



DATASHIFT



CCAGG CONCERNED CITIZENS OF ABRA FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE

CASE STUDY

INITIATIVE NAME:
CONCERNED CITIZENS
OF ABRA FOR GOOD
GOVERNANCE (CCAGG)

ONLINE PRESENCE:
[HTTP://CCAGG.ORG](http://ccagg.org)

GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE:
ABRA, PHILIPPINES

Photos taken from
<http://ccagg.org>

A local grassroots organization in the Philippines, **CONCERNED CITIZENS FOR ABRA FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE (CONCERNED CITIZENS)**, monitors the completion and quality of public infrastructure projects in the province of Abra. The citizens of the province who volunteer to monitor these projects receive training from Concerned Citizens' team of engineers, learning how to generate data themselves. **Over the past 20 years, the organization has successfully monitored more than 600 infrastructure projects valued at 7 million USD in total**, including roads, school buildings, irrigation systems and bridges.

BACKGROUND

The poverty incidence in the 7,100 island archipelago of that makes up the Philippines is currently at 25.8%, meaning one in four families lives in poverty.¹ The province of Abra is one of the largest and poorest.² Without paved roads or basic infrastructure, many citizens have no access to hospitals or schools. Moreover, the country has a history of politically motivated violence, causing instability and corruption.

The Government of the Philippines has found it difficult to follow through on its development projects in Abra. In 1986, President Corazon Aquino sought to improve this by creating the **COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM (CEDP)**, a one-year initiative that dramatically changed the way government managed its rural public works program.³ The program empowered communities to monitor progress and the quality of construction of infrastructure projects to ensure that government agencies used funds as intended.

THE STORY: CONCERNED CITIZENS

In the context of the CEDP, a group of two-dozen teachers and community organizers got together and formed Concerned Citizens for Abra for Good Government (Concerned Citizens). Their objective was to ensure that the public officials and contractors effectively carried out the development of public works projects by acting as a monitoring group.

They monitored public infrastructure projects, starting with road construction, working closely with the national planning and development agency, National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) and the Ministry of Budget and Management (MBM).⁴ The chart below maps out the knowledge and tools that government, through NEDA and MBM, provided the implementing civil society organizations, such as Concerned Citizens.

1 "Philippines in Figures 2015." Report on Census Data. Republic of the Philippines: Philippines Statistics Authority, 2015. <https://psa.gov.ph/sites/default/files/2015%20PIF.pdf>

2 Ibid.

3 Rushda Majeed, "Power at the Grassroots: Monitoring Public Works in Abra, Philippines, 1986–1990." in *Innovations for Successful Societies*, Princeton University, February 2013, accessed September 28, 2015, http://successfultsocieties.princeton.edu/sites/successfultsocieties/files/Policy_Note_ID231.pdf

4 Majeed, op cit.

GOVERNMENT PROVIDED CSOS WITH

- A list of local projects and their locations
- Information about the implementing agencies of the projects
- Statements of project costs and schedule for the release of funds
- General and technical training
- Open channels of communication with organizations during process

CSOS WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR

- Documenting the project's progress and reporting back to NEDA and local implementing agencies
- Documenting the number of local citizens employed at the project site, the number of days they worked and the income they received
- Providing recommendations for resolving any irregularities

During this year-long CEPD program, “[public works] contractors were to be paid only after [civil society] monitors confirmed completion of various stages of work”.⁵ Working with the support of the government, Concerned Citizens successfully identified 20 incomplete projects.⁶

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AND EMPOWERMENT

Concerned Citizens organised themselves into committees: organisation and mobilisation, programs, logistics, education, research and documentation, legal, and media. They informed the Abra community about the new government projects to be implemented, discussed monitoring activities, and reported findings at town hall meetings, local radio stations and through print media. The people of Abra were very surprised to know that such so much money had been invested in their province. During researcher Rushda Majeed’s interviews with community members, they exclaimed “ We had been shortchanged. People in the government kept us ignorant so that they could do what they wanted.”

TRAINING, MONITORING AND DATA COLLECTION

The monitoring and data collection was a collective effort between the passionate citizens of Abra and engineering team at Concerned Citizens. These engineers trained volunteers to monitor roads and infrastructure projects, providing detailed guidance

5 Ibid.

6 More about projects in “Power at the Grassroots: Monitoring Public Works in Abra, Philippines.”

to monitor their project.⁷ To make the monitoring process easier for the volunteers, the engineers developed a layman’s version of their own monitoring manual, for non-technical readers. The citizen monitors used the manual to fill out Concerned Citizens forms, which were later supplemented by the engineers.

Even with the support of the engineers, the teams encountered many roadblocks. Finding out a project’s specifications was often challenging. For example, the local district office “would not give us the program of works even if the national development agency instructed them to. There were government officials who were angry with us and said we were meddlers and faultfinders. They could not stand the thought of monitors who were not engineers looking over their shoulders.⁸” In some cases, volunteers were often harassed or offered bribes at project sites “We had death threats for breakfast,” recalled founding member Madriaga.

THE EVOLUTION OF CONCERNED CITIZENS

In 1988, Concerned Citizens registered as an independent nonprofit organization, institutionalizing and consolidating after its initial success in 1987 with CEDP. Today, their mission has evolved to “establish a self-reliant community of a politically mature and economically emancipated citizenry who will work for good governance.” Their project funding comes from organizations such as the UNDP, the British Council, the World Bank, the Partnership for Transparency Fund, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and the Asian Development Bank.

Unfortunately, following the end of CEPD, some elements of the program, specifically government support and involvement, dissolved over time. Come mid-1990s onwards, local officials no longer waited for Concerned Citizens’ monitoring report before paying contractors. For its part, the department could not delay payment as it waited for progress reports. It is the view of Concerned Citizens members that the government could have done more to enable their work.

7 These training sessions were spread over a period of several weeks. The first session, sharing positive and negative experiences and the legal bases of conducting monitoring. The second session, learning the technical aspects of monitoring infrastructure projects. The third session, hands-on training at available infrastructure projects in the area.

8 Rushda Majeed, “Power at the Grassroots: Monitoring Public Works in Abra, Philippines, 1986–1990.” in *Innovations for Successful Societies*, Princeton University, February 2013, accessed September 28, 2015, http://successfulsocieties.princeton.edu/sites/successfulsocieties/files/Policy_Note_ID231.pdf

MEASURING IMPACT

Over the last two decades of monitoring, public infrastructure “ghost” projects, the use of substandard materials in construction, deviation from technical specifications, budget overruns and other project implementation anomalies have been unearthed and reported to higher authorities by Concerned Citizens.⁹ Many of Concerned Citizens’ monitoring activities have had high profile successes. Due to the work of Concerned Citizens, there have been cases where public officials have been prosecuted, sanctioned and dismissed from service because of the anomalies committed by them. The group’s monitoring activity exposed technical flaws in a number of projects, such as a faulty irrigation system in the remote Tubo municipality and missing gravel in the national Abra-Kalinga road that linked the two provinces. In 1996, monitors reported that the Sinalang Detour Bridge, which had cost P8.26 million (US\$300,000), was of poor quality. The Concerned Citizens report and subsequent Commission on Audit investigations led to the commission’s recommending prosecution of a number of public works and highway officials.¹⁰

In Abra, Concerned Citizens volunteers monitored more than 600 infrastructure projects worth P300 million (US\$7 million) from 1987 to 2006.¹¹ The projects included 100 CEDP projects in 1987 and 145 barangay, 29 municipal, 46 provincial and 17 national roads in subsequent years. Volunteers also inspected 149 school buildings, 123 deep wells, 42 flood control projects, and 19 bridges.¹²

Beyond the numbers, the organisation’s advocacy work helped broker a change in citizen norms and behavior. Founding member Baltar recalls that “earlier, people would accept whatever they got, but we taught them to ask questions and engage officials. It was their right because public money had to be guarded, monitored, and accounted for. We demanded accountability from our officials.”¹³

They also shared their knowledge and experience with other organizations looking to similarly monitor their province’s projects [i].

9 Organizational profile of Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government (CCAGG) on the International Budget Partnership’s website:

<http://internationalbudget.org/groups/concerned-citizens-of-abra-for-good-government-ccagg>

10 Karen Sirker and Sladjana Cosic, “Empowering the Marginalized: Case Studies of Social Accountability Initiatives in Asia,” World Bank Institute, 2007, 48.

11 Luz Rimban, “Helping Communities by Monitoring Infrastructure: A Case Study of the CCAGG in the Philippines,” Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government, 2012.

12 Ibid.

13 Majeed, op. cit.



For example, the Northern Luzon Coalition for Good Governance -a coalition of 30 mostly parish-based groups from Abra and two other northern provinces- sought out the help and training of Concerned Citizens. Then in 2006, the organization collaborated with the Transparency and Accountability Network -a coalition of 24 organizations- to lead Road Watch, a national construction monitoring project. Along with other partners, Concerned Citizens trained about a hundred volunteers to monitor roads in different regions. By 2007, the organization had representatives or partners in 15 provinces. In 2010, it trained 35 monitors to oversee infrastructure projects in Bicol, a remote southern region on the country's main island of Luzon.

CHALLENGES

Although the organisation's work helped improve service delivery, members and observers of Concerned Citizens' work debate whether it has brought about long-term structural changes in the province. By itself, citizen monitoring is no panacea. As of 2012, 75% of national and provincial roads in Abra remained unpaved.

As was the case in 1987, when the government supported CEDP, the government needs to put in place systems to enable Concerned Citizens to feed their findings into government monitoring and accountability efforts. The organisation and its citizen volunteers recognize that "even if we are driven, we can do only so much without these structures for intervention within the government."¹⁴

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Endnotes

[1] The group partnered with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the Department of Education, the Enhancing Public Accountability Program of the Philippine Commission on Audit, Department of Agrarian Reforms. They also worked with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)- funded audit involved 23 road projects of the Department of Public Works and Highways and community projects of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. In 2003, Concerned Citizens worked with the National Anti-Poverty Commission to monitor local poverty-reduction projects. In addition to those activities, the group monitored elections every four years as a NAMFREL chapter and led programs on voter education.



DataShift is a multi-stakeholder, demand-driven initiative that builds the capacity and confidence of civil society to produce and use citizen-generated data to monitor sustainable development progress, demand accountability and campaign for transformative change. Ultimately, our vision is a world where people-powered accountability drives progress on sustainable development.

DataShift is an initiative of **CIVICUS**, in partnership with **the engine room** and **Wingu**. For more information, visit www.thedatashift.org or contact datashift@civicus.org.

