

# The Extent of Civil Society Participation in Local Governance in Iligan City, 2004-2007

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## Abstract

This paper verifies the extent of civil society organizations' participation in local governance. Specifically, it aims to examine their attributes; investigate the extent of their participation in political and administrative governance; explore the significant difference in the extent of their participation when grouped according to their attributes; delve into the best practices; and identify the problems that they experienced while participating in local governance.

This paper employed a triangulation of methods of data gathering: a survey; one-on-one in-depth interview; and focus group discussion (FGD). Secondary data, particularly on the mechanics of accrediting CSOs, were obtained from the Department of Interior and Local Government and *Sangguniang Panlungsod*. There was a total of 32 survey respondents, ten (10) key informants and 20 FGD participants constituting the data sources of this research.

The findings show that the CSOs are legitimate and functional. The extent of their participation in planning socio-economic projects, peace, order, and public safety and in advertising bids is limited; while the extent of their participation is nil in planning and recommending changes in the names of public schools and in creating committees to advise local health agencies on health matters.

*Keywords:* democracy, civil society, local governance, basic services

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## Introduction

Nations worldwide are beset with a broad array of new challenges brought about by globalization, deepening interdependence, consumerism, the commoditization of knowledge, and the end of the cold war. Concomitantly, these phenomena have resulted in domestic socio-political changes which promote the development of civil society organizations and their active participation in domestic and international arena (Yamamoto and Ashizawa, 2001 and World Bank, 2007).

In the Philippines, the participation of civil society in governance became significant after the EDSA I Revolution which happened in 1986. From then on, civil society organizations had found their way in the arena of local governance by virtue of the mandate of the 1987 Constitution of the Philippines (De Leon, 2002), Republic Act (R.A.) 7160, otherwise known as the Local Government Code of 1991, and Rules and Regulations Implementing the Local Government Code, particularly, Article 62, Rule X111. These legal instruments increase citizen participation and empower them to be more open, innovative and creative in the pursuit of local autonomy, thus promoting participatory local governance.

Civil society engagement in local governance serves to strengthen local capacities to influence government policies and shift the allocation of public resources to people-identified priority projects, such as delivery of social services and implementation of development programs.

Conventionally formal structures and processes perform this state function of delivering social services. However, according to Brillantes (2000), scarcity of resources (both human and financial), cumbersome bureaucratic system, and graft and corruption, coupled with corresponding increases in societal demands render the state inefficient in delivering public goods. Thus, the involvement of civil society is paramount in order to fill the gap in this state function.

The Local Government Code provides formal and informal venues and various mechanisms for citizens' participation. These mechanisms are viewed as important "windows for engagement" in public decision-making for civil society organizations. The formal venues allow them

direct participation in the local legislative body (as sectoral representatives) and in the local special bodies. The Code also opens mechanisms and processes for participation like mandatory consultations, public hearings and active partnerships.

In Iligan City, prior to the implementation of the Code, civil society organizations (sometimes referred to as cause-oriented groups or pressure/ interest groups/militant groups) were viewed as mere watchdogs or fiscalizers of the local government. But the Code has reformulated the role of civil society organizations to shift from being fiscalizers to active partners in the development process. The CSOs also complement government officials especially in areas where the local government is weak particularly in policy implementation or basic service delivery due to certain constraints such as inadequacy of funds, technology and expertise.

### Research Objectives

This study attempts to determine the extent of civil society participation in local governance in Iligan City, considering their participation in the local special bodies and in the delivery of basic services and projects.

More specifically, this study has the following objectives:

1. To determine the attributes of accredited civil society organizations (CSOs) that participate in local governance in Iligan City in terms of the following:
  - 1.1 Mandates/Thrusts
  - 1.2 Ideological Orientation
  - 1.3 Length of Operation in Iligan City
  - 1.4 Funding Sources
  - 1.5 Networks and Linkages
  - 1.6 Functionality
    - 1.6.1 Financial Status
    - 1.6.2 Office Equipment Status
    - 1.6.3 Office Accommodation
    - 1.6.4 Organizational Structure Status

- 1.6.5 Performance
- 1.6.6 Number of Trainings
- 1.6.7 Number of Reports
- 1.6.8 Frequency of Meetings
- 1.6.9 Frequency of Assemblies

2. To find out the extent of the CSOs' participation in local governance particularly in:

2.1 Political Governance

- 2.1.1 Formulation of Policies and Plans
- 2.1.2 Identification and Prioritization of Projects
- 2.1.3 Budgeting
- 2.1.4 Evaluation and Monitoring of Projects
- 2.1.5 Investigation and Adjudication of Cases

2.2 Administrative Governance (Basic Services Delivery)

- 2.2.1 Livelihood
- 2.2.2 Housing and Resettlement
- 2.2.3 Education
- 2.2.4 Health
- 2.2.5 Peace and Order (Conflict Resolution or Management)

3. To establish if there is a significant difference in the extent of their participation in political governance when CSOs are grouped according to the following organizational attributes:

- 3.1 Mandates/Thrusts
- 3.2 Ideological Orientation
- 3.3 Length of Existence in Iligan City
- 3.4 Funding Sources
- 3.5 Networks and Linkages
- 3.6 Functionality

3.6.1 Financial Status

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- 3.6.8 Frequency of Meetings
- 3.6.9 Frequency of Assemblies, and

4. To explore the best practices and problems experienced by civil society organizations that participate in local governance.

### Significance of the Study

This study is beneficial to the following:

#### **The Chief Executive and Members of the *Sangguniang Panlungsod* of Iligan City**

The results of the study provide insights and ideas on the role of civil society organizations in achieving societal transformation. It is premised on the recognition that in a democratic polity, governance is not an exclusive jurisdiction of the state. The multi-faceted concerns of the local government, coupled with scarcity of the country's resources may render the government inadequate in providing the basic goods and services to its constituents. Owing to these constraints, the best approach in achieving the agenda of the government rests in its collaboration and linkage with civil society and with the private sector.

In addition, it would encourage local government units to allow the participation of civil society organizations in the democratization process, thus making government programs more responsive to the felt-needs of the people particularly at the grassroots level who are mostly deprived in terms of access to basic social services due to the constraints mentioned above. This research therefore provides inspiration/motivation to other

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LGUs to intensify the political engagement of the different stakeholders beyond advocacy since this is the very essence of participatory democracy.

Moreover, this research offers solutions to possible gaps in state function with the participation of civil society organizations and the private sector in the realm of governance.

### **The Civil Society Organizations**

The emergence of civil society organizations in the Philippines is part of the social transformation as a result of the restoration of democracy in 1986. Many NGOs have been tagged as ideologically-oriented groups and viewed as oppositional, cynical, critical, and fiscalizers. The results of this shall study help eradicate doubts and the conservative outlook regarding the role of civil society in development, particularly in providing alternative mechanisms in the delivery of basic services.

### **The People in Iligan City**

This study would inspire them to become active partners in the development endeavors and not just passive beneficiaries of projects and services.

### **The Academe**

The results of this undertaking provide additional inputs to the growing body of knowledge pertinent to the concepts of civil society and participatory governance that are important ingredients of democracy.

### **Research Setting**

This research was undertaken in Iligan City. This city was created on June 16, 1953, by virtue of R. A. 525, otherwise known as the Charter Creating the City of Iligan. Majority of Iligan City's population come from the Visayas and some are immigrants from other places in Mindanao. Iligan is literally and geographically located at the crossroads of rich cultures – the Maranaos of Lanao del Sur, Higa-onons of Bukidnon, and the dominantly Christian settlers and migrants.

Iligan City has a total population of 308,046. Poverty is one of the major issues most especially in the hinterland barangays and some depressed urban areas, particularly barangays Dalipuga, Santiago, Saray, and Tambacan, and Saray. Poverty incidence in Lanao del Norte, which includes Iligan City, is 54.0%. It is believed that there are 60,388 or 54.64% families whose annual per capita income falls below the per capita poverty threshold in the national level (Bait-it and Paculba, 2007). The number of employed individuals is 204,000 but the unemployment rate is 17.22% with a dependency ratio of 65.17 dependents per 100 workers. In the field of education, from SY 1999-00 to SY 2006-07, the drop-out rate (public and private elementary schools combined) is 2.68%, while in the secondary level, the drop-out rate (public and private schools combined) is 13.68% (Iligan City Statistical Yearbook, 2007).

In terms of peace and order, Iligan City being at the hub of the community of so-called tri-people (Christian settlers, Higaonons, and Muslims), has experienced some peace and order disturbances due to *rido* (Maranao term for "clan feud"). According to a member of the City Peace Negotiating Panel, some 18 *rido* among the indigenous groups had been recorded during the first term of Mayor Ll. Cruz. Majority of them have already been resolved while the others are still in the process of negotiation.

Furthermore, the 2004 Annual Investment Plan report prepared by the City Planning and Development Office (CPDO) indicates that Iligan City is proximate to areas known to have unstable peace and order condition so, aside from *rido*, threats of attack from the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) continue to loom. This is the aftermath, largely, of the vehement opposition to the inclusion of certain portions of Iligan City in the Memorandum of Agreement on Ancestral Domain (MOA-AD). This opposition was manifested in a city-wide multi-sectoral rally on August 5, 2008, and in other gatherings thereafter.

Bombing incidents and bomb threats likewise have alarmed the residents. In 2007, one bomb exploded in the city plaza and injured more or less ten people. On August 17, 2008, two separate bombs exploded in two inns, and on December 17, 2008, another two bombs exploded separately in two commercial centers. The latter claimed the lives of two civilians and injured more than 40 people. Aside from bombing incidents in the city proper, several transmission towers were also destroyed by bombings perpetrated by unidentified renegade groups.



### Methodology

This is a descriptive research which utilized a triangulation of methods of data gathering. Three (3) instruments were used: semi-structured survey questionnaire, Focus Group Discussion guide, and interview guide. The semi-structured survey was intended to gather data on the profile of the CSOs, as well as, data on the extent of their participation in local governance. FGD and in-depth interviews were used to gather additional data and to confirm the data gathered from the survey.

The study used a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches in determining the extent of the participation of civil society organizations in governance.

There were two aspects of governance examined: political and administrative. In political governance, the study employed a complete enumeration method in choosing the respondents who were members of the five local special bodies in Iligan City within the period of 2004-2007. For administrative governance, chosen were only five civil society organizations which undertook basic services or projects within the period 2004-2007 under the joint venture and partnership scheme. There were 62 persons involved. Thirty two (32) of them were taken as respondents of the survey, ten of them were subjected to one-on-one in depth interview, and 20 of them were taken as participants of the FGD.

The gathering of data was personally done by the researcher. Data processing was done through SPSS student edition and version 13.0 for Windows. Descriptive statistics involving frequency, percentage and mean was utilized in determining the profile of the respondents and the extent of their participation in both political and administrative governance, while non parametric ANOVA and T-test were used in determining whether or not a significant difference existed in the extent of their participation when grouped according to attributes.

The qualitative data were content analyzed and presented in a narrative form according to the variables of the study. The extent of participation of CSOs is described as one of the following four characteristics: "no participation", "low", "moderate" and "high participation".

## Discussion of Results

### A. Political Governance

1. In the function of planning, only very few of the respondents participate in formulating long term, medium term, annual socio-economic plans and local investment incentives. Likewise, only very few of them participate in pre-procurement and pre-bid conference, advertising bids, improving peace and order and public safety, and in recommending measures for the improvement of peace, order and public safety. As a whole, the extent of their participation in the above mentioned functions is low while it is nil in planning for health concerns or recommending changes of names of public schools.
2. In the function of identifying and prioritizing projects and awarding of projects to qualified bidders, a narrow trend in quantity and proportion of the respondents' participation is observed.
3. As to the function of budgeting, majority of the respondents do not participate, particularly in health related concerns. However, a few of them participate in determining the annual budget for the needs of the DepEd and in allocating and disbursing the Special Education Fund for educational purposes.
4. In terms of evaluating and monitoring, there is a low level of participation among the respondents in monitoring the implementation of development programs and projects, in the evaluation of bids, and in making periodic assessment of the prevailing peace and order situation in Iligan City.
5. In regard to investigating and adjudicating, all of the respondents show high participation in three of the four

major functions – hearing and deciding citizens' complaints against members of the PNP, investigating and adjudicating administrative charges, and imposing the corresponding penalty. The fourth function is assumed by the secretariat created by the LGU, that is, receiving and filing complaints.

In general, the findings of the study show that the CSOs who were given seats in the developmental bodies exercised very minimal participation in political governance. Among the local special bodies, it is the City Development Council (CDC) pinpointed in which the CSOs exercised the least participation. Some reasons for their minimal participation in planning are: they were not invited, the time allocated for CDC meetings was not adequate to exhaust deliberation of the major concerns, and the plans were already done ahead by the agencies of the LGU.

### B. Administrative Governance

Regarding the second component, administrative governance, the CSOs' extent of participation was explored in the implementation of projects or services which were undertaken solely by the CSO, or, through a joint venture and partnership with the LGU. These projects are:

1. For livelihood, the Bigasan Project of Purok 5 Circle of Women Organization (P5CWO) in Purok 5, Tibanga;
2. For housing and resettlement, the Gawad Kalinga Mindanao Portland Tag-ibo Village Project (GKMPTVP) of Gawad Kalinga in Dalipuga;
3. For education, the Reading Remedial Program of Goodwill Mindanao Philippines, Incorporated;
4. For health service delivery; the Maternal and Child Care of Hope for Change Incorporated; and
5. For peace and order, the Management and Resolution of Rido of the Greater Tagoloan Sultanate League.

In the "*Bigasan* project", the respondents show a high level of participation, from the conceptualization phase until the monitoring and

evaluation phase. So far, this is one of the most viable livelihood projects for women in Iligan City.

As far as the housing and resettlement project is concerned, the respondents indicate high participation in the conceptualization, implementation, operation and maintenance, and monitoring and evaluation phases. It was only in the pre-construction phase, particularly in the lot acquisition, that no participation was made because the lot was donated by La-Farge.

As to education (Reading Remedial Program), the respondents show high participation in all the stages of the program implementation. The target beneficiaries were more or less 2,000 frustration level pupils in Grades 2-6 IN 20 public schools in Iligan City.

In health service delivery, particularly in the facility for Maternal and Child Care, the respondents show high participation in all stages of the project, except in the pre-construction phase, where the midwife-beneficiary shoulders the cost in the acquisition and development. The health care facility provides accessible, affordable and quality private health services, and serves as entry point for clients to avail themselves of services from medical experts in the City.

As to peace and order, particularly the Management and Resolution of *Rido*, the respondents show a high level of participation with the utilization of two complementary approaches -- communication skills and negotiation. The final step was finalized in a peace pact accompanied by a set of rituals called *kanduri para sa kapasad sa rido*. Of the 18 *rido* obtaining in the first term of Mayor Cruz, majority had been resolved. The process of resolving the rest is ongoing.

There is no significant difference in the extent of CSOs' participation in political governance, when grouped according to attributes, as indicated by the P-values which were higher than 0.05 level of significance. This was tested through T-test and non parametric ANOVA. The null hypothesis which states that "there is no significant difference in the extent of their participation when grouped according to attributes" is not rejected.

As to best practices in political governance, the best practices are: the practice of volunteerism; linkage with other CSOs; organization of clans or family heads and religious leaders; publication of a book entitled, "Lighting Up the City;" the allocation of funds by the LGU through the City Mayor to shoulder the costs of *Kanduri para sa kapasad sa rido*;

resorting to interfaith chaplain peace service in all precincts in Iligan City; tapping available local resources; observance of transparency in the acquisition of supplies and materials for the operation of the city government; constant consultation with the parents, teachers and students; and decision-making based on consensus in the "investigation and adjudication" function.

As far as administrative governance or implementation of basic services are concerned, the best practices revealed are summarized as follows: the spirit of volunteerism; savings and thrift; *kapitbahayan*; continued values education; beautification in the village; regular *pahina* or voluntary labor in addressing village problems; partnership with other stakeholders with convergent objectives; using the Koran as symbol of sincerity in implementing the settlement of conflict; and the personal involvement of the local chief executive (LCE) in the resolution of conflict.

Some problems encountered by the respondents revolve around lack of funds and logistical support, delay in the release of budget from the Special Education Fund (SEF) due to the inadequacy of property tax collection, poor roads and bridges in hinterland barangays and unsteady peace, order and security problems in hinterland barangays due to *rido*, and occasional attacks from lawless elements who are lurking in the adjacent Lanao del Sur area.

### Conclusion

CSOs are bearers of democratization and agents for setting limits on state power. As such, they constitute the essential pillars of decentralized local governance and serve as intermediary forces in the local setting as members in local special bodies and as the deliverers of basic services, under the joint venture and partnership mode. However, there are glaring gaps in their performance of political governance. At any rate, these gaps are being filled by CSOs, adding to their importance as development agents.

From the observation of their non-participation approach in planning, it could be deduced that their accreditation was intended only to justify the LGU's compliance with the law that provides for decentralization and demarginalization in political governance. The law empowers CSOs as development partners of government hence, participatory planning is primordial. In communities where no credible

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opposition exists, they could also provide the much needed checks and balances that are vital in curbing if not deterring the commission of irregularities in the conduct of political and administrative governance.

It can be concluded from the non-participation of the CSOs in the performance of the oversight function of the local government for socio-economic programs and projects that the local government in Iligan City did not make an institutionalized assessment or monitoring thereon. And if ever there were any, they were not participatory evaluations.

Part of the imperatives of democratic countries like the Philippines is the conduct of evaluation and monitoring programs and projects as a component of political governance. Policies should not only be formulated and executed but must be subjected to review. These mechanisms promote adherence to the principles of accountability, transparency, efficiency, effectiveness and legitimacy which then lead to better governance.

Furthermore, CSOs are important channels through which disputes can be negotiated and mediated by aggregating and articulating the interests of the socially-marginalized groups. As mechanisms for mediation, they play an intermediary role between the powers-that-be and those who are not. Their involvement in the investigating and adjudicating function, as members of the Peoples' Law Enforcement Board (PLEB), for instance, manifest their role in mediating disputes regarding alleged human rights violations perpetrated by some government agents. PLEB services are accessible, cheap and speedy.

The participation of the CSOs in administrative governance is impressive. The projects are institutionalized capability-building interventions, with either institutions or individuals as beneficiaries. There is teamwork which results to making the participatory mode in the delivery services effective. In this situation, CSOs perform the role of privatizing policy implementation and working as change agents for community development. They fill the gap in state functions.

## Recommendations

### A. For Iligan City:

1. It must adopt a participatory style in planning;
2. It should allocate enough time for deliberation of plans during City Development Council (CDC) meetings;
3. It must intensify the establishment of civilian volunteer organizations (CVOs) in every barangay and institutionalize peace education in schools, including Madrasah schools, and
4. It must allocate more funds for the improvement of roads and bridges in the hinterland barangays. If not, it must look for donor agencies to undertake these infrastructure projects.

### B. For the CSOs:

1. They must submit development proposals to the city government for review before the conduct of CDC meetings;
2. They must establish close contact and coordination with the local government unit (LGU) regarding development plans, and assert their right to participate in the process of governance, and
3. They must make regular follow ups with the local chief executive (LCE) regarding the status of the development proposals they submit for consideration. CSOs should be active development interventionist.

### C. For Further Research:

1. Further research must be done using other methods like case studies, to gain deeper insights regarding CSOs' involvement in local governance; and
2. Further research must explore the participation of CSOs as watchdogs or fiscalizers in other governance aspects, like in monitoring the environment, fiscal management, elections, and human rights promotion and monitoring.



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