

## The Participatory Governance Project

### **“Promoting Transparency and Accountability of Local Governments through Active CSO Participation in Development Processes”**

*Sorsogon Vice Governor, Hon.  
Antonio Kruni H. Escudero*



The Participatory Governance Project implemented by the Integrated Rural Development Foundation of the Philippines (IRDF) with support from the European Union (EU) was officially launched in the province of Sorsogon. The event paved the way for meaningful discussions about the project as well as different concerns and sharing of insights on governance. More importantly, IRDF and DILG signed a Memorandum of Understanding stipulating the formal partnership to implement the project.

The launching last February 19, 2013 held in Manggo Grill, Sorsogon City, was conducted together with the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) and attended by LGU officials, department heads and CSOs from the six project areas namely Sorsogon City, Casiguran, Pilar, Matnog, Irosin and Bulan. Two Mayors actively participated Mayor Ong of Irosin and Mayor De Castro of Bulan. Around 70 participants including IRDF staff attended the launching.

The event started with a prayer song and the national anthem. IRDF Project Manager, Libby Dometita, moderated the whole day program (See attached Annex A:Program.). She acknowledged the LGU officials, CSOs and other participants in the event.

Vice Governor-Sorsogon, Hon. Antonio Kruni H. Escudero, delivered the welcome remarks. He expressed his appreciation to the role of CSOs in governance particularly in helping the government deliver its programs.

EU Representative, Mr. Galvin Eric, provided a message (in absentia) in behalf of the European Union. (See attached Annex B.)

- I. IRDF Executive Director, Arze Glipo, shared IRDF's experiences in promoting good governance as well as outlined the current projects supported by the EU. (See attached Annex C for a complete copy of the

*IRDF Executive Director Arze Glipo on  
IRDF experience in promoting Good  
Governance*



presentation.)

She pointed out that to achieve the Millennium Development Goal, the Human Development and Poverty Reduction Cluster and the Good Governance Cluster organized under Executive Order 43, together with DBM and the DILG, piloted the bottom-up budgeting (BUB) and planning in December 2011 – March 2012. BUB aims to make planning participatory through genuine involvement of grassroots and community organizations.

ED Glipo also reiterated that through the promotion of good governance, there were (1) people-centered development wherein empowerment and participation of grassroots and communities in legal proceedings, advocacy and dialogues between the CSOs and the government took place; (2) specifically, a program of governance for Sorsogon, in partnership with NPC, has been undertaken wherein organization and active participation of CSOs in various governance like planning and formulation, budgeting, etc. will be pushed.

IRDF was also successful in organizing LPRATs (Local Poverty Reduction Action Plan Teams) and in mobilizing sector participation, among others. Some of the lessons that IRDF learned are: (1) active participation among stakeholders led to timely and well-crafted LPRAP; (2) guidelines from NGOs facilitated substantial participation of basic sectors and CSOs in local planning and budgeting; (3) efficient mobilization of activities between CSOs, NGAs and LGUs; (4) there is still a need to enhance participative capacities of basic sectors in governance; (5) leveling off and expectations check between LGUs and CSOs are needed to better understand their roles and responsibilities, and to give support and commitment; (6) partnership encourages greater ownership of the CSOs - more active and supportive of LGU projects; (7) need further improvement and systematization of database to aid planning targets; (8) coordination with DILG and expertise of personnel in bureaucracy facilitated and improved the process; and (8) participation of civil society is important in influencing policies and, resource allocation. The EU-IRDF governance project targeted six (6) municipalities in Sorsogon, namely, Bulan, Matnog, Irosin, Pilar, Casiguran and Sorsogon City. EU's overall objective is to (1) promote participatory, transparent and accountable local governance to enable poor and vulnerable groups to participate in, and to (2) promote and benefit from inclusive economic, social and cultural-political development in the province of Sorsogon and specifically in the identified six (6) municipalities.

#### **ISSUES RAISED DURING THE OPEN FORUM: (facilitated by Jake Mesias, LGOO)**

1. How did the Naga City formed its own People's Council? Is it still active? How do they overcome resistance from other stakeholders? Does the province of Sorsogon has its own People's Council? Is it working or active?

Naga City increased the coverage and membership of the People's Council. Membership is specific. The members are also given the right to vote as a council and decide on local legislations. The "Empowerment Ordinance" enabled members of NGOs/POs to vote through the People's Council giving them powers akin to the Sangguniang Panlungsod. According to LGOO Roque De los Santos, the legality of this particular ordinance has not been questioned so far and no one filed a formal complaint yet and as such, the proper court has no stand yet on

the situation/issue. There is a standing legality doubt because deviated from the mandate of the local government code of 1991.

For Sorsogon City, it followed the Naga's Citizen's Charter model. The Sorsogon Citizen's Charter has been established three (3) years before the other localities adopted one. The document describes how to effectively deliver services to the citizenry.

2. Regarding Sorsogon's Citizen's Charter, was it institutionalized? This is an issue raised by Ms. Alice Lopez. Experience in the Office of the Assessor showed that the process for the empowerment of the citizenry and the establishment of the Anti-Red Tape system did not take place. There are diagrams showing the flow of process showing which window to go to for a certain transaction and yet, when you look for it, no such window exists.

Some LGOOs participating in the activity shared also their respective LGU experiences. The Sorsogon Citizen's Charter has been established and surveys from various LGUs in the province showed that almost all have their own Charters and supports Anti-Red Tape act. For this matter, LGOO Andy Marcaida, 80% of the local offices in the town of Pilar have already established and implemented the Citizen's Charter. For Sorsogon, the Office of the Civil Registrar and Health offices were the preliminary recipient/trial area of said charter.

It is pointed out by the CPDO-Sorsogon City, the Charter's implementation should undergo review and evaluation to further improve the processes employed. According to him, a Citizen's charter is useful for the citizenry. However, we need feedback from its clients/citizens so that the local officials will know what is happening and will know if the processes implemented relative to the charter are effective and sustainable. The feedback mechanism and the active participation of the people will help improve the system, the processes and the projects that are intended for the citizenry. DILG reiterated and supports the suggestion that the feedback mechanism should be used fully by the people. In every municipality, areas where comments/suggestions/complaints for the services rendered are evident and can be used by the clients. Likewise, there is also a Public Assistance Desk where forms can be acquired for documenting/writing comments, suggestions or complaints that needed action or response from the local government unit.

However, it was interpolated that such mechanism even if existing cannot be fully utilized if the conducive environment for genuine people's participation is not present.

3. Regarding Complaint Desk, people are afraid to document their complaints because of fear that they will be marked as against the local executives. This is not easy due to complications that make their life even more difficult. One suggestion for this is to establish and sustain an active website where the citizenry can send their complaints, comments and suggestions through aliases (if afraid to come forward). Sorsogon City CPDO shared that the city shall soon have a functional and interactive website.

The media is also mentioned as another institution that can contribute to facilitating feedback mechanisms.

4. Different experiences and insights were also shared regarding regarding the involvement of IRDF in the participatory governance including the BUB processes.

Per Matnog experience, it was suggested that leveling of expectations between the IRDF and the LGUs should be properly done. Proper procedures of IRDF involvement in local governance should be well-coordinated with the local executives so that activities being done by the LGUs and IRDF will simultaneously address bottoms-up planning of projects. Likewise, roles of LGUs, IRDF, NPC and CSOs should be clarified so that the process, as well as the stakeholders' relationships and interactions, of participatory governance will be smoother and harmonized.

IRDF ED Glipo acknowledged Matnog's comment re coordination with various organizations involved (LGU, CSOs, IRDF) for smooth interaction. She thanked Mayor Ubaldo for all his support especially to grassroots organizing. Previous "Empowerment Project" initiated some confusions regarding roles of LGUs, CSOs and IRDF but were later ironed out. Matnog representative (Mrs. Monet Escultura) suggested that IRDF should first have a presentation of program to the local chief executives and a clear discussion on the roles. She also shared her impressions to the recent BUB process. The dynamics of interaction and broadness of thinking of the LCEs are more evident now than before. The grassroots are active and interests among CSOs regarding their roles and responsibilities are also present. LGUs always have their priority projects. Hence the more coordination is imperative especially among the various stakeholders so that projects that will have more positive impact at the grassroots will be considered by the local officials. Through the process of participative governance, the formulation of the projects will be more specific and focused on the needs of the people. These are learnings that we will take into heart so that in the next round, we will be more effective.

DILG also shared its experiences in Bulan re CSO assembly wherein proposals were immediately done by the CSOs and were brought during the assembly proper. This enabled the LGU to immediately identify programs and projects for the sectors. On the other hand, it is also important to note that the planning stage is another arena wherein not all projects submitted by the CSOs will be accepted. LGOO Calortiz further emphasized that the LGU has its own projects and as such, one task for us is to harmonize or ensure that the LGU and CSOs' projects match and be implemented eventually. The CSOs should also acknowledge that there are many sectors that the LGU considers like women groups, fisherfolk, farmers, senior citizens, transport groups, etc. Hopefully, with the active participation of various stakeholders, the 2015 budgeting process particularly in the planning stage will be more substantial, focused and specific.

Libby Dometita commented that the evaluation and sharing being done during the event further sharpened the process of participation amongst stakeholders, smoothen out problems in every stages of the planning, formulation and implementation process. The BUB served as a platform of good governance where relationships between the LGU and CSOs were tightened and become more effective and results-oriented.

*IRDF Project Manager Libby Dometita on feedback mechanism, sharing and evaluation as tools for sharpening the process of stakeholders' participation*



Likewise, she explained that IRDF is committed to improve protocols and support processes that will respond to the concerns raised by Ms. Escultura. One step already initiated is having the MOU between DILG and IRDF to delineate the roles and tasks, as well responsibilities expected from each organization. IRDF also requests that they be allowed to have a round of consultation with the LCEs so they could have an MOU between IRDF, CSOs, and the LGUs where expectations and roles were clearly stated and at least act as a guide for each organizations involved.

5. Regarding involvement of CSOs, some may be wondering what their roles are because this might only be an IRDF project. It was also raised how a CSO if “weak” will engage with government processes? How CSOs will ready and consolidate efforts to fully engaged?

Ms. Glipostated that many grassroots and cooperative organizations shall be involved, not only the IRDF. One of the objectives of participatory governance projects is to capacitate different CSOs especially those from grassroots. IRDF is there to involve both LGUs and CSOs together in the formulation, planning and budgeting process. IRDF is also involved in other platforms of governance.

Ms. Dometita specified that the CSOs are not completely mapped out. When LGUs ask who will be contacted in the BUB process, not all CSOs can be identified. In fact, many are not yet accredited. Although IRDF is the project holder, it is important to consolidate all CSOs in the 6 target areas. Some CSOs who are “strong” would need a different help from IRDF as compared to some who are “young” or “weak” or “new” in the arena. IRDF would have to address these varying needs accordingly, to capacitate them, so that all CSOs will eventually become strong and active participants in the process of governance. IRDF can focus on this in the next three (3) years. CSO mapping is a specific task to do.

6. What are the experiences of the LGUs, CSOs and other entities involved in the promotion and establishment of participatory governance; from planning to formulation of projects? What are the best practices and challenges of the CSOs (and other stakeholders) that can be shared so that in the next budget year, participation will be smoother?

Different LGUs shared their experiences. For Irosin, the LPRAT ensures coordination with the LGU and general assemblies with the CSOs. Calling for the participation of CSOs, people’s organizations, various sectors such as the business sector, was not difficult. Series of meetings were conducted wherein LGU reps, agency reps and CSOs were present. The Kalahi-CIDDS budget was P12M while the LGU budget was P15M. The final projects were drawn up and was accepted by all stakeholders. The challenge now is how to institutionalize CSO participation.

Mayor De Castro of Bulan reported that their experience re participative governance is smooth sailing. Coordination at the start was a problem but was smoothed out later on. Hopefully, funding from the EU will really materialize so that our marginalized communities and grassroots will benefit. We need the support of CSOs and the LGUs/LCEs to make this venture successful. One problem that can be seen is a CSO that involves itself in partisan politics. If we don’t dwell on politics, the formulation and planning of our projects will be smooth. Bulan is committed to support the program of IRDF.

- II. Provincial Director – DILG Sorsogon, Ruben E. Baldeo, discussed the DILG experience in ensuring participatory, transparent and accountable governance with focus on the directions, challenges and the roles of CSOs in Sorsogon. (See attached Annex D for a complete copy of PD Baldeo’s presentation.)

Below are priority programs and projects and FY 2013 performance targets presented by PD Baldeo that will serve as a vision, as well as guide, for the LGUs, CSOs and all other stakeholders in their developmental goals.

1. Business friendly and competitive LGUs
2. Environment-protective, climate change adaptive and disaster resilient LGUs
3. Socially-protective and safe LGUs
  - a. Bottom-up planning (LPRAP – local poverty reduction action plan) formulation
  - b. This program open up a chance for CSOs to actively participate in the planning and plan formulation
4. Accountable, transparent, participative and effective local governance
  - a. Local governance performance management system
  - b. Seal of good housekeeping
  - c. Performance challenge fund
  - d. Local governance watch
  - e. Election 2013
  - f. MDG tracking system
  - g. Compliance to national policies
  - h. Training-workshop in the formulation of comprehensive development plans
  - i. Training-workshop in Community Based Monitoring System (CBMS)
  - j. Orientation training on the Sanggunian Information System
  - k. Training-workshop on documentation/replication of good practices



**ISSUES RAISED DURING THE OPEN FORUM: (facilitated by Sheena Porciuncula)**

1. “What is not included is excluded”. The principle is that there should be people participation. During GMA time, people participation was just lip service. This time, we’re trying to make it work. Before, the Local Government Code (LGC) was not too workable. But this time, we’re trying to make it stronger. What must be done this time to institutionalize the active CSOs

participation? On the local level, even with the change of administration, what can be done to continue this participation and make it sustainable?

PD Baldeo of DILG Sorsogon remarked that the purpose of the BUB planning exercise is to ensure participation in coming up with sectoral programs particularly those addressing poverty. There is the tendency that local planning is influenced by partisan politics. The BUB is designed to address this block so that the agency concerned can come to the rescue.

In the local government planning, not everyone is involved. The Sangguniang Panlalawigan make the policies. The inputs coming from the LCEs and CSOs are thus important to the Sanggunian, enabling them to make focused and specific policies. Our focus now is how to harmonize this BUB experience with the mandated local government processes. CSOs should have more involvement not only in the planning aspect. CSOs should also have membership within the Executive Committee because Execoms are empowered to ensure that the programs are implemented.

2. What can we do to smoothen out CSOs participation, even without P/NOY?

PD Baldeo of DILG-Sorsogon reiterated that all CSOs concerned are well organized. Are they accredited, do they have their Constitution and By-Laws, as well as officers who will represent the organization? The goals, mission, advocacy and tasks of each CSOs should be cleared to all its members and should have a legal entity (registered and accredited). The IRDF can help the CSOs in not only organizing their groups but also in determining their goals and advocacies so that the LGUs/the government and the community will hear them. If one CSO went through the process of accreditation (“dumaan sa butas ng karayom”), then all other CSOs should undergo the same system. They cannot participate without this process of accreditation. For the information of all, accreditation is year round and there is no partisan accreditation.

3. One solution is to make a federation of all these CSOs. So that when we attend the Local Development Council meetings, projects are already well discussed and representative of a wider and multi-sector agenda. If BUB (Bottom-Up Budgeting) will be used, how can the CSOs participate sustainably?

PD Baldeo of DILG Sorsogon explained that the BUB is an executive exercise influencing the mandated local planning process. It is a good exercise but it cannot circumvent what the LGC mandates. The BUB is so far working because the funds that will be used are also national funds hence the national government can dictate also how to execute the whole thing.

However, it is also good to consider well and subscribe to the opportunities provided by LGC for CSOs to participate. For example, Local development Council is required to organize five (5) sectors like social, economic, agricultural, etc. Each sectoral committee can invite CSOs to formulate the sectoral form. There is no limited number for CSOs to join as long as they can really contribute. Again, accreditation is required. The bulk of work (time, ideas, efforts) is with these committees. The MPDC is only tasked to consolidate and serve as technical writer.

4. How long does it take for a CSO to be accredited? Also, regarding the Citizen Charter, are the comments/suggestion desk be sufficient? It might just be there for compliance purposes only but the actions needed to make things work are not in-place.

It takes 60 days before an organization is accredited. It is required that all CSOs apply for accreditation right after the newly elected officers assume office.

One suggestion of PD Baldeo is to enable one CSO to accept complaints/suggestions of citizens who are afraid to go to the LGU concerned and thus be the one to deliver the feedback, thus protecting the complaining citizen and ensuring that actions be done by the LGU. If not acted upon by the LGU, the CSO can then go to the Civil Service Commission to report the inaction of the concerned local agencies.

Regarding the sufficiency of a complaint desk, DILG shared that they interviewed some health services customers in one LGU if the services were properly and efficiently delivered. The responses were yes and that the services were ok. This process is also a feedback mechanism.

5. In Sorsogon City, other legal bodies were created, such as Housing Board, etc. How can we reactivate these bodies? (CPDO-Sorsogon City)

PD Baldeo suggested to discuss with the Mayor as he is responsible in the conduct of meetings and to reactivate the legal bodies. A CSO does not belong to anyone and thus, has no constraints when it requests to have a meeting with a local executive (Mayor). The reality however is that CSO members find it difficult to attend meetings and connect with LCEs. Sometimes, its members depend on incentives or honoraria before attending meetings. If a CSOs advocacy is strong, it should look for ways to achieve its goal without depending on any incentives to act.

Libby Dometita, IRDF Project Manager, synthesized that there are two (2) sides of the coin: one side is the technical side and the other is the political side of governance. The first one is the focus of PD Baldeo: what is in the law, what are the functions and the responsibilities of the concerned organizations, etc. If the CSOs know this aspect, they can participate more. This is one area where CSOs should be capacitated so that they will fully understand their positions, weaknesses and strengths. The government should also help them understand this. Another side of the coin is the political aspect. Why did Naga City able to institutionalize and not Sorsogon? Because Naga set aside partisan politics, set up mechanisms that downplay "politics" and work according to the required tasks. As we can see, we have policies and legal processes already in-place, but why are CSOs unable to enter the legal arena? Probably, because of the political biases in the area. these are the sides which LGUs and CSOs should look into. If the stakeholders are both willing to improve participatory governance, then both should move towards achieving it. This is the challenge for all the players.

6. Question regarding the Citizen's Watch: will it cover the issues being discussed in this activity? Can it become a feedback mechanism wherein people can share, complain and tell their woes and be answered accordingly?

PD Baldeo explained that DILG is only giving info for now on how CSOs can participate in local governance. Today is an occasion where various areas and provisions of law were briefly discussed for CSOs to know where they can come in and participate. CSOs should be organized, have By-Laws and be accredited so that they can fully participate in the development process, as expected of them. If minimum requirements are complied then the next steps can follow.

7. How important is media participation in this project? Can the media get a copy of the LGUs' annual performance report? If the participation of the CSOs is weak, is DILG accountable in making the LGU do its job? (DZGN-FM, Jing Rey Henderson)

PD Baldeo stressed the importance of media in explaining to the LGUs the programs, advocacy, and the needs of the CSOs as well as the corresponding actions that the LGUs may provide to further improve the lives of its people. The communication officer or media can broadcast this to its listeners.

The result of the LGUs' annual performance survey can be seen at the Local Government Resource Center website. Other materials are also available to help the media come up with factual as well as comprehensive points of discussion.

Regarding DILG's role in governance, it is tasked to ensure that LGUs activate the body and make the LGU commit in its tasks. It is the role of the LCEs to make it operational. DILG gives advice, not supervision over CSOs. We want the citizenry to know what is provided by law so that sectoral groups can move, organize and participate.

8. It is a challenge to the CSOs to convince them to organize and to have By-Laws. Why pursue accreditation if it is already stated in the Local Government Code that CSO participation is a must? (Bigkis – Frank)

PD Baldeo reiterated that CSOs must have an advocacy, should have a written document and be accredited so it can properly and legally participate in local governance. It is a way to introduce to the LGU what they do, what capacities they have, what agenda they push, what contribution they can give and show or even prove certain track record.

ED Glipo of IRDF suggested that there should be a balance in the participation of LGUs, CSOs, and other stakeholders. One major lesson in actively participating is that it encourages ownership of the CSOs because they were part of the process. Another is that there is genuine participation and CSOs were able to articulate their ideas, as compared to a Top-Bottom style of governance. If we can institutionalize a more innovative way that enables the strengths of both processes (Top-Bottom and Bottom-Up), why not do it. DILG can provide information, explain the roles of the CSOs and LGUs, teach the stakeholders of strategic visioning, etc. What changes do we want to see? What are the things we want to change? What is our vision and the different roles that each should take to institute change? These are questions we first have to answer before we can expect improvement in our lives.

9. Wouldn't it be better to adopt the BUB process so that the composition of the committee is varied and sectors are well-represented? During sectoral committee meetings, CSOs were usually asked to sign (attendance) and these were only selected groups. Not all CSOs were represented and invited. The BUB process will remove this and enable all sectors to attend and represent their groups.

PD Baldeo reminded the participants that the composition of the LDC is limited to only one-fourth of the entire Council members and as such, legally speaking, not all CSOs will be represented. However, CSOs can establish a federation wherein they can be represented by elected officers. If the CSOs really want to participate, they have to assert their rights. If we love our community, then we have to assert our rights and participate in the development process with our LGUs.

### III. Presentation and Signing of MOU between DILG and IRDF

IRDF Project Manager, Libby Dometita, expressed her appreciation to the regional/local DILG staff and officers for their presence and support in the undertaking. She then briefly explained the MOU between the DILG and IRDF, emphasizing on their roles and committed support in promoting participatory governance. See attached MOU between the DILG and IRDF (Annex E). She also mentioned that this is good start for another MOU undertaking at the level of LGUs involved.

PD Baldeo clarified that DILG will discuss with IRDF all the programs related to the areas of cooperation. Afterwards, the LGUs will be invited for commitment and support through MOUs.

*IRDF - Executive Director ARZE Glipo and DILG Sorsogon - Provincial Director Ruben E. Baldeo signing the MOU between DILG and IRDF for the Participatory Governance Project*



#### IV. Message of Support and Statement of Commitment by LGUs and CSOs

In behalf of LGU Matnog, Ms. Monette Ubaldo thanked IRDF and DILG for selecting Matnog as one of the focus areas of the program. At the onset, there were indeed small kinks but she hopes that it will all be overcome considering the positive impact of the project to Matnog. She fully appreciates the funding support that will be provided and she encourages the CSOs to assert their rights and have the political will to become a part of the process. We don't rely on our Mayors or LGUs but become self-reliant in the process of participatory governance.

In behalf of LGU Irosin, Ms. Glenda expresses her appreciation to the mayors/LCEs who gave them the free hand to identify and prioritize the programs in 2014.

In behalf of LGU Bulan, Mayor de Castro earlier that day already commits the town to this project.

The Provincial Chairman of Bigkis, Ando, also thanked DILG and IRDF, as well as other participants in this undertaking. He expressed willingness to learn more.

#### V. Closing

PD Baldeo officially closed the event thanking everyone for their active participation.

The launching of the Participatory Governance Project ended at 5:00PM.

*DILG, IRDF, LGUs and CSOs supporting the Participatory Governance Project*



*Fisherfolks, farmers and women sectoral groups*



*CSOs and LGUs together in promoting transparency and accountability through active CSO participation*



*LGU Matnog and local CSOs supporting Partipatory Governance*

