



Empowering communities for housing and community services

A new generation of strategies for government accountability is needed, one that fully considers entrenched, institutional obstacles to change. Vertical integration of coordinated civil society policy monitoring and advocacy is one such strategy. Engaging each stage and level of public sector actions in an integrated way can locate the causes of accountability failures, show their interconnected nature, and leverage the local, national and transnational power shifts necessary to produce sustainable institutional change (Fox 2001). This case study summary is one of seven that reflect on civil society monitoring and advocacy initiatives in the Philippines – all of which aim to improve government accountability in different sectors – through the lens of vertical integration.

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The Philippines, with its booming population, faces a massive housing problem. Informal housing arrangements, substandard structures, congestion, a lack of relocation areas, rising criminality in overcrowded spaces, land-use conflicts and a lack of access to social services characterise this housing dilemma.

In the 1990s, widespread demolitions displaced many informal settlers in Metro Manila. Victims and their families responded by organising themselves. Among those that organised early was the umbrella organisation Damayan ng Maralitang Pilipinong Api (Philippines Poverty Relief, DAMPA). It was created to demand not just housing and relocation from different levels of government, but also the social services that should go with them.

DAMPA's activities and scope

DAMPA organised poor communities around common basic issues through building a partnership with the government, enhancing community-based self-help initiatives, and initiating pro-poor legislation at both the local and national government levels. It presented viable solutions to basic poverty problems endemic to the urban poor – such as inadequate and unaffordable housing, evictions and relocation – which complied with both international and local standards, the provision of basic services, and literacy and livelihood development. Through these effective approaches, DAMPA was able to grow its membership. This large membership, composed mainly of women, became an

important source of leverage in negotiations with the state.

In terms of scale, DAMPA is active in six major regions in the Philippines and has engaged with 90,000 households. It has helped about 5,000 families secure land and housing tenure; helped set up 40 community pharmacies in 30 poor communities, providing low-cost generic medicines to an estimated 50,000 poor families; and run an Income Restoration Programme that benefitted 252 families. DAMPA considers its greatest impact as developing the capacity of 500 urban poor leaders and volunteers in 95 communities to address local problems more effectively. These leaders sit on various local government development and planning bodies, where they actively participate in local governance and development planning activities in their localities.

DAMPA has achieved a number of key victories as a result of its organising work. In 2009, for example, it assisted 31 informal settler families from Sitio Krusher in the municipality of Norzagaray, Bulacan province. They were involved in tense relations with their home-owning neighbours, who wanted to have them evicted. To prevent this from happening, community organisers from DAMPA – assisted by leaders from the left-leaning Akbayan Citizens' Action Party – organised a dialogue between the concerned parties. The result was that the landowner donated a 2,694 m² lot to the informal settler families, on the condition that they pay the taxes on it. To date, DAMPA continues to provide capacity-building training to the Sitio Krusher families.

Another success story involved 2,000 informal settlers in the areas of Bangkal and Magallanes in Makati City, who had to be relocated to give way to several government

infrastructure projects. DAMPA brokered a deal with both the national and local governments, which enabled the residents to acquire land through a 'negotiated relocation' and entitled them to a small grant to construct their houses. DAMPA assisted the residents in developing their new community, not leaving until the basic social services such as schools, roads, potable water and electricity were set up.

While DAMPA's primary strategy remains community organising around grassroots issues, a strong networking strategy has also been integral to its activities. Through continuous engagement and active participation in the spaces it has opened for collaboration, DAMPA has been able to build a very wide local and international network.

Furthermore, engaging in dialogue with the government and other stakeholders at different levels has afforded the leaders and ordinary members of grassroots organisations the opportunity to acquire new skills and knowledge, and to hone their expertise. As such, they have become more knowledgeable about local and national government processes, and calibrate their responses and activities according to this new knowledge.

Through lobbying, coordination and constituency-building at different levels of government – even extending to the international level – DAMPA has been able to claim spaces where the urban poor can voice their concerns, and to institutionalise some of these spaces. It advanced the requirement for consultation in relocation activities and the participation of citizens in decision-making for housing and relocation projects affecting them. This has been achieved through participation in deliberative

processes and decision-making at local urban poor and housing offices, and at the national level through the National Housing Authority and other agencies under the Housing Urban Development Coordinating Council.

Lessons for vertically integrated advocacy

- DAMPA considers its network of constituents, members and partners as its greatest resource for vertical integration. It was able to overcome populism and clientelism by building on the knowledge that it acquired through collaboration and networking within its constituency.
- For DAMPA, vertical integration is a chance to learn and to strengthen the organisation and its members.
- DAMPA recognises that it was able to vertically integrate its activities because of its understanding of its own strengths and weaknesses, and of how institutions operate, how power structures at the different levels of government affect the results of advocacy, and how best to engage the government at different levels.

Reference

Fox, J. (2001) 'Vertically Integrated Policy Monitoring: A Tool for Civil Society Policy Advocacy', *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 30.3: 616–627

Background to this summary

This summary is based on a case study by Benedict G. Nisperos and Frederick Vincent Marcelo. Further reflections on this material will be published later in 2016 as part of a report on the theory and practice of vertically integrated civil society activism, edited by Joy Aceron, and including a contribution by Jonathan Fox. Please visit the Making All Voices Count website (www.makingallvoicescount.org) for the latest information about the publication of this report, and to find the other six case study summaries in this series.

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.

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Research, Evidence and Learning component

The programme's research, evidence and learning component, managed by IDS, contributes to improving performance and practice, and builds an evidence base in the field of citizen voice, government responsiveness, transparency and accountability (T&A) and technology for T&A (Tech4T&A).

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