

Cambodia Talk

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When I took over in 1998 as Mayor of the Municipality of San Isidro, I was confronted with a great divide –POVERTY. San Isidros' inhabitant is mostly farmers and in a state of poverty and a municipality that was in CRISIS. My first strategy was to make the government responsive and be accountable to the people by having a FUNCTIONING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION that has the capacity to respond to citizens' demand.

My development strategy is a BOTTOM – UP GOVERNANCE

We professionalized bureaucracy thru RE-ORGANIZATION and set up systems designed for every department to deliver services efficiently - A client friendly municipality with capable employees, office equipments needed to be able to finish transaction same day or maximum of three days, Flow Charts of transaction processes displayed are simple & understandable to the public, there are comfortable places for them to sit while waiting with accessible drinking water and clean toilets, a reception desk to guide them to where they should go. To measure our efficiency, we use performance evaluation system for employees and yearly accomplishment report for every department. This gave us annual savings that we were able to use for social services programs and benefits and incentives for the employees provided by the civil service law.

Our Road Map to Participation

1. Listening & Responding to the people

Through the restructuring, we became efficient with a lean organization, but we also realized that we needed to be effective. We

asked ourselves, “Do we really answer the key issues in the town.” We ran dialogues per barangay in order to illicit the problems of the people. And in many ways, we found that participation starts here.

SLIDE - INTEGRATION OF SOCIAL- ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT - We engaged a group consisting of heads from the multi-sectoral groups and government agencies and worked together to find solutions that will increase the harvest of the farmers and build the capacity of the farm families to manage and sustain the programs. This included planning, budgeting, and assignment of responsibilities and finally signing of a memorandum of agreement that stipulates the terms and conditions agreed upon.

The series of consultations and trust building dialogues with the farmers, community leaders and civil society on the ground resulted to our findings those problems confronting both farm & non-farm families, were interrelated. Hence, development programs must be integrated and holistic to deal with problems in all aspects of people’s lives. Our INTEGRATION OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROGRAMS were finalized & manualized to have a strategic direction as well as a basis to move forward in improving the quality of life of the people through the delivery of basic services and employment of opportunities.

2. Building Integrity – creating a shared vision

Unfortunately, the need doesn’t end. We have realized that being good does not just mean providing the basic services. We saw that we need to get the community involved in solving the problems. We need to increase people’s participation in order to nurture understanding.

As we continuously make efforts to integrate the community needs, we saw the need to augment the barangay council and support the governance thru a coalition of empowered people and program implementers.

SLIDE - CCSI – Informing the citizens' of their rights and responsibilities, engaging their interest and mobilizing them is critical to achieve our goals. The Critical Coalition of San Isidro, a coalition of multi-sectoral leaders, was created to advocate programs and engaged the grass roots using a process where stakeholders will CO-OWN the issue and CO-CREATE a new arrangement that will lead to empowered citizenry and responsive institutions. This was done thru series of trust building dialogues until a common response and a SHARE VISSION AND MISSION are achieved.

3. Understanding our roles when we participate

Our Health program as an example - There are certain programs that we could not have done well without the people's participation. The Health development program, for example is known, in our country to be riddled with so many problems. Most of the RHU are not functional and regional health centers are often overrun with patients that service is so poor. In the Philippines, health is devolved which means that services and functions are assigned to elected bodies with some degree of autonomy. This RHU can barely keep a good MEDICAL STAFF and stock of medicines.

Nevertheless, our limited budget did not stop us from finding ways to create new arrangements to protect the rights of people to be healthy. Participation & Collaboration resulted to social innovations that enabled us to allocate 16.21% of the municipal budget to HEALTH to sustain the BARANGAY BASED HEALTH CARE SYSTEM and maintain a CLIENT CENTERED CLINIC. 64.44% comes from Municipal Budget and

35.56% comes from national government and the voluntary co-sharing of P200/yr/family. The voluntary share is the community's response to sustain the health program.

In order to reduce poverty and achieve social inclusion, health insurance coverage must be extended to the sectors that do not benefit from formal social security protection. We, the local government, unit are accountable to provide socialized health insurance. We were able to enrol 9000 families by allocating subsidy for the premium payment of our socialized health insurance program (PHILHEALTH sa MASA). This program is being implemented on the ground by 108 women from the grass roots who were trained to implement programs effectively. One of their marketing strategies is a BOOKLET indicating the services offered by the Clinic and the utilization of their benefits. Families are taught how to enjoy the privileges offered by the program. The health program was institutionalized thru a council resolution making the insurance subsidy a permanent item in the municipal budget.

4. Sustaining the gains in participation

As we move to integrate our efforts in pushing for better governance, we cannot help but ask ourselves, HOW DO WE SUSTAIN THE GAIN? How do we carry this to the future and further institutionalize this and deepen the memory we create. When we dwell in these questions, we touch on education. I do not know much about education, but when we saw the state of the national education and the local education system, we were shocked. Student achievement scores were far below passing levels and the dropout rates were increasing because farmers were using their children in the fields. We sought help. Within a few years, we saw ourselves being the top in different categories in the school division and region. But what I would like to share and emphasize to you is the opportunity we saw in the education development. We found that the local public schools are an EXCELLENT

VENUE to galvanize community participation. By increasing the capacity of the teachers and principals, we hope to also strengthen the values of the community in the schools their children belong to.

Ateneo School of Government taught us the importance of good governance & ethical leadership while Ateneo Center for Educational Development taught us to have a functioning school board to meet our goals.

5. Nurturing participation - nurturing future leaders

In order to nurture participation, we need to let people discover themselves and find their greatness...discovers their value and where they can become a blessing to others. We engaged a community development organization that helped us put up houses for the poorest of our community... those that were hit by the storm and lost their homes. Every weekend students from the 3 local colleges trooped to the GAWAD KALINGA sites to build houses and lend their hand to the poor. After they do, we facilitated reflection sessions. By the time the houses are being turned over to the owners, we let these students become witness to their handiwork and the experience springs a life of its own.

Transition: This is how we integrate participation while we deliver the basic services. This is the cyclical and repeatative process we take in nurturing participation. Imagine if we start doing this in all the things we do as the local government leaders in our towns. This is where we are now.....

WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES OF OUR COLLABORATIVE EFFORT

VMOKRAPI – as the score card of the community. The performance indicators and key result areas of the farmers harvest, health

improvement, education achievement scores, shelter, CSO participation and the sustaining mechanism adopted is a way for us to see if we are meeting our targets.

SUSTAINABILITY – Creating sustaining mechanism is important to achieve development goals. This is done thru institutionalization, program documentations and manualization.

INCREASE in farmers' income; Increase in tax collection and Increase in revenue collection

CITIZENS' EMPOWERMENT - increased sectoral group participation

BETTER ELECTORAL BEHAVIOR - Peoples' participation brought understanding which facilitated trust in governance and the peoples trust translated to better electoral behavior. Last election I decided to campaign without poster, no excessive spending and no dirty tricks. I won the highest margin recorded in the history of San Isidro. In the end the people elected us because they wanted to continue the kind of governance that is PARTICIPATORY, TRANSPARENT & PEOPLE OWNED

Summary & Ending, Slide:

I think when we seek ways to nurture participation, we inadvertently narrow the gap that usually bridges governance and citizenship. I call this.... "a love affair between a good leader and her people - a romantic relationship" If we keep listening to the community and we stay faithful to their needs, we slowly integrate these needs in our plans and slowly create transparency. And as we build our shared vision in the community, we start owning the problems as well as the successes. I always tell my coworkers... Own their needs, when you do, you own their joy as well." This is how we build social accountability in our small

town. When we let people understand each others problems, we slowly enable people to help each other and solve these problems as well. I think social accountability is not merely exacting but understanding... Enabling each other to understand and fill the gaps. If we can somehow do this repeatatively and let our children inherit this, we create the memory that the future will cherish and benefit from. And we have started this in small steps, but we still have a long way to go. So we do this in each and every program we initiate... Little by little - like a mother, patiently nurturing the values she means her children to keep.

To end, Let me show you a video. I am reminded of what Mother Teresa of Culcutta said once,

"There is only one God and He is the God to all; therefore it is important that everyone is seen as equal before God. I've always said we should help a Hindu become a better Hindu, a Muslim become a better Muslim, a Christian become a better Christian." ...and in your case here in Cambodia, a budhist be a better budhist.

Our country is predominantly Christain and in town of San Isidro, the province of Nueva Ecija, the Philippines... This is how we make our faith come alive.

Video: St. Ignatius Library (w English subtiles)