments.

32. Brockmyer and Fox (2015) noted in their study on multi-stakeholder initiatives (MSIs) that CSOs engaged with MSIs tend to be specialized, technical organizations rather than broad-based organizations with reach outside professional classes in the national capital.

33. Thank you to Danny Carranza of RIGHTS for pointing this out in a comment on an earlier draft.

34. See Wampler’s (2008) point on the importance of contentious politics.

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Notes, G-Watch National Meeting. Astoria Plaza, Ortigas; 23-24 February 2017.

Notes, Focus Group Discussion. Bacolod City; 26 May 2017.

Notes, G-Watch Roundtable Discussions on "What Happened to the Reforms."

- April 3 - Puerto Princesa
- May 8 - Sibagat
- May 11 - Samal
- May 19 - Tagbilaran, Bohol
- May 24 - Dumaguete

Notes, Focus Group Discussion with San Miguel Bohol KALAH I staff. San Miguel, Bohol; March 19.

Notes, Focus Group Discussion with KALAH I national program staff; Quezon City; April 24

Annex 1: BuB Menu of Programs

| BuB 2014 | BuB 2015 |
|--|---|
| <p>Department of Agriculture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Farm to Market Roads -Small Irrigation Projects -Communal Irrigation Systems -National Rice Program -National Corn Program -National High Value Crops Program -National Fisheries Program -Promotion and Development of Organic Production <p>Department of Agrarian Reform</p> <p>Community Irrigation System, Roads, Bridges, School Buildings, Day Care Centers, Flood Control Projects, etc.</p> <p>Department of Energy</p> <p>Household Electrification Program (HEP)</p> <p>National Electrification Authority</p> <p>On Grid – Sitio Electrification Program (SEP)</p> <p>Department of Education</p> <p>Basic Education Facilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Repair / rehabilitation of classrooms -Construction of Water and Sanitation Facilities <p>Gulayan sa Paaralan</p> <p>Innovative programs to promote access to Education</p> <p>Department of Environment and Natural Resources</p> <p>National Greening Program</p> <p>Department of Health</p> <p>Epidemiology & Disease Surveillance</p> <p>Maternal, Neonatal, Child Health and Nutrition</p> <p>Community Health Team mobilization</p> <p>Infectious Diseases</p> <p>Health Emergency Management</p> <p>Doctors to the Barrios</p> <p>RNheals</p> <p>Rural Health Training & Placement Program</p> <p>Health Facilities Enhancement Program</p> <p>Geographically Isolated & Disadvantaged Areas</p> <p>Others</p> <p>Department of the Interior and Local Government</p> <p>Provision of Potable Water Supply</p> | <p>Department of Agriculture</p> <p>Irrigation Projects (SIP/STW/OSP)</p> <p>Infrastructure Support to Agriculture and Fishery Production and Development (Tractor, Planter/ Seeder, Harvester, Thresher, Sheller, Motorized Fishing Boat, Fish Nets)</p> <p>Agro-Processing Facilities and Expanded Agri-Business Activities</p> <p>Post-harvest Facilities and Equipment (Mechanical Dryers, Multi-Purpose Drying Pavement)</p> <p>Cold Storage Facilities/Vans</p> <p>Ports and Wharves</p> <p>Trading Posts</p> <p>Sustainable Agri-Fishery Based Livelihood and other Agri-Fishery Business Investments</p> <p>Tramlines</p> <p>Farm Implements/ Tools</p> <p>Agri-Fishery Trainings</p> <p>Marine Reserve and Fish Sanctuaries</p> <p>Marine Protected Areas</p> <p>Organic Fertilizer Production</p> <p>Department of Agrarian Reform</p> <p>Social Infrastructure & Local Capability Bldg. (SILCAB) - Institutional Development Interventions</p> <p>Sustainable Agri-business and Rural Enterprise Development (SARED) - ARC Connectivity & Economic Support Services (ARCESS)</p> <p>Agrarian Production Credit Program</p> <p>Credit Assistance Program for Beneficiaries Development</p> <p>Department of the Environment and Natural Resources</p> <p>National Greening Program</p> <p>National Greening Program</p> <p>Department of Trade and Industry</p> <p>Local Regional Economic Development</p> <p>Yaman Pinoy</p> <p>Rural Micro Enterprise Development Program</p> <p>Shared Service Facility</p> <p>OTOP Store Express</p> <p>Industry Clustering Development Program</p> <p>Philippine Traceability for Revitalized Agricultural Competitiveness Enhancement (P-Trace) Project</p> |

Continued

BuB 2014**Department of Social Welfare and Development**

Kapit-Bisig Laban sa Kahirapan – Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services

(KALAHI-CIDSS) Project

Sustainable Livelihood Program

Social Pension for Indigent Senior Citizens

Supplementary Feeding Program

Core Shelter Assistance Program

Child and Youth Welfare Program

Women Welfare Program

Program for Persons with Disabilities

Family Welfare Program

Department of Trade and Industry

Shared Service Facility (SSF)

Industry Clustering Development Program

One Town One Product (OTOP) Stores – Ang Tindahan Pinoy

Bamboo Development Project

Philippine Traceability for Revitalized Agricultural

Competitiveness Enhancement (P-Trace) Project

Production Innovation Program (PIP)

Rural Microenterprise Promotion Program (RuMEPP)

Business Permit and Licensing Systems (BPLS)

Department of Tourism

Local Tourism Development Projects

Technical Education and Skills Development Authority

Tech-Voc training,

Community-based training

BuB 2015**Department of Tourism**

Local Tourism Development Projects

Department of Energy

Household

Electrification Program (HEP)

National Electrification Administration

Barangay Line Enhancement Program (BLEP)

On Grid - Sitio Electrification Program (SEP)

Department of Social Welfare and Development

Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP) - Microenterprise Development Track

Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP) - Employment Facilitation Track

Kapit-Bisig Laban sa Kahirapan – Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services

(KALAHI-CIDSS) Project

Protective Services - Infrastructure Projects

Protective Services - Capacity Building

Department of Labor and Employment

DOLE Integrated Livelihood Programs (DLIP): Workers Income Augmentation Program (WIN AP)

DOLE Integrated Livelihood Programs (DLIP): Tulong

Panghanapbuhay para sa Ating mga Disadvantaged Workers (TUPAD)

DOLE-AMP (DOLE- Adjustment Measures Program)

Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) Reintegration Program

SPES (Special Program for the Employment of Students)

Technical Education and Skills Development Authority

Technical Vocation Training / Community-based Training

Department of Education

Basic Education Facilities:

-Repair / rehabilitation of classrooms

-Provision of school furniture

Gulayan sa Paaralan

Innovative programs to promote access to Education/ Abot-Alam Program

Department of Health

Maternal, neonatal, child health and nutrition

Community Health Team mobilization

Infectious Diseases

Filariasis Elimination

Schistosomiasis and Malaria Control

Rabies Elimination

Leprosy

TB Control

STI/HIV and AIDS Prevention

Dengue Control

Continued

| BuB 2014 | BuB 2015 |
|----------|--|
| | <p>Department of Health (Continued) Health Emergency Management RNheals Rural Health Midwife Placement Program Health Facilities Enhancement Program Other Programs</p> <p>Department of Interior and Local Government Sagana at Ligtas na Tubig sa Lahat (SALINTUBIG) - Provision of Potable Water Supply Capacity Building for CSOs Core local road construction/ maintenance/ rehabilitation Evacuation Facility Rescue Equipment Flood Control National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC) Integrated Community Food Production</p> |

Annex 2: What Percentage of Counterpart Funds are Required from Local Government in BuB?

- BUB FY2013 (source: JMC No. 1, section 6.4, page 8): “Highly-urbanized cities (HUCs) are required to provide at least 30% counterpart funds for each identified priority project.”
- BUB 2014 (source: JMC No. 3, section 5.9, page 11): “*Provision of Counterpart Funds*. LGUs must provide the following cash counterpart for each BuB Project, except for Farm to Market Road (FMR) projects:”
 - Highly urbanized cities: 30% of project cost
 - All other cities: 20% of project cost
 - 1st to 3rd class municipalities: 15% of project cost
 - 4th to 6th class municipalities: 5% of project cost
 LGUs will be required to provide a 10% counterpart for Farm to Market Road projects.”
- BUB 2015 (source: JMC No. 4, section 8, pages 15–17)
 - “8.1. LGUs must provide a percentage of their Local Development Fund (LDF) as cash counterpart for the Grassroots Budgeting program. For LGUs which are also part of the KALAHI-CIDSS/NCDDP program, the Grassroots Budgeting and the LAKAHI-CIDSS/NCDDP program will have a common and combined cash counterpart requirement.”
 - “8.2. The percentage shall be based on the proportion of the GRASSROOTS BUDGETING and KALAHI-CIDSS funding provided to the LDF as follows:

| Incident | Date | Actors Involved |
|---|------------------------|---|
| Admission of willingness to protect Uy properties | October 1998 | Domingo Almazora (a.k.a. Ka Jihad) |
| Ground-working for the candidacy of landowner Eleanor Uy for mayor of San Narciso | March-May 2001 | NPA |
| Admission during a campaign rally of supporting the CPP and giving a donation of Php150,000 | Between March-May 2001 | Mayor Victor Reyes |
| Forcible harvesting of coconut from land tilled by Felizardo Benitez | 22-23 July 2003 | Erwin Esguerra (farm manager) and several goons, along with 16 NPAs as lookout |
| Verbal threat against tenant Alberto Bitong | 9 March 2004 | Nora Ribargoso along with 3 NPAs, one of them identified as Ogie Jarlito Carabido |

- “8.3. For LGUs not included in the KALAHI-CIDSS program, the counterpart will be solely based on their Grassroots Budgeting Budget cap allocation.”

- BUB 2016 (source: JMC No. 5, section 8, pages 14–16)
 - “8.1. LGUs must provide cash counterpart for the GPB program equal to a percentage of their current Local Development Fund (LDF). This must be sourced from LGU funds.”
 - “8.2. For LGUs which are also part of the NCDDP program, the GPB and the NCDDP program will have a common and combined cash counterpart requirement.”
 - “8.3. The percentage shall be based on the proportion of the GPB and NCDDP funding to 20% of the LGU Internal Revenue Allotment, or the LDF, as follows

| Incident | Date | Actors Involved |
|---|------------------------|---|
| Admission of willingness to protect Uy properties | October 1998 | Domingo Almazora (a.k.a. Ka Jihad) |
| Ground-working for the candidacy of landowner Eleanor Uy for mayor of San Narciso | March-May 2001 | NPA |
| Admission during a campaign rally of supporting the CPP and giving a donation of Php150,000 | Between March-May 2001 | Mayor Victor Reyes |
| Forcible harvesting of coconut from land tilled by Felizardo Benitez | 22-23 July 2003 | Erwin Esguerra (farm manager) and several goons, along with 16 NPAs as lookout |
| Verbal threat against tenant Alberto Bitong | 9 March 2004 | Nora Ribargoso along with 3 NPAs, one of them identified as Ogie Jarlito Carabido |

- “8.4. For LGUs not included in the NCDDP, the counterpart will be solely based on their GPB budget cap allocation.”

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- Carlos García Jiménez. 2019. "Experiencias y desafíos ciudadanos para instituir la transparencia y la rendición de cuentas en gobiernos locales del sur de México." *Accountability Note* 5.
- Carlos García Jiménez. 2019. "Citizen Experiences and Challenges in Bringing Transparency and Accountability to Local Governments in Southern Mexico." *Accountability Note* 5.
- समीर गर्ग और शुची पांडे. 2018. "स्वास्थ्य बदलाव के लिए सीखने की रणनीति की भूमिका: भारत में मितानि समुदायिक स्वास्थ्य कार्यकर्ताओं द्वारा सार्वजनिक उत्तरदायित्व को बढ़ाने पर कार्य." *Accountability Note* ४.
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- Nani Zulminarni, Valerie Miller, Alexa Bradley, Angela Bailey and Jonathan Fox. 2018. "Movement-building for Accountability: Learning from Indonesian Women's Organizing" *Accountability Working Paper* 3.
- Francis Isaac, Danilo Carranza and Joy Acheron. 2017. "From the Ground Up: Multi-Level Accountability Politics in Land Reform in the Philippines." *Accountability Working Paper* 2.
- Suchi Pande and Rakesh R. Dubbudu. 2017. "Citizen Oversight and India's Right to Work Program: What do the Social Auditors Say?" *Accountability Working Paper* 1.

Books

- Joy Acheron (Ed.). 2018. *Going Vertical: Citizen-led Reform Campaigns in the Philippines (Second Edition)*. Quezon City and Washington DC: Government Watch (G-Watch) and Accountability Research Center (ARC).

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