

Case Study – July 2022

**'Constructive Accountability':
Sandwich Strategy for Textbook Delivery
in the Philippines**

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Contents

Introduction	4
Political Context Surrounding Textbook Count	5
Reform Actors	6
Reform Dynamics: How Textbook Count Enabled Citizen Engagement	8
Textbook Count Results and Gains	13
Challenges and Lessons	16
Analysis and Final Insights: Introducing ‘Constructive Accountability’	19
Reference List	23
Endnotes	26

Introduction

Textbook Count began in the Philippines in 2002 as a joint program of the Department of Education (DepEd) and Government Watch (G-Watch), the governance program of the Ateneo University School of Government (ASoG). The objective of the program was to ensure that the right quantity and physical quality of textbooks reached public school students on time, following the right processes.

Textbook Count is a good case to illustrate the sandwich strategy. It involved pro-reform actors in DepEd working in partnership with civil society groups to introduce participatory reforms in textbook delivery. Government allies opened up DepEd and made it conducive to transparency, participation and accountability through procurement reforms and by supporting the monitoring efforts of civil society at all critical levels of the textbook delivery process. This subjected private sector contractors and officials of DepEd (who used to benefit from irregularities in textbook service delivery) to checks and facilitated the responsiveness of DepEd and the continuous improvement of its textbook delivery program.

Sandwich strategy refers to the

“attempt by pro-reform actors within government to drive institutional change by cultivating synergy with citizen action...The hypothesis is that openings from above that make possible mobilization from below by tangibly reducing the risks/costs of collective action can enable pro-accountability actors in both state and society...” (ARC Guide paper)

This paper begins with the political context surrounding Textbook Count. This is followed by sections on reform actors and dynamics, then an examination of the Textbook Count program itself. The paper concludes with a look at the challenges and issues that confronted this initiative and an analysis of Textbook Count as a sandwich strategy case. I underscore how the powershifts it created, while leading to gains such as improved textbook delivery, were only momentary due to changes in the political context.

The paper introduces a term to describe the relationship of government and CSOs that made Textbook Count work: *constructive accountability*—i.e., the engagement of government, civil society and even the private sector to jointly undertake accountability processes to achieve a shared goal. Such accountability processes mainly take the form of joint monitoring initiative to improve the effectiveness of services or programs the stakeholders view as critical through mutually-agreeable and mutually-reinforcing processes that includes independent civil society oversight.

Political Context Surrounding Textbook Count

In March 1999, the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ) released a report indicating that sixty-five percent of textbook funds had been lost to corruption involving textbook suppliers and officials from what was then called the Department of Education, Culture and Sport (DECS), now DepEd (Chua 1999). In the Social Weather Stations (SWS) perception survey in the late 1990s, the public saw DECS as one of the five most corrupt agencies in the country. This was also the period when there was growing international concern about corruption and the Philippines was starting to figure as one of the most corrupt countries in Asia (World Bank 2000, 2001).

The heightened public attention to corruption during this period was further accentuated by the big-ticket scandals involving former President Joseph Estrada that led to his ouster in another civic uprising in January 2001, later dubbed as “EDSA 2.” This pushed government and civil society actors to pay closer attention to corruption. In 2000, the World Bank released a paper entitled *Combating Corruption* outlining an anti-corruption strategy for the Philippines (World Bank 2000). The Philippine government then came up with its first National Anti-Corruption Plan in early 2000, elevating the fight against corruption as a government priority.

While anti-corruption has always been a major goal of civil society and social movements, their strategies mainly involved protest actions. The key tactic has largely been naming and shaming or “expose and oppose,” where social forces identify government officials or agencies involved in corruption and seek public attention through media or public demonstrations to hold corrupt officials to account. These efforts rarely led to justice (Arugay 2005).

In early 2000, a new approach to anti-corruption campaigning began to emerge, pioneered by civil society groups focusing on the government’s management of public finances. Procurement (including contract implementation) is a key issue, since according to an October 2001 report by Procurement Watch, the potential leakage ran to about Php21 billion in 2001 (USD 420 million at USD1=Php50) alone.¹ This new approach to fighting corruption is distinctive in that it is preventive, and done mainly through joint monitoring by civil society and state partners.

The emergence of this approach was due to a confluence of factors. The end of Martial Law in 1986 galvanized accountability movements, and created democratic space for civil society actors to form alliances with reformist bureaucrats and political elites. By the late 1990s, civil society actors recognized that the corruption issue could be addressed by engaging government actors through joint monitoring of public resources. International donors also took note of corruption in public financial management. The scandal and eventual overthrow of Estrada turned corruption into a central issue in the Philippines. These factors created several entry points for civil society in public financial management. This was the context for the creation of G-Watch, when citizen oversight was emerging as a new approach in fighting corruption in the Philippines.² G-Watch started as an anti-corruption/ social accountability program of a university that later spun off into an independent national action research organization advancing transparency, participation and accountability reforms.

Reform Actors

In 2000, a monitoring project was undertaken by a group of young researchers belonging to the G-Watch program, which was established by the Ateneo School of Government in partnership with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). Largely experimental, the monitoring simply checked the actual quantity and physical quality of textbooks delivered to public schools, comparing the results to what the paper trail claimed. The monitoring initiative yielded the following findings:

- Forty percent of the textbooks reportedly delivered were missing;
- Suppliers delivered books seemingly at random;
- Recipients were not notified of deliveries;
- There was no feedback mechanism to confirm that schools actually received the books;
- Documentation reports were not properly filled out; and
- There were no effective sanctions for late deliveries (Government Watch n.d.).

G-Watch presented these findings to the executives of DepEd. In response, the Department, through the initiative of then Undersecretary Juan Miguel “Mike” Luz, formally decided to collaborate with G-Watch to undertake a monitoring project referred to as Textbook Count. At the time, Luz was heading the textbook procurement of DepEd, where he was tasked by then-DepEd secretary Edilberto de Jesus to curb corruption in procurement. Luz knew about the corruption in textbooks and needed a mechanism to track it. This happened to coincide with G-Watch’s pilot program.³

With support from donors, including UNDP, the Asia Foundation (TAF) and the Partnership for Transparency Fund (PTF), G-Watch coordinated the participation of civil society organizations (CSOs) in Textbook Count for four rounds of monitoring from 2002-2007. UNDP co-established G-Watch with Ateneo de Manila University under the Philippine Governance Forum (PGF). Funds from the PGF were used to support the first round of textbook monitoring. G-Watch Coordinator Dondon Parafina learned about PTF through a colleague who was on the board of PTF. The Asia Foundation got to know G-Watch through G-Watch’s events, and through Dina Abad, who was Dean of Ateneo School of Government when G-Watch was formed.⁴ The Textbook Delivery Program of DepEd itself, on the other hand, was funded through a loan from the World Bank.

The objective of the project was simple: to ensure that the right quantity and physical quality of textbooks reached public school students, on time, following the right processes. One clear distinction of the initiative is the direct participation of CSOs in monitoring the delivery of the textbooks, in partnership with the government. Here was the beginning of the use of this approach in anti-corruption, which is now referred to in the Philippines as social accountability (SACC).

In 2003, when Textbook Count 1 was launched, a total of thirty-seven million textbooks and teacher’s manuals for elementary and high school had to be brought to approximately 5,500 delivery points nationwide. To undertake this extremely challenging task, DepEd was assisted by its civil society partners, such as the National Citizens’ Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL).⁵ Because of its previous engagement in election monitoring, where teachers serve as members of the Board

of Election Inspectors in polling precincts, “Namfrel volunteers had working relationships with teachers or officials in most schools” (Majeed 2011).

By the following year, both the Boy Scouts of the Philippines (BSP) and the Girl Scouts of the Philippines (GSP) joined Textbook Count and took on the challenge of monitoring the delivery of more than fourteen million textbooks and other teaching materials. Redempto Parafina, the former coordinator of G-Watch, was a member of the Ten Outstanding Boy Scouts of the Philippines (TOBSP). He was the one who invited the BSP and also extended the invitation to the GSP.

Textbook Count mobilized as many as forty-seven CSOs at the national and local levels. Through NAMFREL in the first round and BSP and GSP in succeeding rounds, it did grassroots organizing work at the school-level with the division-level chapters at the city and provinces facilitating the recruitment and flow of information.

Textbook Count covered the entire textbook delivery program of DepEd, from procurement to distribution. See table below that describes Textbook Count stages and components, indicating the different roles played by the DepEd and CSOs at each stage.

Reform Dynamics: How Textbook Count Enabled Citizen Engagement

Textbook Count was mainly a monitoring initiative. CSO monitoring of procurement and expenditure management of the government was supported by a law called the Government Procurement Reform Act (GPRA) or Republic Act No. 9184, passed in 2003 through the advocacy of civil society. The specific provision in the GPRA that allocates a seat to CSO observers in the bidding was a product of previous advocacy campaigns by CSOs, particularly by Procurement Watch. GPRA requires that observers from non-government organizations and private professional organizations are invited to observe the bidding activities of all government agencies. Various CSOs, including G-Watch, have also been claiming a broader interpretation of the GPRA to also include contract implementation. While the advancement of transparency and participatory reforms in the procurement continues to this day, under the current administration of Rodrigo Duterte, there has been significant rollback (Aceron 2021).

After EDSA 2 and the removal of Joseph Estrada as President, there was a broader consensus on the need to stop corruption among actors in government, civil society and business. The government's focus on fighting corruption served as an opening for CSOs to engage the government on this agenda. The then-new administration of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo also brought in reform-minded Cabinet members who served as allies of CSOs in initiating reforms in the bureaucracy. There was also a lot of support from the international community to advance transparent, participatory and accountable governance.

Textbook Count covered the entire textbook delivery program of DepEd, from procurement to distribution. The table below describes the Textbook Count stages and components, indicating the different roles played by DepEd and CSOs at each stage. All the undertakings of the CSOs at different levels (stages?) formed part of an integrated, multi-level collective action to account for textbooks through transparency and participation. The government, through DepEd, supported the CSO undertakings through various means: providing information, creating mechanisms to incorporate CSO monitoring, and responding to the findings.

Table 1. Textbook Count Stages, Activities and Actors (2002-2007)

Component	DepEd Processes	CSO Activity	DepEd Support to CSOs
1. Bidding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DepEd, through its Bids and Awards Committee (BAC), conducted pre-procurement, and opened and awarded the bids 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensured the transparency of pre-bid conference Signed the abstract of bid during its opening Ensured the transparency of the bidding Observed the conduct of content evaluation 	<p>Provided information about the biddings; invitation to bidding-related activities; held meetings about any bidding-related issues and concerns; government allies also discreetly informed CSOs of attempts by politicians to intervene in the process (Going beyond what the GPRA requires which was only to invite CSOs to observe biddings)</p>

Component	DepEd Processes	CSO Activity	DepEd Support to CSOs
2. Production	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DepEd, through the IMCS Quality Inspection Team visited the winning suppliers to inspect physical quality of textbooks to ensure they meet contract specifications • Inspection results forwarded to suppliers for corrections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspected quantity and quality of textbooks, and ensure that they meet contract specifications • Recommended the rejection of books that do not meet quality standards 	Formalized the inspection team, which included CSOs; Provided information about the inspection; invitations to inspection activities; Held meetings about any inspection-related issues and concerns
3. Delivery	<p>Pre-Delivery</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocation list was sent to division offices, which in turn forward it to high schools and district offices • Actual Delivery • Suppliers' forwarders delivered textbooks to district offices (for elementary school textbooks) and to high schools (for high school textbooks) • District offices and high schools inspected and accepted deliveries • Authorized Receiving Personnel of DepEd signed the Inspection and Acceptance Receipts (IARs) • The four copies of the signed IARs were given to: (1) Division Office, (2) Supplier, (3) District Office/ High School, (4) Third-Party Monitor <p>Post-Delivery</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Division Office validated deliveries in district offices/ high schools where IARs were not signed by a third-party monitor • The Division Office prepared the Certificate of Final Acceptance and submits it to Central Office • The Central Office prepared payment to the suppliers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helped in counting and inspection of books, making sure that the right quantity and quality are delivered on time • Recorded notable incidents and observations in the IARs, which are submitted to DepEd • Signed the IAR's Third Party Monitor section. 	Provided information about the delivery; supports briefing-orientations (resource persons); briefing of DepEd personnel to ensure they would be open to the monitoring; coordination with monitors as a requirement to suppliers and forwarders; space for CSO signature in the official reporting form
4. Distribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • District offices prepared allocation list to elementary schools • Textbooks were delivered to the elementary schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planned for a festive activity involving the community • Helped in distributing textbooks from district offices to schools • Prepared the monitoring report and document the activity 	Provided information about the distribution; briefing of DepEd personnel to ensure they would collaborate with the monitors; provided funds to ensure onward distribution of textbooks to schools upon the recommendation of G-Watch

Note: This is a revised table based on Fox and Acheron 2016. Specifically, the final column was changed from 'CSOs Involved' to 'DepEd Support to CSOs'.

A crucial preparatory tool for the endeavor was the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the government at the beginning of the initiative. This facilitated government buy-in since the MOA set the parameters of the engagement, clarified the roles and responsibilities of both the government and CSO participants. The framework of engagement assumes that though there are differences between civil society and the government, shared goals can be set for joint undertakings

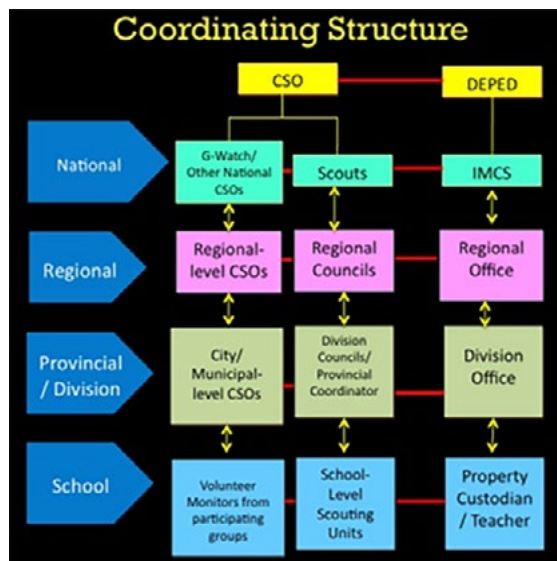
that will maximize each other's respective strengths without compromising each one's respective mandates. The MOA was drafted by G-Watch with inputs from its consultation with its CSO network and reviewed and approved by DepEd. The MOA was a formal and binding agreement that DepEd and G-Watch were expected to observe.

Actors at the national level (G-Watch, National CSOs and DepEd) coordinated among themselves in undertaking activities at the central office/ Manila level. This national level coalition also served as the overall coordinator of Textbook Count. This multi-sectoral coordination was expected to be replicated at the regional, division and school levels, with the counterparts of those national institutions and organizations. G-Watch referred to this in its trainings as the horizontal line of coordination, where responsible persons/units/groups at the same level coordinated to do their part in Textbook Count. The replication varied across the country depending on direct facilitation provided by G-Watch and by leadership on the ground. At the school level, where the actual 'counting' happens, the different sectors had to coordinate to accomplish all the tasks identified in receiving and accounting for the textbooks that were delivered. See figure below for the multi-level, multi-sectoral coordination in Textbook Count.

DepEd, on its end, provided information on the bidding schedules and specifications. It also made sure invites to bidding-related activities were sent to G-Watch. In instances that there were bidding-related issues and concerns that need to be resolved, DepEd convened meetings with the relevant stakeholders. There were also instances when allies in the Bids and Awards Committee (BAC) would discreetly inform G-Watch of attempts by politicians to intervene in the procurement decision-making, which were thwarted by the sheer presence of G-Watch procurement observers. In one specific incident, a DepEd BAC official discreetly told a politician that they could not accommodate his preferred contractor because "G-Watch is watching." All these efforts of DepEd went beyond what the GPRA requires. GPRA mainly mandates government agencies to invite CSOs to observe biddings.

The two offices that coordinated with G-Watch were the Procurement Service (PS) that handled procurement activities of DepEd and the Instructional Materials Council Secretariat (IMCS) that was handling the textbook program, both of which were reporting to Usec. Luz when Textbook Count started.

Figure 1. Coordination structure of Textbook Count⁶



Also presented in Fox and Aceron 2016

To prepare the participants, G-Watch in cooperation with other CSOs and supported by DepEd, conducted briefing-orientations at the division level. The topics covered in briefing-orientation included:

- The Textbook Policy of DepEd and its policy to engage with the CSOs;
- The amount, quantity and titles of textbooks procured and the timeline of the delivery;
- The coordination and reporting system; and
- The roles and responsibilities of all actors and stakeholders.

In the course of Textbook Count implementation, DepEd created task forces or committees, such as the inspection team created to inspect warehouses. In these cases, CSO participation depended on the invitation of DepEd. With close coordination with DepEd and in planning the entire monitoring, G-Watch made sure that CSOs were invited in all of these processes. Inspections of textbook production in the suppliers' warehouses was a way to spot and prevent mass errors in the printing and binding of textbooks. According to G-Watch reports, this contributed significantly in improving the physical quality of textbooks delivered to students.

Monitors at the delivery points observed the physical delivery of the textbooks. DepEd divided the country into four zones (north of Manila, south of Manila, Visayas and Mindanao) and outlined a schedule for every province within each zone. Publishers were instructed to deliver the textbooks within three to five days for a province and three days for a city.

DepEd provided vital information about the textbooks to be delivered, particularly the number of textbooks per title to be expected per delivery point. G-Watch disseminated this information to CSOs through the multi-level Textbook Count communication channels. CSO volunteers, on the other hand, were tasked to coordinate with the various suppliers and wait for the deliveries within the prescribed schedule. They also submitted their volunteers' names and contacts to G-Watch, which were then forwarded to the suppliers for coordination. In addition, volunteers were given materials and IDs, as well as information on the actual quantity of textbooks per title allocated to each school. By doing so "volunteers who help count the books can check the actual quantity delivered against this information" (Parafina n.d.).

Grassroots citizen-monitors relied on simple and easy-to-use monitoring tools to observe the implementation of government policies in real time. The Textbook Count monitoring tool used checklists to document compliance with the performance standards to be monitored, which included the cost, quantity, quality, process and delivery time. These standards were specified and agreed upon with the government at the onset.

The official monitoring report form was the Inspection and Acceptance Report (IAR), which included a space to be signed by school-level CSO monitors. This served as proof that the books had actually been delivered by the suppliers to the intended recipients. The number of signed IARs indicated the level of CSO coverage, in terms of the numbers of schools. If the IAR of the school was signed by a CSO during the actual delivery of textbooks, DepEd would no longer undertake post-delivery validation at that delivery site, which automatically meant savings for the government. Once the schools generated their book reception reports, they were submitted to the district/ division offices of both DepEd and GSP/BSP. The reports were then consolidated at the regional offices for submission to the DepEd central office and GSP/BSP National Headquarters, a way of parallel reporting. G-Watch and DepEd conducted their respective consolidation of monitoring results, a way of cross-validation.

The monitoring effort generated data and information that serve as the basis for a set of recommendations made by the independent citizens' assessment to improve the contract/ service delivery/ program that they monitored. For instance, the additional allocation of funds for the onward distribution of textbooks to schools resulted from the findings of G-Watch monitoring that noted the lack of funds as a key gap that explains why textbooks remained in warehouses. DepEd and other concerned agencies attended problem-solving sessions with the CSOs of Textbook Count to respond to findings and give commitments such as correcting the flaws identified by the monitors. After some time, the overall results of the monitoring initiative were presented to broad stakeholders, including the media, in a public presentation. Lessons from previous rounds were also generated through the sharing sessions and assessments. These lessons were considered in improving the next rounds of Textbook Count, particularly in filling in gaps.

Implementation of Textbook Count was not without resistance. In the early rounds of Textbook Count, non-cooperative suppliers and DepEd officials were perennially reported by CSO monitors as an issue during sharing sessions. It took a lot of orientations, re-orientations, briefings and affirmative actions from DepEd and CSOs to make all actors from the top down to support and cooperate with the initiatives. DepEd introduced G-Watch in its seminars, giving a spot for G-Watch to present its profile. Briefing-orientations were co-organized by G-Watch and DepEd to provide details about Textbook Count. DepEd also communicated the conduct of Textbook Count through department orders/ resolutions. DepEd invited G-Watch in other related initiatives and meetings.

Textbook Count Results and Gains

Numerous articles and reports, mostly grey literature, have been written about Textbook Count that present Textbook Count as a “success story.” Its success has been attributed to champions or leadership in DepEd (Leung 2005; Majeed 2006), the presence of civil society monitors (Leung 2005; Arugay 2012; Guertzovich and Rosenzweig 2013) and the engagement between state and non-state actors (Arugay 2012, Guertzovich and Rosenzweig 2013). The most recent paper that analyzed Textbook Count using vertical integration showed that the gains of Textbook Count can be attributed to its multi-level and broad coalitional strategy, which created a parallel citizen oversight to the government textbook delivery program. (Fox and Aceron 2016)

In the four rounds of Textbook Count national implementation, CSO monitoring in Textbook Count was able to cover from sixty-eight percent to as high as eighty-five percent of all the 4,800 to 7,656 delivery points,⁷ which includes district offices of DepEd and public high schools. The areas with least presence of CSOs were those in “Zone 4,” which corresponds to Mindanao school divisions. According to DepEd-IMCS (Instructional Materials Council Secretariat), it is likely that the areas that were not covered by Textbook Count were upland and affected by the armed conflict.

Table 2 below shows the CSO coverage in Textbook Count, including the last two rounds (2008-2009 and 2009-2010), which were coordinated by DepEd’s IMCS after G-Watch turned this task over to the government in 2008. The data for the four rounds coordinated by G-Watch (2003-2007) were validated through G-Watch’s own checking of the CSO box in the Inspection and Acceptance Reports (IARs) (see below). For the rounds coordinated by DepEd (2008-2010), the data were provided by IMCS, without validation by CSOs. DepEd has not made data from 2011 onwards available at the moment of writing this section.

Table 2. Textbook Count Coverage of Distribution Points

Round	Year	CSO Coordinator	CSO Coverage
Textbook Count 1	2003	G-Watch	68% of 5,613 delivery points
Textbook Count 2	2004	G-Watch	85% of 7,656 delivery points
Textbook Count 3	2005	G-Watch	77% of 4,844 delivery points
Textbook Count 4	2007	G-Watch	70% of 4,844 delivery points
DepEd Textbook Delivery Program	2008-2009	DepEd	85% of 1,875-4,105 delivery points (average reported coverage of different textbooks) ⁸
DepEd Textbook Delivery Program	2009-2010	DepEd	71% of 4,375-5,491 (average reported coverage of different textbooks) ⁹
DepEd Textbook Delivery Program	2011-2013	DepEd	Data remains undisclosed/ unconsolidated as of writing

Source: Fox and Aceron 2016

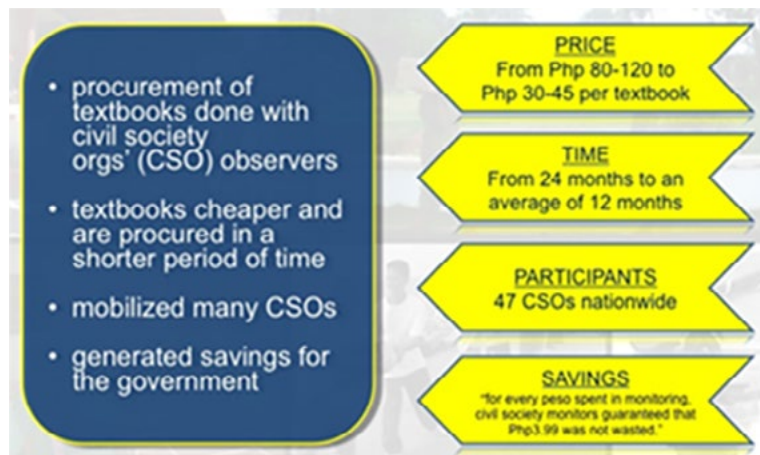
Through Textbook Count, forty-seven national and local civil society organizations (CSOs)¹⁰ mobilized to support the education system and participate in anti-corruption. Some of these CSOs have also subsequently undertaken their own monitoring initiatives, following the general approach of Textbook Count.¹¹ G-Watch has also broadened its engagement in DepEd, undertaking similar initiatives covering critical procurements and programs. Textbook Count has become G-Watch’s main template as it engages local government units (LGUs) in undertaking monitoring initiatives with local CSOs.

Textbook Count is widely recognized as a highly successful initiative. Though it received modest international funding, it was a national initiative – the first of its kind in the Philippines. As mentioned in several reports and articles on Textbook Count, the campaign contributed to the reduction of textbook unit price from between Php80 to Php120 in 1999 to between Php30 to Php45 in 2006-2007. It also helped improve the physical quality of textbooks. And it shortened the procurement cycle from twenty-four months to an average of twelve months.¹² The key factor of Textbook Count that contributed to these improvements was the incorporation of transparency and participation in the processes that presumably pushed the government to meet performance standards, perform better and avoid or stop any anomalies.

Furthermore, Textbook Count enabled the government to generate savings by preventing estimated pilferages or corruption through CSO monitoring. Geert van der Linden of the Partnership for Transparency Funds (PTF) in 2008 estimated the savings amounting to Php151 million for Textbook Count 4 that took place in 2007 (Van der Linden 2008).¹³ Comparing this to the cost of CSO operations for Textbook Count 4, which amounted to US\$66,000 (PTF grant of \$22,555 and counterpart contribution, mostly in kind, of \$43,180), van der Linden argues that the benefits of Textbook Count (savings of Php151 million or \$3.6 million) far outweighed the cost.¹⁴

This was further validated in a study by Simon Gregorio (2006), which estimated that, “for every peso spent in monitoring, civil society monitors guaranteed that Php 3.99 was not wasted” (page 16). This conclusion was reached by comparing the cost of G-Watch’s coordination of Textbook Count with the amount that was not wasted because of CSO monitoring (ibid.).¹⁵

Figure 2. Results of G-Watch-Coordinated Textbook Count 2002-2007



DepEd's public trust rating has also improved from being perceived as one of the most corrupt government agencies before 2000 to being one of the least corrupt agencies of the government in 2009 (Ong and Flores 2009). Textbook Count was introduced during this period, along with other reforms to open up the procurement process through the passage of the Government Procurement Reform Act. The government and development partners like the World Bank and the UNDP had also adopted their own anti-corruption strategy and action plans. There was also heightened awareness and media coverage on incidents of corruption and anti-corruption efforts.

In terms of involvement in the crafting of alternative policy proposals, Textbook Count focused mainly on strengthening CSO participation and what mechanisms are needed to address the flaws and gaps that were noted. For example, the Textbook Walk was introduced jointly by G-Watch and DepEd to address the problems encountered by Textbook Count in onward distribution. Because there were reports in previous Textbook Count rounds that textbooks delivered in district offices were not reaching the schools itself, Textbook walk was introduced to address this gap. It was a festive activity of onward distribution from district offices to the elementary schools conducted by the schools along with the community.

These results and gains contributed to the efficient and effective implementation of a specific program of an agency. It prevented corruption and leakages, given that corruption problems reported in the past, such as ghost deliveries, were eradicated. It thereby ensured proper utilization of resources allocated for a basic service needed by citizens simply through participation and transparency processes involving civil society organizations. The process also opened up DepEd processes and officials to external checks in the form of civil society partners, who gained access to the nitty-gritty of processes of public administration.

Challenges and Lessons

After Textbook Count 4, DepEd reported that the Textbook Count process continued, but in contrast to the first four rounds, the government controlled both the recruitment of CSO monitors and the consolidation of the school level reports of textbook delivery. DepEd continued to invite G-Watch and some of the other Manila-based CSOs to the bidding for textbook contracts, as well as to warehouse inspections. The extent or coverage of this is hard to know.

Between 2008 and 2010, according to government-supplied data on the number of Inspection Acceptance Receipts signed by supposed CSO representatives on the ground, CSOs continued to cover from seventy to eighty-five percent of delivery points of DepEd textbook delivery. However, despite having data on CSO coverage through the IAR, DepEd itself had noted the lack of validation of responses to the IAR to be problematic. Only the small number of areas covered by G-Watch's Local Hubs Project and to some degree, the schools covered by a separate civil society initiative Check My School (CMS) have independent sources of information that can validate DepEd reports of textbook delivery.

This means that Textbook Count post-2008 no longer had any guarantee of independent oversight of delivery. Those signing the IARs were not necessarily CSOs, and even if they were, there is no evidence that they were properly informed of what to do before signing the Inspection Acceptance Receipts. Unlike in the first four rounds of Textbook Count, where G-Watch coordinated CSO participation, there was no prior orientation of CSOs before the actual monitoring of the delivery.

Change in political context affected sustainability

The changing political climate in 2006-2007 partly explains why the role of G-Watch and other CSOs shifted from coordinating a full-scale, independent, nation-wide monitoring program to only sporadic small-scale independent social accountability initiatives. During this period under President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, the government was facing several complaints of electoral fraud and big-ticket corruption. Arroyo was facing impeachment and demonstrations by social movements calling for her resignation. Reform champions in her cabinet resigned and also called for her resignation. In such a 'politics of survival,' the Arroyo administration was forced to make a lot of compromises (PCIJ 2005).

In DepEd, one of those affected was Undersecretary Luz, the main Textbook Count champion. According to reports, Luz was sacked from DepEd and transferred to the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), because of his refusal to accept questionable postdated checks issued by Malacañang (the presidential palace) to fund a certain politician's scholarship program (PCIJ 2006). Luz was a known ally of the reformists who had already left the Cabinet.

In such a governance context, undertaking a huge celebratory anti-corruption drive like Textbook Count would have lacked credibility and may not have been feasible. Independent social accountability work could only be done in certain areas, quietly, in alliance with middle managers who had worked with civil society in the past.

Textbook Count offers rich points of reflection on the sustainability question in social accountability initiatives. How can participatory monitoring of government programs be sustained, given the inherent limitations and constraints of CSOs and the changing political context?

How to go beyond immediate gains in achieving systemic change

Textbook Count has shown how a targeted and bounded social accountability initiative (i.e., covering a specific service delivery for a given period of time) can deliver tangible results. However, the case also shows the limitations of this approach. While independent monitoring effectively ensured that the right quantity and physical quality of textbooks were delivered at the right place to the right beneficiaries, the sustainability of these achievements over time remains in question.

Transferring these targeted gains to systemic reform was a challenge, including how to ensure that such “good practices” become a norm in all processes of governance. Deep normative shifts in governance admittedly take significant time given the long history of weak institutions and a “captured State” in the country. The challenge faced by Textbook Count in sustaining its gains can be explained by its limited work on policy or systems improvement and the absence of sustainable linkages with broader constituencies of reform and accountability (such as media, public oversight institutions, international partners, etc.). Such actions were supposedly beyond the framework and design of Textbook Count, which is premised on constructive engagement and targeted intervention.

Textbook Count involved a set of “pro-empowerment institutional reforms (that) are driven by mutually reinforcing cross-sectoral coalitions between state and society, grounded in mutually perceived shared interests” (Fox 2004). But how this would be sustained was a question. This would require embedding the initiative or parts of it in a broader strategic engagement pursuing policy and systemic reforms that address the root causes of the problem of corruption such as breakdown of accountability due to power asymmetry, and not only its symptoms. For this to work, it has to build alliances and coalitions that are not only engage in monitoring work, but also those that are involved in advocacy campaigns on political reform and deepening of democracy that go beyond one service delivery or program.

Since 2007, G-Watch has been shifting its strategic direction towards addressing underlying causes of the problems of corruption and accountability deficit in governance. It has started addressing, not only symptomatic issues, but also underlying systems and policy issues such as inequitable distribution of resource allocation in education and lack of/ weak support mechanisms and/ or programs for accountability that prevented the sustainability and institutionalization of transparency, participation and accountability in the Department of Education and in selected local governments through G-Watch’s initiative to sustainably engage at the local and community level too. It has worked with another program of the Ateneo School of Government called Political Democracy and Reforms (PODER) to take on the broader systems, policy and power structure issues that cause corruption and accountability deficit in government through constituency-building, multi-stakeholder convening and policy research.

Middle-Managers as more enduring allies

G-Watch maintained its engagement with DepEd from 2007 to 2013. This included sporadic participation in textbook delivery monitoring as well as other projects that tried to cover critical services and address strategic challenges in sustaining CSO monitoring.

While top-level champions are more vulnerable to political maneuverings and squabbles (as in the case of Undersecretary Luz), reform-oriented middle-managers have proven to be more sustainable. Through its alliance with a few middle managers and lower-level government officials inside DepEd, G-Watch was able to find a way to carve out spaces isolated from intra-elite squabbling in order to deliver small, but concrete gains. The director of Procurement Service, in particular, also became a staunch advocate in finding ways to sustain CSO participation. She found that CSO partnerships were mutually beneficial in supporting the oversight function of her unit and in her involvement in the Government Procurement Policy Board, the government's oversight on procurement policies. A CSO initiative like Textbook Count gave her that opportunity.

A central coordinating unit in civil society was key to independence and autonomy of CSO monitoring

The Textbook Count case raises the question of how CSO monitoring can be sustained in a way that CSOs will maintain the capacity to account for government performance independently and effectively. A key turning point in the history of Textbook Count was the formation of a unit to coordinate CSO participation and ensure the independence and autonomy of participatory monitoring. It matters to check what kind of CSO/ citizen participation is involved and how independent it is to be able to validate data and information from the government, as well as its capacity to ensure compliance with standards by duty-bearers. Capacity and independence of CSO engagement are critical to ensure that its involvement in governance can effectively prevent corruption and ensure efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery. Otherwise, it could fall into the trap of being a rubber-stump of government, deodorizing governance performance.

The Textbook Count case shows that a 'claimed space,' such as CSO observation of biddings guaranteed in the GPRA passed through lobbying and advocacy of pro-procurement reform, could turn into an 'invited space.' Because the needed specific information about these "claimed spaces" were in the hands of the government, it was almost inevitable that the claimed spaces turned into invited spaces, with the government having more control over the latter. This underscores the critical role played by CSO coordination and the production of independent information through third-party monitoring, as in the case of social accountability initiatives such as Textbook Count. With enough autonomy and capacity, CSOs could both help "claimed spaces" to get operationalized and embedded in the bureaucracy, while retaining civil society voice and oversight over the process. Unfortunately for Textbook Count, independent oversight of the entire textbook delivery process lasted only while G-Watch led the CSO coordination.

Analysis and Final Insights: Introducing ‘Constructive Accountability’

Strategic campaigns such as Textbook Count involved synergy between government and CSOs. Government reformers enabled collective action by opening formal spaces and providing information, as CSOs organized to conduct parallel monitoring in coordination with government allies. It was a mutual empowerment process that enabled oversight of a specific program implementation by active monitoring across scales to connect oversight at local, subnational and national levels.

Textbook Count employed a preventive approach to corruption through citizens’ monitoring. This approach is intended to preempt possible non-compliance with standards, corruption or any form of abuse of authority through real time monitoring, while the processes, service delivery or program implementation are ongoing. Citizen monitoring serves as a pro-active effort to remind the duty-bearers of their responsibilities or what is expected from the process/ program/ service delivery being monitored. Coupled with a quick feedback mechanism, in which G-Watch facilitates linkages up to the top-level management of the agency and accountability institutions, this approach has proven to deter non-compliance as well as to facilitate enhanced compliance with standards.

The monitoring conducted by CSOs in Textbook Count served as an indirect advocacy initiative, supporting DepEd officials who favored enhanced participation, transparency and accountability of CSOs and citizens in governance, while providing them with evidence that they could use to constrain corrupt officials.

The collaboration between government and civil society in Textbook Count has been referred to as ‘constructive engagement.’ Constructive engagement is defined as the “building of a mature relationship between two naturally opposable parties—i.e., citizens or citizen groups, on the one hand, and government—bound together by a common reality”(ANSA-EAP, undated) This practice dates back since the restoration of formal democracy in the country, after Martial Law ended in 1986. Particularly, this practice has been common among non-government organizations (NGOs) when it comes to service delivery or co-implementation of programs and projects termed before as “partnership” or “collaboration.”

Only when anti-corruption became a major national issue in early 2000 did this approach get applied to enhancing accountability and responsiveness of government. In the context of civil society participation, “constructive engagement” attempts to capture a point of departure in how civil society engages the state—from the outside usually opposing government or advocating reforms through pressure politics or “parliament of the streets” to being a “partner” of government, working in the inside to supplement the institutional capacity of the government.

However, this term has been diluted and pacified over time in a way that has prevented CSOs from checking the government for the sake of ‘smooth interpersonal relationship.’ This has, in turn, highlighted the non-threatening approach of such relationships, used to persuade government officials – who are often anxious about “outsiders” or “external interferences” – to make their processes and documents open and accessible.

This re-examination of Textbook Count offers a different term for the synergy of government and civil society. Looking at the key aspects of Textbook Count, CSOs' capacity for independent oversight was present through parallel multi-level monitoring and coordination covering almost one hundred percent of the delivery points. The approach was preventive, as monitoring happened at the point of delivery. Common goals, principles and terms of engagement were set at the beginning of the initiative through a memorandum of agreement that recognized the equal footing of government and civil society. While the two parties closely coordinated their capacity-building, monitoring and reporting activities, CSOs maintained autonomous processes independent from the government.

The term constructive engagement does not specify the exact purpose of the engagement, which could explain how its main purpose or end (accountability) could be diluted to maintain smoother engagement. To be exact, in Textbook Count, government and civil society synergized to enable accountability. As such, the engagement is premised on civil society having the capacity for independent and autonomous oversight. What kept the engagement constructive was the common ends and goals (e.g., strengthening of accountability, improvement of services and good governance), as well as the preventative approach focusing on what can be done to improve the system rather than emphasizing public exposure of faults. Government-civil society engagement was the means to an end, which was accountability and its intended results.

This paper offers a new term for this: *constructive accountability*. It refers to civil society-government engagement premised on 'constructive accountability,' i.e., the engagement of government, civil society and even the private sector to jointly undertake accountability processes to achieve a shared goal. Such accountability processes mainly take the form of joint monitoring initiative to improve the effectiveness of services or programs the stakeholders view as critical through mutually-agreeable and mutually-reinforcing processes that includes independent civil society oversight.

Constructive accountability qualifies as constructive, both in terms of the ends, goals or targets of accountability (usually to improve a service delivery/ program, policy or system) and the accountability approach itself (preventative/ preventive instead of punitive). Both are shared/ agreed upon by government and civil society. It builds on a common term 'constructive criticism,' which means the criticism can be negative or critical, but it is meant to improve and help. The monitoring is not meant to find faults on individual officials (not fault-finding/ witch-hunting) to punish them or hold them to account. The G-Watch approach, as applied in Textbook Count and other monitoring initiatives, is described as "preventive" in that the citizen monitoring is meant to (1) prevent corruption/ inefficiencies; and (2) to improve systems/ policies/ processes.

Constructive accountability is an application of sandwich strategy that aims to enhance and enable accountability through partnerships between state and society partners that respect and enable the autonomy of civil society. The term constructive accountability does not necessarily address whether the relationship or engagement between civil society and government needs to be adversarial or cooperative. It may or may not be so. By dropping "engagement," constructive accountability frees itself from having to specify the terms of engagement which gives civil society a lot of elbow room to employ the specific tactics of engagement (whether adversarial or collaborative) that they deem applicable at any given time vis-à-vis specific government officials and decision-making levels. What is qualified as 'constructive' is the kind of accountability processes that are tapped and not the engagement.

This echoes a point in the recent paper *Accountability Keywords* by Jonathan Fox:

“The conventional ‘either/or’ framing of collaborative vs. adversarial implicitly assumes that civil society actors either challenge or partner with officials. Yet in practice, activists often *combine* collaborative with adversarial approaches —and that mixture varies across territory and over time, depending on whether they can find any officials willing to partner with them (e.g., Hernández et al. 2019; Isunza and Garza 2018). A more three-dimensional approach recognizes that some government actors may support collaboration for change, while others do not. This recognition leaves room for civil society actors to collaborate with insider reformers while also questioning reform opponents in the same government.” (13)

“...Indeed, one central message of the sandwich strategy is that the construction of accountable governance needs countervailing power both in state and society in order to weaken anti-accountability forces (Section 6.2). This contrasts with approaches to collaborative governance that rely primarily on the goodwill and influence of enlightened elites.” (81)

This specific paper looks at Textbook Count as an example of a sandwich strategy case. But why a further study of sandwich strategy? Developed by Jonathan Fox, sandwich strategy captures the complexity of ‘accountability politics’ in a reform process. It shows coalition-building of pro-accountability/ pro-reform forces from civil society and government needed to achieve gains amidst hurdles from anti-accountability/ anti-reform forces. Sandwich strategy is an example of a strategic approach to accountability that is a point of departure from simplified, linear, highly optimistic formulas for reform which have led not only to poor results and failed expectations, but also contributed to a lot of noise, missed opportunities, distractions and misconceptions in the field of transparency, participation and accountability (TPA). There is a need to study sandwich strategies more not only to promote strategic approaches to TPA, to learn more about it and to elaborate more on how it works.

What does the Textbook Count case contribute to study on Sandwich Strategy? This specific case write-up on Textbook Count clarifies how the interplay of pro-accountability/ pro-reform actors from civil society and government achieved a balanced partnership that fed on and built on each other’s strengths – independent citizen oversight that mobilized and capacitated citizens and TPA-enabling government agency that was keen in undertaking necessary reforms to improve its performance. Other written works on Textbook Count have dubbed this interplay constructive engagement in social accountability. Such formulation has been vulnerable to diluting the engagement to simply being constructive at the expense of accountability. In response, this piece has introduced a new term which it argued as a more nuanced and power-shifting term to refer to the interplay of civil society and government in Textbook Count: constructive accountability. Constructive accountability is the application of sandwich strategy on an accountability agenda that involves broad mobilization of civil society with support from government allies for multi-level monitoring and advocacy that aims to prevent corruption and improve service delivery. Constructive accountability pushes back the intent to box how civil society should relate with government, while asserting that for joint government-civil society accountability initiative to work, there should be an independent civil society that is capable of truly checking government; and such could be constructive -- towards a joint/ shared ends and with focus on what can be improved instead of whose fault it is.

Textbook Count has demonstrated a form of government-civil society accountability initiative that worked. Though short-lived when political context changed leading to a loss of reform champions

in government and as a result of shifting CSO roles and priorities over time, Textbook Count, nonetheless, delivered results. It led to more efficient textbook delivery and improvement of public trust towards the education department. It advanced participatory reform provisions in laws. It mobilized hundreds of citizen monitors who were able to exercise their rights to information and freedom of assembly. Their efforts contributed to ensuring that the right quantity and quality of textbooks were delivered at the right time following the right processes. This fruitful 'constructive accountability' delivered powershifts worth re-exploring and scaling.

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Endnotes

1 “Public Expenditure Management.” <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPHILIPPINES/Resources/DB02-PublicExpenditureManagement-June28.pdf>.

2 Arugay (2005) discusses the shift from protest action to participation as an approach to fight corruption. Two reports by the World Bank (May 2000, September 2001) show the extent of corruption in the Philippines, its link to poverty and the need to address it. PCIJ published a book (1999) entitled *Robbed* that discusses corruption in the entire education sector. Arugay (2005) discusses the shift from protest action to participation as an approach to fight corruption. Two reports by the World Bank (May 2000, September 2001) show the extent of corruption in the Philippines, its link to poverty and the need to address it. PCIJ published a book (1999) entitled *Robbed* that discusses corruption in the entire education sector.

3 See also Majeed (2011) for a more detailed account on why and how Luz ended up supporting Textbook Count.

4 Thank you to Dondon Parafina for providing additional details here.

5 Formed in 1983, NAMFREL has more than 500,000 volunteers organized into 103 chapters, and is present in each of the country’s 80 provinces.

6 G-Watch (n.d.). “Presentation on Textbook Count.”

7 Delivery points varied year-to-year depending on the number of textbooks procured that year and target recipients given the need.

8 Instructional Materials Council Secretariat (IMCS) of DepEd data were disaggregated according to textbook titles.

9 Ibid.

10 List of CSOs in Textbook Count: Alliance of Concerned Teachers, Alliance of Volunteer Educators, Association of Ministers and Ministries in Nueva Ecija, Ateneo School of Government, Barug! Pilipino, Boy Scouts of the Philippines, Brotherhood of Destiny, Caucus of Development NGO Networks, CCP-Sugpuin ang Korupsyon, Christian Convergence for Good Governance, Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government (Abra, Region I), Civil Society Network for Education Reforms, DIWA, Don Bosco Technical Institute Makati City BSP, Fellowship of Christians in Government, Girl Scouts of the Philippines, Kapatiran Kaunlaran Foundation, Konsyensyang Pilipino, Linangan Foundation, Naga City People’s Council (Naga, Region V), National Citizens Movement for Free Elections, Negros Center for People Empowerment and Rural Development (Negros, Region VI), Procurement Watch, Inc., Public Services Labor Independent Confederation, Rahma Qur’anic Center and Mosque Foundation, Risale Nur Islamic Students, Rotary Club of Manila (Manila, NCR), Social Watch Visayas (Visayas Island), Student Catholic Action, Ten Outstanding Boy Scouts of the Philippines Association, Transparency and Accountability Network, UP Bannuar, UP Harong, UP Kamayo, Victory Campus Ministry, Volunteers for a Libertarian Society, YES Tejeros (Manila, NCR), Young Moro Professionals Network, Inc. (ARMM), Youth Empowering Youth Forum.

11 Initiatives included Bantay *Eskwela* of Procurement Watch that monitors school furniture and school-building projects, NAMFREL’s monitoring of medicines in the Department of Health (DoH) and CheckMySchool of the Affiliated Network for Social Accountability in East Asia and the Pacific (ANSA-EAP).

12 DepEd computation that was validated by G-Watch.

13 According to Van der Linden in this report in 2008: In the *ex ante* situation, 40 per cent of textbooks worth P542 million would not have reached the district DepEd offices. The TBC4 monitoring process covered 70% of the deliveries at district offices and elementary schools and verified that all books valued at Php379 million were delivered. If it is assumed that in the remaining 30% of the (not monitored) deliveries the *ex ante* situation still prevailed (i.e., continued unaccounted books at the pre-TBC levels – a very conservative estimate), and that in the segment between district offices and the schools the 21 per cent losses still continue (again very conservative, given the experience of Textbook Walk) then the monetary value of the additional books now accounted for works out at P151 million (P542 million x .70 x .40).

14 Ibid.

15 Gregorio (2006) explains: Quantifying the degree of confidence, G-Watch coordinating functions cost roughly PhP1.025 million in Textbook Count 3. Doubling this amount for what civil society partners in the field spent (transportation costs, food, and time) results in a total monitoring cost of Php2.05 million. For Textbook Count 3, the Department of Education procured 1,269,617 textbooks worth Php63.070 million (including delivery cost). On the average, civil society monitors signed 65% of all Inspection and Acceptance Reports. One IAR was equivalent to one delivery site. Assuming that 65% of all textbooks were delivered to these delivery sites, civil society monitors tracked or guaranteed the delivery of Php40.995 million worth of books. The Government Procurement Policy Board (GPPB) estimated that 20% was lost to corruption. 20% of Php40.995 was Php8.199. Therefore, for every peso spent in monitoring, civil society monitors guaranteed that Php3.99 was not wasted. Even by the standards of business, this is a good return.

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