

Making Hay While the Sun Shines: Working with Opportunities and Adapting to Constraints

A Case Study on Universities and
Knowledge Partnerships for Open
Government in the Philippines



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This case story was produced as part of the Learning to Make All Voices Count Program, an initiative supported by Making All Voices Count and implemented in partnership with Global Integrity. For more on L-MAVC, please visit [our website](#).

MAKING ALL
VOICES COUNT

A GRAND CHALLENGE
FOR DEVELOPMENT

About Making All Voices Count

Making All Voices Count is a programme working towards a world in which open, effective and participatory governance is the norm and not the exception. It focuses global attention on creative and cutting-edge solutions to transform the relationship between citizens and their governments. The programme is inspired by and supports the goals of the Open Government Partnership.

Making All Voices Count is supported by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and the Omidyar Network, and is implemented by a consortium consisting of Hivos, IDS and Ushahidi.

Disclaimer: This document has been produced with the financial support of the Omidyar Network, SIDA, UK aid from the UK Government, and USAID. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the official policies of our funders.

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DLSU Jesse M. Robredo Institute of Governance

Setting the scene

The 1991 Philippine Local Government Code mandates local government units to make important financial documents available to the citizens in public places including on bulletin boards and websites¹. However, implementation of this legal provision is mixed at best, with neither sanctions nor incentives for transparency.

When Jesse M. Robredo² became Secretary of the Department of the Interior of Local Government, he pursued the Full Disclosure Policy in a memorandum order³. The Full Disclosure Policy requires all local government units (LGUs) to post financial documents to publicly conspicuous spaces. Compliance with the FDP is one of the requirements for an LGU to receive the Seal of Good Local Governance (SGLG). SGLG awardees become eligible to access performance funds from the national government. FDP compliance is also a requirement for an LGU to access national fund transfer programs such as the Bottom-up Budgeting and Assistance to Disadvantaged Municipalities. This policy became the basis for providing performance challenge grants and later a key government commitment in the Open Government Partnership (OGP)⁴.

¹ The 1991 Local Government Code (LGC) serves as the organic law in the devolution and decentralization of national government power from the national government to local government units (LGUs) – provinces, cities, municipalities and barangay (community-level government). The passage of the LGC is considered as one of the institutional reforms initiated by the Aquino government in the context of the 1986 EDSA People Power Revolution, which restored democracy after the authoritarian regime of Marcos.

² Considered as an “icon of good governance,” the late Secretary Jesse M. Robredo practiced and championed transparency, accountability, innovation and citizen participation in public service delivery. As Mayor of Naga City in the Bicol Region, he introduced reforms such as the development of Citizens’ Charter, which informs citizens about the standards of services provided by the City. He implemented the Full Disclosure Policy (FDP) in Naga City, which disclosed all financial documents of the city government. Also, he allowed for the creation of the Naga City People’s Council, which institutionalized civil society participation in the planning, budgeting, implementation and monitoring of programs of the city. With all of these innovations towards good governance, Robredo was awarded the Magsaysay Award for Government Service (Asia’s Nobel Prize). In 2010, he was appointed by President Benigno Aquino III as Secretary of the DILG. In 2011, he implemented the FDP that required local government units to publicly post all financial documents. He incentivized compliance of local governments to the FDP by providing compliant LGUs access to national performance grants, which can be used for anti-poverty programs at the local level. He died in a plane crash in August 2012.

³ See http://www.dilg.gov.ph/PDF_File/issuances/memo_circulars/DILG-Memo_Circular-2012813-e4d43e5c47.pdf.

⁴ The Philippines is a founding member of the OGP.
<https://www.opengovpartnership.org/countries/philippines>



Nevertheless, transparency has become a supply-driven exercise for local government units. Compliance with the Full Disclosure Policy (FDP) is futile, as publicly disclosed data is not used. The weak uptake of open government data by local stakeholders stems from a lack of awareness, capacity, incentives and citizen knowledge on how to concretize the everyday benefits of open government⁵. One way to improve use of FDP data is to bring in local knowledge stakeholders and develop platforms that can serve as *infomediaries* in translating open government data into knowledge products that local stakeholder can and wish to use.

The model highlights the role of universities as information intermediaries (i.e., *infomediaries*) in supporting citizens and local governments in monitoring public service delivery. The project produced knowledge products that improved capacity of CSOs to monitor LGU services and enhanced the appreciation of LGUs in the use of data for decision-making. In this project, universities are enabled to serve as infomediaries in translating FDP data to useful tools for citizens to participate in local governance. Universities are interested in using open government data to guide research, develop local knowledge, solve local issues and facilitate community engagement. Local governments can use data to improve planning, track performance and report evidence-based achievements to citizens.

In 2016, the Jesse M. Robredo Institute of Governance (JRIG) at De La Salle University was elected as academic representative to the Philippine Open Government Partnership (PH-OGP) National Steering Committee⁶. The inclusion of a university in the Steering Committee emphasized the importance of appointing knowledge institutions to support implementation and monitoring of open government commitments. One of JRIG's priority initiatives as a member of the PH-OGP National Steering Committee is to enable research centers based in regional universities to become knowledge hubs in fostering transparency, accountability and participation at the local level. In particular, JRIG aims to capacitate regional university-based research centers to help local stakeholders in using open local government data.

⁵ The 2013–2015 Independent Reporting Mechanism argued that one of the limitations of the implementation of OGP national commitments is weak concretization at the subnational level. This stems from the lack of capacity, incentives and awareness of citizens to drive demand-side OGP initiatives given that some of the programs have reached the third iteration in the action plan. See Mangahas, Malou, [Independent Reporting Mechanism: The Philippines Progress Report 2013–2015](#) (OGP, 2016).

⁶ See "[OGP National Summit 2016 became avenue for stakeholders to discuss reform and development,](#)" GOVPH website.



Our theory of change

JRIG partnered with three local research centers based in regional universities: the Center for Local Governance (CLG) of Ateneo de Naga University (Bicol Region); the Center for Local Governance and Indigenous People's Studies (CLGIPS) of Central Philippine University (Western Visayas); and the Governance and Leadership Institute (GLI) of Xavier University (Northern Mindanao). We co-organized a series of knowledge activities that sought to enable each of the three academic institutions to serve as knowledge hubs for local stakeholders in promoting open government.

At the outset of the project, JRIG focused on capacitating local CSOs through infomediaries to use social accountability tools that will be collected by the regional universities in the policy context of the Bottom up Budgeting (BuB) program. With the scrapping of BuB, and input from reflection sessions and knowledge workshops with local stakeholders, we adjusted the project's focus to enabling infomediaries, i.e., universities and civil society organizations, to build knowledge hubs in promoting open government in particular using open government data. While regional universities have experience in engaging with the community, they have not established sustainable systems for engagement on open governance. Thus, we enabled them to be knowledge hubs on open government.

The knowledge partnership between JRIG and the regional universities resulted in the production of tools and technologies that facilitate citizen use of open government data. In particular, the project produced the following outputs: online and offline⁷ knowledge portals on open government data and social accountability that can be accessed by citizens; city budget infographics and budget analysis based on publicly disclosed data that can be used by CSOs and local government units to improve local planning and budgeting; and a compendium of local social accountability tools that can be accessed by citizens for capacity development⁸.

Through the knowledge partnership, research centers in the regional universities gained knowledge and skills on using information, particularly publicly disclosed open government data. The initiative also contributed to

⁷ In our knowledge workshops, CSOs and university faculty members reiterated that online activities should be complimented with offline activities. Workshop participants emphasized that aside from an online portal, the universities acting as infomediaries, i.e., an offline portal, can facilitate face-to-face dialogue, policy forums, workshops and other knowledge activities among local stakeholders on open government and other local development issues. According to one participant at the Iloilo City knowledge workshop, "The university is the neutral and fertile ground for insightful discussions towards problem solving."

⁸ See JRIG [Knowledge Hub for Open Government](#) website; [Transparency and Accountability Portal](#), Ateneo de Naga University; [City Budget Analysis](#) and [CSO Knowledge Portal of the Center for Local Governance and Indigenous People](#), Central Philippine University; [Cagayan de Oro CSO Knowledge Portal](#), Xavier University.



the development of new local knowledge partnerships between regional universities, civil society organizations and local government units. For example, the newly established City Poverty Reduction Action Team and Local CSO Office of Cagayan de Oro City will partner with Xavier University to utilize the knowledge portal developed by GLI⁹. In Iloilo, CLGIPS will sign a memorandum of agreement with a regional CSO network to help the latter in analyzing the city and provincial government budget on disaster risk reduction and management. The City Government of Iloilo City has also expressed an interest in working with CLGIPS on producing infographics to guide the city's traffic management policies. Moreover, the CLG is partnering with a regional CSO network to work on capacity development activities for local CSOs in poor municipalities.



Image 1: Local CSO Networks in Naga City and Bicol discuss how they will use the city budget infographics developed by the Center for Local Governance of Ateneo de Naga University.

⁹ The Cagayan de Oro City government has recently established a Local CSO Office or the City Poverty Reduction Action Team (CPRAT). The CPRAT will coordinate programs and projects for local CSOs in community governments. The CPRAT representatives through the GLI have expressed a strong interest in using the portal developed by the MAVC project. The portal will serve as a knowledge repository of tools and information to ensure the transparency and performance of the CPRAT since the office will be operating using city tax payer's money. The portal will contain information about CSO and community project funded by the government; CSO Directory; CSO social accountability tools; meetings of CPRAT meetings; and relevant infographics. Given the demand from the CPRAT, the GLI is committed to continue its partnership with JRIG to support the knowledge needs of the local CSO office.



Practicing adaption in context

Initially, our project sought to enable regional universities in capacitating local CSOs in monitoring projects of the Bottom-up Budgeting (BuB) program, a crucial participatory space for CSOs to engage local governments in the planning and budgeting of national government funds for finance poverty reduction programs. However, during the project, the Department of Budget and Management of the newly elected Rodrigo Duterte administration discontinued the implementation of the Bottom-up Budgeting (BuB) program¹⁰.

To adapt to the change in the policy landscape, JRIG held consultations with local university partners and the OGP National Non-Government Steering Committee. In addition, local university partners held knowledge workshops with CSOs and local government units to determine how to proceed. Based on the recommendations of these workshops, it was decided that the universities working as infomediaries would focus on developing products that would enable CSOs and local citizens to better understand the city budget, using the publicly disclosed data stipulated in the Full Disclosure Policy¹¹.

Another critical point of adaptive learning during the project was our recognition of the need to develop an offline knowledge portal in the form of knowledge activities such as dialogues and policy forum for CSOs, local government units (LGUs) and other stakeholders, and to institutionalize partnerships between the universities and local stakeholders (including CSOs) to engage in particular local governance and open government initiatives.

In the knowledge workshops, participants strongly reiterated that the role of the university as infomediary: to serve as a neutral venue for insightful and high-level policy dialogue. Local stakeholders requested that the infomediaries organize offline activities, such as policy forums, workshops, consultations and dialogues. Offline activities also included trainings for CSOs on how to use available tools and technologies to monitor government actions with respect to local priorities, and included insights from case studies in other regions. Based on the lessons that emerged in initial workshops, JRIG adapted its approach, designing each local knowledge session with speakers coming from local governments, national

¹⁰ See [“Duterte administration drops participatory budgeting program of Aquino government,”](#) *Business Mirror*, 5 October 2016.

¹¹ See [JRIG Adaptive Learning Journey](#) document.



government agencies and regional CSO networks to discuss specific local policy issues on open government and social accountability tools¹².



Image 2: In the local knowledge workshop in Iloilo facilitated by the Center for Local Governance and Indigenous People's Studies of Central Philippine University, local CSOs and universities used adaptive learning on how to track the next steps to continue collaborative work on open government particularly on using the budget infographics¹³. As a result of the project, local CSOs in Iloilo and the CLGIPs will sign a memorandum of agreement on open government initiatives.

¹² See [JRIG Knowledge Hub for Open Government website](#); [Transparency and Accountability Portal](#), Ateneo de Naga University; [City Budget Analysis](#) and [CSO Knowledge Portal](#) of the Center for Local Governance and Indigenous People, Central Philippine University; [Cagayan de Oro CSO Knowledge Portal](#), Xavier University. In Iloilo they discussed the City Anti-Poverty Programs and City Plans and Programs of the current fiscal year: Iloilo Program.docx. For Cagayan de Oro, CSOs were interested in the formation of the City People's Council and its role in the City Poverty Reduction Action Team: CDO Program.pdf. In these knowledge activities, LGUs, mayors, regional heads of the department of the interior and local government were invited to dialogue with CSOs on key policy issues.

¹³ Additional information on the action planning workshop including the City Government and CSOs inputs on using the City Budget Infographics can be found in the documents available in the annex to this [record](#).



Image 3: Dr. Kiko Magno of JRIG interacts with Cagayan de Oro City (CDO) CSOs about Open Government Partnership and adaptive learning. The CDO Local CSO Office of the City Government shall use the knowledge portal as their official website and learning tool¹⁴. The portal was developed through the project by the Governance and Leadership Institute of Xavier University.

Our thoughts on the adaptive learning approach

JRIG approached adaptive learning in the project implementation by viewing the regional university partners as co-learners. Learning is a collective action that requires sharing, reflection and collaboration, whereas adaptive learning entails dialogue and understanding of interests, institutions and identity. As such adaptive learning cannot happen in a vacuum; it requires the participation of key stakeholders taking into account that governance is an ecosystem of nested actors. Thus, a platform for communication and levelling-off is critical. Regional university partners and JRIG implemented knowledge workshops and reflection sessions¹⁵. The knowledge activities were fruitful in bringing knowledge institutions together to develop action plans to sustain the gains of the project¹⁶. At the local level, the regional universities implemented reflection activities that involved

¹⁴ The CPRAT or Local CSO Office of Cagayan de Oro has expressed support through GLI that they will be using the portal developed by the project.

¹⁵ See [an account of our workshop in Bicol](#)

¹⁶ "[XU-GLI, DLSU establish local knowledge hub for CSOs, open gov't](#)," Xavier University, 23 May 2017; "[CPU CLGIPS and KDC with DLSU-JRIG hold Local Knowledge Workshop](#)," Central Philippine University, 9 June 2017.



stakeholders from civil society and government on how to move forward with the production of knowledge outputs¹⁷. Lastly, adaptive learning provided a room for project implementers to innovate and be resourceful in project implementation.

JRIG appreciated the contribution of the learning community with regard to providing space for project implementers to engage in a knowledge dialogue. The most important lesson for JRIG was that learning is a community enterprise where experience and insights become more valuable if they are documented, reflected-upon and, most importantly, shared with other stakeholders. JRIG intends to integrate adaptive learning approaches in the implementation of future programs and projects particularly on issues that demand multi-stakeholder perspectives.



Image 4: JRIG and CLG conducted an adaptive learning reflection on project outputs and sustainability. Dr. Kiko Magno, Ian Hecita, Dr. Malu Barcillano and Jay Abawag participated in the session.

¹⁷ As a result of the knowledge workshops and reflection sessions, CLG has committed to continue its partnership with JRIG working on open government. The portal developed by CLG will be used by the Bicol CODE – a Regional CSO Network seated in the new OGP Steering Committee – for their knowledge needs including dissemination of OGP information to local stakeholders, development of budget infographics analyzing the budget of lower income municipalities, and strengthening of local CSOs outside Naga City.



Image 5: Local CSOs in Iloilo used adaptive learning to plan for activities in the partnership with CLGIPS.

The future

Regional knowledge hubs driven by local governance centers located in three regional universities are now equipped to provide a constant supply of analytical studies of open data provided by subnational governments. The policy notes, briefing papers and infographics produced by academic institutions can be used by civil society organizations in voicing the demands of citizens as they participate in open governance spaces, including local development councils, local special bodies and regional development councils. Since these knowledge products are uploaded to open information portals, local officials can also use them for their policy work¹⁸. Aside from online websites, face-to-face knowledge forums organized by the universities with government, civil society and other stakeholders will enhance mutual learning and foster democratic deliberations to generate content and deepen discourse on local planning, budgeting and performance monitoring to contribute in making all voices count.

In each of the second series of workshops, a sustainability action planning workshop was organized to identify how local partners and stakeholders

¹⁸ *Universities and Knowledge Partnerships for Open Government – Transparency and Accountability Portal* (Ateneo de Naga University, 2017).



could sustain the positive gains of the project beyond the end of the Making All Voices Count (MAVC) program. The stakeholders identified critical steps such as forging of memoranda of agreement between regional universities and CSO networks to conduct budget analyses (Iloilo); uptake of city government offices to support knowledge needs on planning and budgeting (Cagayan de Oro); and partner with regional CSO networks to support localization of OGP (Naga City).

Remaining questions

With the landscape of development work that still largely operating in a neoliberal framework and ‘rational’ approaches premised on effectiveness/efficiency indicators, we raise some theoretical and empirical questions, which need to be addressed in order to fully understand adaptive learning, as follows:

- What kinds of institutions, programs and projects can “adopt/adapt” to adaptive learning?
- Given the resource constraints, what kinds of incentives are needed to promote adaptive learning as a tool that can be integrated in the processes of development organizations including funders and development agencies?
- Why and how can adaptive learning be utilized as a tool to amplify the voices of the vulnerable, the weak, the poor and those in the periphery as beneficiaries of and partners in development?
- JRIG believes that our experience with the adaptive learning journey—the international learning community and project implementation—produced important insights and evidence that are worth documenting and publicizing. This documentation of the adaptive learning journey can immensely contribute to problematizing the role of learning in development. How can we best document and publicize our journey?