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Civil Society Organizations Commitments to Local Government Unit Service Delivery

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ABSTRACT

This study dealt with identifying priority localized services offered by the local government unit (LGU) of Caoayan, Ilocos Sur, Philippines, and the corresponding recommendations and commitments of the respective civil society organizations (CSOs) to the LGU to ensure improved service delivery. It employed a qualitative research method using thematic content analysis. It utilized interview guide questions for the focus group discussion (FGD) of the 13 heads of CSOs, which are accredited by the said municipality. The priority service areas were health, education, social welfare, governance and response, public works and infrastructure, environmental management, and economic and investment promotion. In general, the civil society organizations signified their usual support and have renewed their commitment to helping improve the delivery of localized services offered by the LGU.

Keywords: *Commitments, Focus group discussion, Localized services, Qualitative research method, Thematic analysis*

INTRODUCTION

Civil society organizations (CSOs) are non-State, not-for-profit, voluntary entities formed by people in the social sphere that are separate from the State and the market, according to the UN Guiding Principles Reporting Framework (2017). CSOs have a diverse set of interests and ties. They can include both community-based and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). CSOs in this context do not include businesses or for-profit organizations.

In the Philippines, the participation of CSOs in local governance is encouraged under existing statutes and policies to bring about effective and efficient local development; and to foster an enabling environment where citizens and government officials can work together to identify urgent problems and craft plans that will address them.

Data from the United States Agency for International Development (2019) provides that the Department of Interior and Local Government suggests that CSOs' engagement with local governments remained strong in 2019, with 11,000 CSOs registered as members of local development councils (LDCs). By 1993, more than 16,000 NGOs and POs were accredited by various local government bodies, and more than 4,600 were reported as members of the Local Special Bodies (Tuano, 2011).

The Department of Agriculture (DA; 2021) published the list of accredited CSOs where national CSOs and CSOs by region were identified. Among the published national CSOs in the Province of Ilocos Sur are the Nueva Segovia Consortium of Cooperatives and Suyo Multipurpose Cooperative. Further, in Region I, specifically Ilocos Sur, three CSOs were named: Burgos-Sta. Maria Irrigators Multipurpose Cooperative, Sacred Heart Savings Cooperative, and Conconig East Farmers MPC. Among these, only the Nueva Segovia Consortium of Cooperatives is accredited by the Municipality of Caoayan, Ilocos Sur, the LGU on which this study is focused.

Midgley's (1986) claim that CSO involvement in local governance "not only humanizes bureaucracy but strengthens the capacities of individuals and communities to mobilize and help themselves" captures the essence of CSO involvement in local governance. As a result, reliance on the state is reduced, and ordinary people rediscover their capacity for cooperation and mutual endeavor." Working with the government allows CSOs to broaden the scope of their operations, increase their influence, and participate in formulating the national development agenda. In contrast, the government may see collaboration with CSOs as an opportunity to gain more reflected moral glory, regain control of donor funds, neutralize potential opposition, and achieve more efficient and cost-effective policy implementation (White, 1999).

According to Farrington and Lewis (1993), the benefits of a partnership between the government and NGOs include the reduction of government risks and responsibilities, reducing public sector debt, and the improvement of the quality of public goods. This is supported by Hague (2004), who stated in their study that the preference for NGOs as government partners is because NGOs are better equipped to address rural poverty, understand local needs and priorities, and conduct consultative meetings.

Good governance is also possible in an environment that allows CSOs to participate in local governance. Citizens would benefit from fair, prudent, transparent, accountable, participatory, responsive, well-managed, and efficient institutions in public life (Grindle, 2008). This is because a more accessible government establishes fair, accountable, incorruptible, and responsive governance (Ivanyna & Shah, 2012). CSOs can assist in amplifying the poor's voices, coordinating coalitions to overcome collective action issues, mediating on their behalf through redress mechanisms, and demanding greater service accountability. 2004 (Ghaus-Pasha)

Orbista (2012) claims in his study that citizens are aware that the policies implemented by the government influence them in some way. As a result, they become more involved and assertive, particularly on political, economic, social, and environmental issues. They work together by establishing civil society organizations to influence the

decision-making process in the government, especially when the issue at stake directly relates to them.

The 1987 Philippine Constitution requires the government to encourage non-governmental, community-based, or sectoral organizations that promote the welfare of the nation (Article II, Section 23). The state must also recognize the role of independent people's organizations in pursuing legitimate and collective interests and aspirations through peaceful and legal means (Article XIII, Section 15). The Constitution also grants the people and their organizations the right to participate effectively and reasonably in all levels of social, political, and economic decision-making and establish adequate consultation mechanisms (Article XIII, Section 16).

One of the defining characteristics of the Philippines' decentralized government system is the collaboration of local governments, civil society, and non-governmental organizations in planning, policymaking, and service delivery (Snavelly & Desai, 2001). Potutan et al. (2000) conducted a study in LGU Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines. They discovered sustained NGO-local government collaboration in the delivery of agricultural services programs, particularly in community organizing to form a farmers' cooperative (Tabuso, 2018) The extent of CSO engagement in local governance in Sta. Maria, Ilocos Sur, Philippines was also investigated, with LGU officials having higher engagement as respondents than CSO members.

The localized services in this study are on health, education support, social welfare, governance and response, public works and infrastructure, environmental management, and economic and investment promotion in Caoayan, Ilocos Sur. Americans with fewer years of education have poorer health and shorter lives, according to the Virginia Commonwealth University Center on Society and Health (VCU Center on Society and Health; 2015), and this has never been more true than today. In fact, since the 1990s, life expectancy has fallen for people without a high school diploma, particularly white women. Education is critical not only for higher-paying jobs and economic productivity but also for saving lives and money. This supports the inclusion of education as one of the LGU's priority services.

According to Alber (2017), unemployment is politically relevant because it affects many people who can be easily mobilized to challenge governments. The implementation of public unemployment protection schemes cannot be easily linked to broad social and political development patterns. Unemployment insurance was typically implemented as the last of the four major social insurance schemes. France was the first to implement a national subsidized voluntary unemployment insurance scheme in 1905. This Alber citation is a good suggestion to the LGU Administration to assist the unemployed and national development.

According to Reotutar (2019), Caoayan is a fourth-class municipality in the province of Ilocos Sur, Philippines, with a population of 19,861 across 17 barangays. Because of its geographical location, fishing has been the primary source of income for the residents. Agriculture follows, with farmers planting onions, tomatoes, rice, and corn. The town is also known for its loom-weaving industry, dating back to the Spanish regime. Furthermore, he stated that Palafox and Associates had designated Caoayan as Ilocos Sur's fish bowl and onion basket. Alongside the LGU are 18 CSOs accredited by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), which render services for the people in the various sectors and promote

different advocacies in the locality. The localized services were identified as per RA 7160 or the Local Government Code.

The results of this study will be essential to the LGU and CSOs in communicating their desire to sustain their collaboration for development.

Objectives

This study aimed to identify the: 1) priority localized services offered by the LGU and the corresponding recommendations for improvement, and 2) the commitments of the respective CSOs to the LGU to ensure improved service delivery.

Conceptual Framework

This section contains literature to guide the reader in a better understanding of the concept of this study.

In their study, Parekh and Klintman (2021, April) concluded that there is a need for CSOs to increase integration and coordination in the execution of their activities. According to Javier and Javier (2018, October), local government units (LGUs) in the Philippines face various issues and concerns. Recent years have seen an increase in extreme weather patterns in the country, which is thought to be caused by climate change. A diverse climate has a negative impact on species, habitats, and the ecosystem as a whole. Experts on climate change predict more extreme weather events, but the severity and location of these events are difficult to predict. Its negative consequences quickly become a common concern, particularly for local governments, which are the primary drivers of development. LGUs frequently collaborate or merge to address a common concern, such as ecosystem management.

Mumtaz (2021) stated that CSOs play an increasingly important role in overcoming such challenges and preparing local communities in collaboration with local institutions, particularly in cities, in advancing green and blue infrastructure and effectively addressing climate change. Blue-green infrastructure refers to using blue elements such as rivers, canals, ponds, wetlands, floodplains, and water treatment facilities in urban and land-use planning, as well as green elements such as trees, forests, fields, and parks.

Aspinwall (2021, September 20) wrote that civil society participation is a good thing that should be widely accepted, citing a report that states that effective civil society engagement results in more informed decision-making by the government, more responsible environmental actions by businesses, more public assistance in environmental management, and more effective environmental law.

According to Relon (2019), sand mining is undeniably an economic activity in many countries worldwide. Although sand mining is legal in many countries, the industry is still subject to illegal extraction and trade, causing animosity among residents due to obvious and life-threatening environmental impacts. This research was carried out in Ilocos Sur's coastal barangays, where agriculture and fishing are the main sources of income. Its goal was to investigate the effects and consequences of black sand mining activities on residents and the environment.

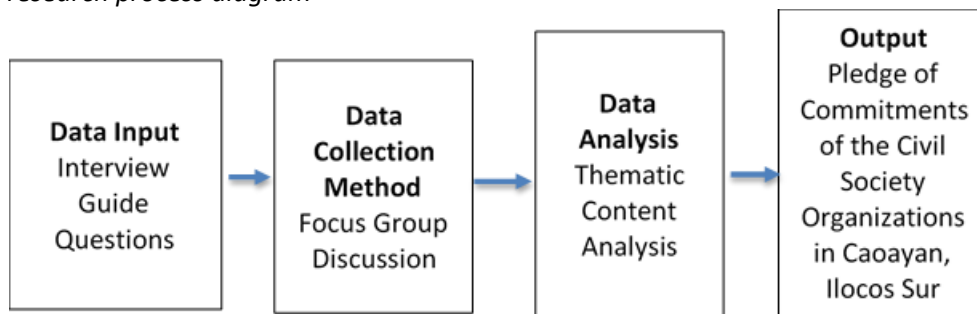
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The study of Domingo et al. (2021) on Oyster Farming in Ilocos Sur can be a good priority service in which the LGU can collaborate with the CSOs for community development. It can be another commitment by the CSO to the LGU.

METHODOLOGY

Figure 1.

The research process diagram



This study employed a qualitative research method using thematic content analysis. It utilized interview guide questions for the focus group discussion (FGD) on November 18, 2019, in Caoayan, Ilocos Sur. The FGD was composed of the 13 heads of CSOs, which were claimed by the then Municipal Interior Local Government Officer as accredited by the said municipality. The group was clustered into two according to the service delivery area relevant to them: Group 1 included Guardians Vero Fratelli International, Inc. (GVFII) Puro, Guardians Vero Fratelli International, Inc. (GVFII) Poblacion, Federated Barangay Health Workers (BHW) Caoayan Chapter, National Chaplain of the Philippines (NCP), E-Caoayan, Ilocos Sur Women's Association (ISWA) Caoayan Chapter, and Citizen Involvement Services (CIS), while Group 2 comprised of: Nueva Segovia Consortium of Cooperatives (NSCC), Caoayan Association of Civil Society Organizations (CCSO), United Architects of the Philippines (UAP) Ylocos Vigan, Rural Improvement Club (RIC), Fuerte Rosangis Association, and Caoayan Overseas Filipino Workers Association (COFWA). Group 1 was along health, education, social welfare, and governance and response service areas, while Group 2 was along public works and infrastructure, environmental management, and economic and investment promotion.

The research process is illustrated in Figure 1. the first part is the data input from the participants. Afterward, the focus group discussion was facilitated for the two groups, from which thematic content analysis was employed. The output of this study is the pledged commitments of the civil society organizations in Caoayan, Ilocos Sur as a partner in improving the service delivery of the local government unit.

There was no conflict of interest in the conduct of this study. Privacy and confidentiality were observed by safeguarding the identity of the participants selected through quota-purposive sampling. Although the focus group discussion proceedings were documented through video recording, their faces will be pixelized whenever presented to any forum/conference. The electronic copy's disposal shall be deleted from the desktop

computer and memory cards after two years. The LGU will greatly benefit as it sheds light on the formulation of CSO's Commitment to delivering LGU services.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Prioritized Local Services and Recommendations

The focus group discussion identified seven general themes or categories of services as the priority services delivered in the LGU. These were: 1) health, 2) education, 3) social welfare, 4) governance and response, 5) public works and infrastructures, 6) environmental management, and 7) economic and investment promotion. In addition, the participants further pointed out specific services along each general category and the corresponding recommendations for improving the service delivery above.

Health Services

The local health services identified as a priority were 1) free general consultations/access to secondary and tertiary health care, 2) free basic medicine or low-cost medicine program, and 3) family planning/reproductive health, distribution of reproductive health supplies, information dissemination, and other services.

For the improvement of the abovementioned health services, the participants recommended that there must be a free monthly check-up with free medicines to be distributed to the residents and that the Botika sa Barangay must be revived. Several participants' statements that "the medical services must be available for 24 hours" are noteworthy to mention.

Support to Education

The local education services identified as priority services were 1) sports programs and activities, 2) scholarship and other assistance programs for students, and 3) Alternative Learning Systems and other special education programs.

Regarding the facilities and instructional materials of the schools, the participants recommended the "beautification of the schools and creation of more classrooms,"; that computers, LCD projectors, and photocopying machines must be procured; and that more updated books and educational materials must be added to their libraries. As regards the pupils/students, the participants voiced out that "the children of indigent families must be prioritized by the local government," that a feeding program for all young learners and the giving of free snacks to them must be initiated, and that there must be a distribution of free school supplies for them.

Social Welfare

The local social services identified as priority services were the 1) Women's Welfare Program, 2) Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) Welfare Program, 3) Older persons/senior citizens program, and 4) Programs for Internally displaced persons.

Collating all the participants' recommendations on the abovementioned localized social services, they suggested that free medicines and cash be distributed to qualified

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recipients and "a more inclusive program for senior citizens, children, PWDs, and indigent families." They also recommend that there must be "a strict implementation of agreements during meetings regarding the social services offered by the local government."

This is corroborated by the study of De La Rosa (2014) that the effort of the CSO and the LGU in uplifting the women in a certain barangay through the provision of livelihood programs is also one of the achievements. The skills training and financial assistance from the LGU and the effort of the CSO in gathering all potential beneficiaries and creating more linkages with the national agencies contributed to the development of these women. These women, mostly mothers, did not only gain additional sources of income for their families, but their confidence and self-esteem were also enhanced through this CSO-LGU initiative.

Governance and Response

The local services on governance and response identified as priority services were the 1) delivery of frontline services (retrieval of birth and marriage certificates, public records, land titles, etc.), 2) local government's response or action on complaints against an officer, official, or personnel in LGU, 3) Mobile LGU service/provision of municipal services to the barangays, 4) timely response on peace and order and public safety-related incidents, 5) disaster risk reduction and management, and 6) public information services.

Regarding the immediacy of action and availability of the local officials in emergencies, the participants suggested the rendition of a 24-hour service of said officials, at least in a rotational duty scheme, and procuring a vehicle for rescue. As to the competency of local officials in emergencies, the participants also suggested that the local officials, especially those involved in disaster preparedness, must undergo more training programs.

Regarding the delivery of frontline services, the participants recommended adopting faster methods for processing the requested documents. They also emphasized the "equal treatment of clients who are availing frontline services."

Lastly, the respondents recommend improving structures utilized in the delivery of local services on governance and response.

Public Works and Infrastructures

The local services on public works and infrastructures identified as priority services were 1) barangay roads, 2) municipal roads and bridges, 3) barangay hall, 4) public markets and satellite markets, 5) public parks, 6) road safety, 7) sports centers and facilities, 8) municipal government buildings, 9) public cemetery, and 10) flood control management system.

On the local road services, the participants recommended rehabilitating old roads and widening certain roads which must necessarily be widened to accommodate more motorists. Moreover, several participants specifically recommended the construction of a diversion road going to Brgy. Tamorong.

On the other infrastructure projects, the participants recommended the creation of additional facilities and procurement of equipment in the Sports Center, establishing a more improved evacuation center, upgrading the seawalls into a sturdier one, and beautifying and expanding the public market.

Environmental Management

The local environmental management services identified as a priority were 1) community-based greening project, 2) air pollution control program, 3) solid waste management, and 4) clean-up programs/projects.

The participants' top recommendation along the abovementioned environmental management services was for the local government to continuously uphold its Commitment to sustain the implementation of these existing programs. In addition, they suggested that "the local government must become stricter in the implementation of environmental laws, e.g., no burning, compliance to waste management, the penalty for law offenders" to ensure the sustainability of their environmental programs. Furthermore, the participants recommended that the local government units implement more clean and green programs like coastal clean-up, free siphoning of septic tanks, and more tree planting activities. Lastly, they recommended the repair of the sewerage going to Beddeng and the assurance of potable and clean waters in the community.

Economic and Investment Promotion

The local services on economic and investment promotion identified as priority services were 1) public employment services, 2) regulation and supervision of business, 3) promotion of barangay micro business enterprises, 4) livelihood programs, 5) development and maintenance of tourist attractions, 6) organization, accreditation, and training of tourism-related concessions, 7) access to irrigation facilities or equipment, 8) distribution of planting/farming/fishing materials and equipment, and 9) water and soil resource utilization and conservation projects.

To uplift the lives of the hard-working residents, the participants recommended that "the local government must initiate a specialized service that is specifically designed to assist job seekers and those who want to put up their own business" and that the local government must establish more micro businesses and more livelihood programs which are not only for 4Ps beneficiaries to provide more employment opportunities to the residents. The participants also mentioned that the local government must start a program where PWDs can work and earn their income

To also expand the locality's economic capacity, the participants suggested that the local government must find ways to encourage more investors. According to the participants, one way to do that is "for the local government to exert more effort on upgrading its information dissemination capabilities."

On local tourism and agriculture services, the participants recommended, respectively, that the local government must focus on developing the (already existing) tourist spots in the locality and that it must formulate a policy on the management of farm equipment that is readily available for local farmers to borrow.

Commitments of CSOs for Improved Service Delivery

The summary of the commitments of the CSOs to the local government unit to improve service delivery is exhibited in Table 2. Based on the table, the participants expressed Commitment to the delivery of the service areas along with health, education,

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social welfare, governance and response, public works and infrastructure, environmental management, and economic and investment promotion.

Table 2

Commitments of the CSOs to LGU for improved service delivery

Name of CSO	Commitment/s
1. Federated Civil Society Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Install quality-assured management systems starting from filing and handling complaints, which will require orientation and training in all barangays. b. Proper information and guidelines on the offering of scholarship programs.
2. Ilocos Sur Women's Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Focus on the development and welfare of women and continue their current activities and programs, but the policy on mandatory fees should be implemented.
3. Guardians Vero Fratelli International, Inc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Continued support and service to the LGU b. Commitment to these activities: tree planting, mobilizing boat owners as members of guardians, and require training of new members
4. Citizen Involvement Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Institutionalization of information posts/centers b. Information dissemination of programs through DWRS radio station
5. National Chaplain of the Philippines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Conduct entrepreneurial and leadership training and seminars for free.
6. Barangay Health Workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Conduct of survey of common illnesses as a database b. Revive Botika sa Barangay
7. Caoayan Overseas Filipino Workers Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Expansion of membership services
8. Rural Improvement Club	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Helps in monitoring and implementation of waste management b. Participation in cultural activities like fiestas, etc.
9. Nueva Segovia Consortium of Cooperatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Low-interest rate of loans for farmers b. Fast-tracking of loans for farmers c. Drafting of MOA between LGU and NSCC on the establishment of a farm laboratory
10. Fuerte Rosangis Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Promote organic farming through information dissemination in barangays
11. United Architects of the Philippines (UAP) Ylocos Vigan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Participate in the monitoring and evaluation of public works as an independent team b. Report to the Mayor and Commission on Audit and other authorities concerned about evaluating roads and bridges.

Civil society organizations generally signified their usual support to the local government unit by being engaged in programs, projects, and activities relevant to their organizations. Some of these include commitments to help in the information dissemination efforts of the LGU and the conduct of relevant training programs and seminars, participation in cultural activities, and revitalization of Botika sa Barangay in all barangays. Moreover, these CSOs also expressed their commitment to monitoring and evaluating these projects.

CONCLUSIONS

The CSOs, as partners of LGU-Caoayan, Ilocos Sur, have signified their usual support and Commitment with the end goal of improving the delivery of localized services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The LGU may conduct a planning workshop and commitment-setting exclusively for the CSOs to formulate an action plan as an official document transcribing their commitments to strengthen the partnership. A monitoring and evaluation instrument must be constructed and validated to accomplish the target initiatives. Further, the UNP-College of Public Administration may assist with strategic planning and project proposal preparation.

ETHICAL STATEMENT

The ethical consideration was applied where the researchers had no conflict of interest. Their only interest is contributing something to the generation of new knowledge, particularly in identifying the priority localized services offered by the LGU and the corresponding recommendations for improvement and the commitments of the respective CSOs to the LGU to ensure improved service delivery. They are not doing this research with any personal intention. The consent and voluntary participation of the participants in this study were taken without force, threat, or otherwise. All information provided is anonymous, with no one, including the researcher, to link questionnaires and identities. Only a code number, not their names, was attached to the questionnaire. All research documents are kept in locked files, accessible only by the researcher, and all information provided is confidential. No individual identity is used in any report or publication resulting from the study. During their participation, they are free to withdraw, even after they have already begun. While it is hoped they read each question carefully and provide an honest answer, they are free to skip any question they do not wish to answer. There was no compensation provided to them. While there are also no obvious or direct benefits to them, their time and effort contribute to the reliability of the result of the study. If the participants have questions for clarification about the questionnaire, the researchers are readily available to respond.

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