Strengthening the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) as an Accountability Mechanism in Local Governance (#SKasGWatch Project)

Pilot Implementation Report and Learning Exchange Documentation
Government Watch (G-Watch), February 2020
Acknowledgement

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Strengthening the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) as an Accountability Mechanism in Local Governance or #SKasGWatch Project is an initiative of Government Watch (G-Watch) that aims to enable the SKs in engaging key poverty reduction programs of the government to advance accountability and responsiveness. This report shares the highlights of the pilot implementation of the #SKasGWatch project from November 2018 to January 2020, including the documentation of its final activity, the learning exchange in January 2020, that brought together the project team and lead volunteer-monitors in the three pilot sites for an assessment and reflection.

More than half of the Philippine population are young people aged 15-30 years old. The role of the youth in nation-building has been recognized in Philippine laws. One mechanism for youth empowerment is the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK or Youth Councils). Every one of the 42,045 barangays (villages) has an SK composed of at least 8 youth officials elected by the youth constituency of the barangay.

The SK mechanism is supposed to serve as a training ground for young Filipinos in governance and leadership. Despite its original intention, the Sangguniang Kabataan has been criticized for failing to carry out its mandate of empowering the youth, and for succumbing to the culture of patronage and clientelism. However, there have been recent attempts to reform the SK by strengthening its link with its youth constituency, and by addressing the problem of political dynasties at their level.

The barangay is the closest government unit to the people who receive and benefit from various government programs. Yet, there has been weak efforts to enable barangay-level social accountability that checks on the programs being provided by the government, especially those catering to the poorest of the poor, such as Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps), Kapit-Bisig Laban sa Kahirapan (KALAHI) and Assistance to Disadvantaged Municipalities (ADM). Enabling barangay-level citizen monitoring of these programs will ensure that target beneficiaries receive the services while avoiding inefficiencies, corruption and abuse.

While anti-poverty government programs already have monitoring and citizen engagement components, most of these are integrated in the program itself and dependent mainly on the government. The project is part of an ongoing exploration for an independent and vertically-integrated (i.e., present at all levels of decision-making from national to communities) civil society monitoring process that would ensure a comprehensive look of poverty reduction programs with the participation of beneficiaries/communities in alliance with youth leaders of SK and G-Watch.
With the drive to reform the SK, the Sangguniang Kabataan can be turned into an accountability mechanism in collaboration with G-Watch, a national action research and citizen monitoring organization with almost two decades of experience in social accountability, thereby filling-up the gap in barangay-level accountability in government anti-poverty programs.

In her Introduction during the Learning Exchange that took place at SOLEA Mactan on January 25-26, Ms. Joy Aceron stated that the #SKasGWatch Project is meant to “scale up accountability through the Sangguniang Kabataan.” The idea of ‘scaling up’ has two dimensions: First, is to spread accountability to other leaders and institutions. And second, is the process of “pagpapalalim” (deepening), which aims to mobilize the SKs in partnership with G-Watch for accountability work at various levels of decision-making. Though the SKs’ involvement in accountability work is not explicitly stated in either Republic Act No. 7160 (Local Government Code) or in the SK Reform Law, the Project assumes that the SK has a stake in ensuring that government services reach their intended beneficiaries, and that it should take action to promote transparency, participation and accountability (TPA).

Specifically, the Project focuses on mobilizing the SKs to monitor the implementation of 4Ps for the following reasons:

1. School children up to 18 years old are one of the beneficiaries of the said Program, and this segment of the population are the main constituents of the Sangguniang Kabataan.
2. 4Ps is targeted towards the poorest of the poor, who therefore requires the most assistance.

Ms. Aceron shared that the pilot-run of the project in three G-Watch sites from November 2018 to January 2020 was supported by the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI), an initiative of the Canadian Embassy in the Philippines. Meanwhile, the monitoring of poverty reduction programs, including 4Ps, is an ongoing action research work of G-Watch with Accountability Research Center (ARC), an action research incubator in American University. The #SKasGWatch pilot project is a convergence of these collaborations.
After discussing the updates on the Sangguniang Kabataan and 4Ps implementation during the Learning Exchange in Mactan, Ms. Vicky Maglanque reviewed the highlights of the Project.

In her report, Ms. Maglanque outlined the various activities that were undertaken from February 2019 until October of that year. She added that all these activities culminated in the presentation of the findings and recommendations before relevant government agencies.

The following were the main activities conducted:

- The Project kicked off with the conduct of a briefing-orientation for volunteer monitors in each of the sites.

- Last March 1, 2019, G-Watch also organized the Empowering Youth to Lead Accountability (EYLA) Forum as part of its policy dialogues. It was attended by representatives from various government agencies such as the National Youth Commission (NYC), DSWD, DILG, Commission on Audit (COA), and the Civil Service Commission (CSC), as well as partner CSOs and SK officials.

- The period from April to June 2019 was allotted for the volunteers to conduct their monitoring activities.

- A two-day sharing and problem-solving session were then conducted per site the following month. Volunteer-monitors attended the sharing sessions, while concerned government offices attended the problem-solving sessions.

- During the briefing-orientation in February 2019, the G-Watch team discovered the various issues and challenges (i.e., lack of information regarding budget guidelines, release of the SK budget, etc.) faced by SK officials in performing their mandates. As such, the team also sent letters to pertinent agencies urging them to address these concerns.

- G-Watch also called for a meeting with other SK reform advocates to discuss the petition initiated by SK Miranda from Samal. The petition was then formally submitted to concerned agencies.

- A team processing was conducted last August 29-30, 2019, attended by G-Watch Center as well as the local coordinators from the three pilot sites. In this workshop, key findings, recommendations, and reflections were formulated.

- Several follow-up correspondences and meetings with concerned government agencies were conducted to press for response and identify next
Following this activity, a problem-solving dialogue was organized last October 22, 2019 to present the team’s findings and recommendations and to get the reaction and commitment of the government agencies concerned. It was attended by representatives from DSWD, Department of Budget and Management (DBM), DILG, and the Senate Committee on Youth (through the office of Sen. Sonny Angara). The NYC and the House of Representatives Committee on Youth were also invited but they were not able to attend.

Throughout the entire project, G-Watch was publicizing updates on the project through social media tagging CFLI/ Canada Embassy, ARC and other G-Watch partners.

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*Photos from top to bottom: Briefing-orientation with SK officials and 4Ps beneficiaries in Maasin City; SK officials doing a short skit during the briefing-orientation in Quezon City; Sharing session of volunteer monitors in Island Garden City of Samal.*
The following were the key findings of the monitoring and the recommendations put forward based on collective assessment and consultations in the project:

In general, 4Ps beneficiaries engaged by SK and G-Watch monitors found that 4Ps is highly beneficial and helpful to them. They want the Program to continue and be improved. There are still, however, some issues and problems in the operation and implementation of 4Ps that, if addressed, can strengthen the program.

**On 4Ps Issues**
- Delayed allowance/payouts to 4Ps beneficiaries.
- Issue regarding inclusion/exclusion in the list of 4Ps beneficiaries.
- The Grievance Redress System (GRS) was not responsive to the concerns of the beneficiaries.

**Recommendations**
- Improve the response of DSWD, and keep the beneficiaries/stakeholders informed of the actions and decisions of the agency (including monitoring results).
- Explore working with the barangay, particularly the SKs, as an independent grievance redress, monitoring, and information center.
- Strengthen 4Ps engagement with youth beneficiaries through the youth development sessions (YDS) in collaboration with the SKs.

**On SK Issues**
- Unclear guidelines regarding their budget and the release of their funds.
- Uncoordinated/scattered training for SKs and their lack of exposure/knowledge on governance and accountability.
- The SK Reform Law is not fully implemented and there are gaps in organizational support and incentives for SK officials.

**Recommendations**
- Clarify rules regarding budget, and provide assistance in accomplishing the requirements.
- Provide rationalized, comprehensive, and integrated training for SKs, as well as orient SKs of the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR), including the programs, projects, and services of the government.
- Convene all government agencies concerned to ensure the full implementation of the SK Reform Law and guarantee that organizational support for the SKs are provided.

The following were the key responses generated from the concerned government agencies:

**Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD)**
- The agency is currently in talks regarding the institutionalization of Youth Development Sessions, and is open to explore possible engagement with SKs in the feedback and grievance redress mechanism.
• The representative also suggested to tap regional institutional partnership development offices in this endeavor.

**Department of Budget and Management (DBM)**
• The Government Procurement Policy Board (GPPB) has already issued guidelines for procurement by SKs.
• COA will also be releasing the handbook regarding the SK budget (the COA handbook has just been recently released last February 6, 2020).

**Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG)**
• The DILG reiterated that the National Youth Commission (NYC) is the lead agency for SK concerns.
• However, they have also issued press releases stating that SKs are allowed to use their budget as long as they comply with having a bank account.
• The agency, through the Undersecretary for Barangay Affairs, has also started crafting projects, programs, and activities for SKs.
• They are also looking at the possibility of SKs being included in the training provided by the Local Government Academy (LGA).

**Senate**
• The Senate Committee on Youth is looking at introducing amendments to the SK Reform Law. The amendments mentioned are the SK Treasurer appointed by the SK Chair should have a background in accounting, and the inclusion of honorarium for all SK officials, among others.

The main complaints raised about 4Ps revolve around delayed payments, logistical problems in payouts, inclusion/ exclusion and slow and weak responsiveness of its Grievance Redress System. While DSWD reports the 4Ps GRS to be functioning effectively with a high resolution rate, the feedback that G-Watch received from 4Ps...
beneficiaries showed dissatisfaction towards the GRS in resolving issues: that it took a long time before the GRS responds to complaints filed and complaints, and that these were not completely resolved/ addressed. We also noted that only 4Ps beneficiaries know about the GRS (other community members have low-to-no awareness). Despite the high awareness regarding GRS, 4Ps beneficiaries still resort to other means in resolving complaints (through the DSWD staff, going to higher DSWD offices, NGO/ private sector).

DSWD reaffirmed possible gaps in the Program’s Grievance Redress System and monitoring that can be filled up by the Project. Though the GRS is integrated in 4Ps, people are afraid to use this mechanism. Beneficiaries often justify their refusal to use the GRS by saying, “baka pag-initan” (they might earn the ire of those managing the Program).

There is, therefore, a need for an independent monitoring system for the implementation of 4Ps, and the SKs can fulfill that function. For this reason, the #SKasGWatch Project explores the gaps in 4Ps accountability system and attempts to devise ways to address those gaps.

Meanwhile, concerned agencies have responded to the petition initiated by SK reform advocates and G-Watch (https://g-watch.org/news-release/calling-nyc-dilig-dbm-coached-and-deped-advance-full-implementation-sk-reform-law) through the passage of needed department orders, the conduct of trainings/ briefings, and conduct of investigations.

The Senate had a hearing on the SK Reform Law implementation and the National Youth Commission directly responded to G-Watch’s inquiry on the 50 Million SK budget that mobilized an uproar from SKs online (https://www.facebook.com/147286138619619/posts/2961325533882318?sfns=mo).

See Annex 1 for the Highlights of the Monitoring and Annex 2 for the Tool used.
Since the SK’s foundation in the 1990s, it has been plagued by criticisms, including how it has become a breeding ground of traditional politicians and a venue to teach the youth of corruption, for being ineffective in achieving its purpose of youth empowerment. Largely, it has yet to serve as an accountability mechanism that ensures that the services and programs of local and national governments are responsive to the youth and to citizens, in general.

Recently, there have been efforts of youth advocates to reform the SK. An SK Reform Law (RA 10742) has been passed in Congress in 2016 strengthening the linkage of the council to its constituency (the Katipunan ng mga Kabataan or Youth Assembly), providing more extensive capacity-building for its leaders, and incorporating a groundbreaking anti-dynasty provision.

Three years after the passage of the SK Reform Law in 2016, the law has not been fully implemented. The Implementing Rules and Regulations lacks implementation details, and SKs and stakeholders have yet to be oriented on it. Most SKs have yet to comply with the requirements for them to receive and utilize their budget. There is confusion among SKs, local government officials and national government agencies on mandates vis-à-vis the SK Reform Law implementation. The status of the SK budget is unclear, and the trainings conducted have been lacking in substance and form.

In this light that G-Watch helped SKs and SK reform advocates to call on concerned government agencies, namely NYC, DILG, DBM, COA, CHED and DepEd, to act on the following demands in a petition:

- Form and regularly convene and inter-agency body on SK reform.
- Review the IRR to clarify mandates and accountabilities in implementing the law and the details of coordination among agencies and stakeholders in consultation with stakeholders.
- Properly orient SKs of the IRR and how it will be carried out, addressing any gaps in the guidelines upon implementation.
- Orient agencies and all government offices of their responsibilities and mandate in the SK Reform Law.
- Review and redesign trainings/ capacity-building programs that build the capacity of SKs, making it more comprehensive, applied and rationalized.
- Allocate funds and conduct mandatory and continuing trainings for SKs (chairs, kagawads, secretaries and treasurers) and Local Youth Development Officers (LYDOs).
- Provide pro-active assistance to SKs in fulfilling their mandate, including in complying with the requirements to access and utilize their funds.
- Elect the new set of officers of the Sangguniang Kabataan National Federation (SKNF) at the soonest possible time.
- Ensure that the entitlements, benefits and privileges for elected SK officials stipulated in the SK Reform Law are provided.
• Set up a reporting/feedbacking mechanism for the proper implementation of the SK Reform Law, especially to ensure that the problems of access to entitlements, benefits and privileges of SK officials in the Law are reported and responded to.

• Explore the creation of Liga ng mga Kagawad (League of Councilors) to ensure the active involvement of kagawad in SK governance.

The Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program is a conditional cash transfer program being implemented by the Department of Social Welfare and Development. The 4Ps aims to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty by investing in poor households’ health and education. The program specifically addresses maternal, infant, and child mortality; malnutrition and stunting of children; basic education completion; and child labor. To receive the grant, households enrolled in the Program need to fulfill certain health and education conditions. As of December 2016, there are 4.3 million household-beneficiaries enrolled in 4Ps. The 4Ps program has been allocated a budget of Php78 billion in 2017.

According to a World Bank study in 2013, beneficiaries of the program spent 38% more on education and 34% more on health compared to those not enrolled in 4Ps. This increase indicates that households under the program invest more in the education and health of their children, giving them more chances of breaking the cycle of poverty in their families. Another recent study by the Philippine Institute of Development Studies (2014) says that the number of out-of-school-youth has decreased from 2.9 million in 2008 to 1.2 million in 2013 due to 4Ps and the K-12 program. In general, the impact assessment on 4Ps have been positive, including assessments of its good governance features. Surveys have also noted satisfaction of 4Ps beneficiaries towards the program. Yet, 4Ps continue to face criticisms and complaints.

Despite resistance from some policy actors, 4Ps was institutionalized into law, through Republic Act No. 11310, in 2019. Specific provision of the law relevant to what #SKasGWatch is doing is Sec. 16 on the Independent Monitoring Committee. It states that, “An Independent Monitoring Committee shall be created at the regional, and national levels, composed of representatives from the private sector and civil society organizations (CSOs) to complement the monitoring activities of the DSWD and provide feedback for appropriate action. It shall submit a report on the results of its monitoring activities relative to the implementation of the program to the respective regional advisory councils and the NAC.”

The learning exchange in January as a final activity of the #SKasGWatch pilot project also served as an opportunity to get the latest updates on 4Ps and SKs. Below are the highlights of the reporting of the sites.
Samal

The participants from Samal reported that COA has prevented all Samal SKs from opening bank accounts. They also stated that a number of SK officials have experienced intimidation ("tinakot") from COA who told them that having their own bank accounts would mean that they will now be held criminally liable for any questionable financial transaction that they make. Because of this situation, the SKs of Samal are the only Sangguniang Kabataan in the country that have no bank accounts.

This predicament has forced the Samal SKs to revert to the old system wherein SK funds are controlled by the barangay chairperson. Aceron commented that this is a cause for concern since the SKs could be obliged to simply settle for the old system, thus undermining the essence of the SK Reform Law.

During the discussion, the participants from Samal also emphasized their disappointment with the President of their SK City Federation for his apparent inaction.

Quezon City

The participants from Quezon City said there was an initial delay in the holding of training-seminars and in the opening of bank accounts. However, their SK Federation President was forced to take action because of intense pressure from barangay-level SK officials. Because of this positive development, the SKs of Quezon City were finally able to upload their documents on PhilGEPS and have now begun the bidding process for their projects.

In addition, the SKs have also started implementing various initiatives. The Sangguniang Kabataan of Barangay Payatas, for example, began coordinating with UP-NCPAG to provide training-seminars for SK officials. At the same time, SK-Payatas has initiated various projects including the distribution of school equipment and the Pamaskong Handog initiative. They are currently devising their budget plan for 2020.

Similarly, the SK of Barangay Capri has also distributed school supplies to elementary and high school children. They have also organized a number of seminars that focused on stress management, career planning and handling relationships.
On the other hand, the SK of Barangay Batasan Hills has partnered with the Office of the Vice President (OVP) for their anti-drugs campaign. They have also organized seminars to provide advice and tips on college entrance examinations.

However, Mr. Gab Peralta—an SK Kagawad from Barangay Batasan Hills—reported that the mandatory training for SK Treasurers in Manila is currently on hold.

**Southern Leyte**

The discussion on Southern Leyte focused on the implementation of 4Ps in the said province. It began with an update from Ms. Aceron who told the participants that the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program has now been institutionalized with the recent enactment of Republic Act No. 11310 (4Ps Act). She added that this new law mandates the DSWD to introduce an independent monitoring mechanism that would observe and scrutinize its implementation.

For her part, Ms. Esmeralda Lamamlao reported that G-Watch Southern Leyte has recently wrapped up their monitoring this January. They observed that Landbank still has only one operational ATM machine, since the two other machines remain offline. The response from DSWD is to schedule monthly withdrawals by batches to keep it as orderly as possible.

**Action Steps**

To address the issues related to the Sangguniang Kabataan, the G-Watch Center resolved to undertake the following actions:

- Write letters to COA, DILG and NYC to raise the non-implementation of the SK Reform Law.
- Get a copy of the SK Handbook, have it scanned, and then send the softcopy to G-Watch’s SK partners.

At the same time, to address the issue regarding 4Ps, the G-Watch Center will send a letter to DSWD to the raise the scheduling of withdrawals in Southern Leyte.

Ms. Aceron also noted that it is extremely important for the SKs and 4Ps beneficiaries to receive their entitlements because these are concrete manifestations that the Philippine state is investing on its youth.
She then added that by undertaking this Project, the G-Watch Center is practically taking a chance on the SKs. The Center invited a large number of SK officers in its initial activities; and from those number, about 20% to 30% have remained.

Ms. Aceron further said that the Canadian Embassy was initially skeptical of the Project. But G-Watch defended the initiative, stating that the SKs are indeed vulnerable to corruption and patronage politics. But they argued that we need to engage the SK precisely because they are vulnerable.

**HOW DO YOU DESCRIBE YOUR #SKasGWATCH EXPERIENCE**

During the learning exchange, the participants were asked to describe their experience. Below is how the participants described their #SKasGWatch experience.

**G-Watch Quezon City**

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<tr>
<td>Federick Vincent Marcelo</td>
<td>“Profound and refreshing”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Persevere”</td>
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<td>“Extended patience”</td>
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<td>John Lester Pangilinan</td>
<td>“#LP Learn the Process”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Do small things with great love”</td>
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<td>Gabriel Peralta</td>
<td>“They can compromise the method but not your principle.”“</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“Pagtataya.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maribel Sumagay</td>
<td>“Has given us enough confidence”</td>
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<td>“Added significant knowledge and information”</td>
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<td>“It was an eye-opening experience”</td>
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<td>“Enabled us to help others”</td>
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<td>Anacleto Valdez, Jr.</td>
<td>“Timely”</td>
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<td>“Nourishing”</td>
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<td>“Fun”</td>
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<td>G-Watch Samal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nelmar Crausos</td>
<td>“Great start”</td>
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<td>“#Babangon kami”</td>
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<td>Nickholai Jimm Genosas</td>
<td>“Strengthened”</td>
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<td>“#walangimpossible”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moana Jickain</td>
<td>“Solution(mak)er”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paul Ephraim Lopez</td>
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<td>Lloyd Martin Mataverde</td>
<td>“Game-changer”</td>
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The following questions were interrogated in a collective discussion during the learning exchange:

- What does youth-led mean?
- What are the other requirements to ensure the success of an initiative that organizes the youth to lead in accountability?

Discussed below are the highlights and synthesis of the discussion.

What does to be youthful mean:
- Enthusiastic
- Hopeful
- Resilient or able to persevere
- Devoted
- Fresh

The determinant of youth is not just age but attitude — i.e., the ability to develop new ways of thinking and of doing things.

There was broad agreement on the meaning of “youth-led.” An initiative is youth-led if the youth plays a central part in the said effort, if their ideas are heard, and if it has
a youth perspective. Thus, youth-led means “isip, gawa at salita ng kabataan para sa kabataan” (thought, action and word of the youth for the youth).

However, while the youth has tremendous potential as catalysts of change, their potentiality will remain dormant if they are not given the capacity to meaningfully participate in decision-making processes. It is, therefore, important that the youth are trained to become:

- Front-liners
- Decisionmakers
- Organizers
- Leaders

It is not enough that the youth engage in action to improve their sector. They should have a far greater goal. During her processing, Ms. Aceron said, “Hindi lang sapat na may boses ang kabataan. Dapat may papatunguhan ang kanilang boses.” (It is not enough that the youth have a voice. Their voice should be in pursuit of a noble end.)

Youth-led efforts should always be purposive, i.e., undertaken in order to achieve objectives, such as: (1) youth development; (2) nation-building; and (3) the creation of a far better future.

**LESSONS LEARNED**

The initial processing and reflection session of G-Watch of its experience in piloting #SKasGWatch has yielded lessons on government responsiveness and citizen/ SK mobilization.

**Factors Affecting Government Response**

- The difficult and demanding process of getting government to respond has to do with the political context.
  - CSO engagement not given value as before.
  - There remains strong hesitation of government with accountability.
  - There are areas of political leadership that are best not engaged.
  - G-Watch and its allies may not be a priority to government because it is not an ‘admin NGO.’
• In light of a political leadership that is generally not open, previous engagement with government officials is a crucial factor in generating response. This still needs proactive outreach to agencies, especially allies.
• Leadership/ point person in the agency is a factor. Entry point is crucial.

Factors Affecting SK Mobilization

• The sector of citizens to be mobilized should shape the mobilization approaches in terms of:
  o Are they youth? Are they SKs or non-SKs?
  o What are their incentives/ imperatives in participating?
  o In some SKs, compulsion/ mandate is needed, hence the need to explore MOA with oversight agencies.
• Feudal, patronage-based and patriarchal characteristics of Philippine society affect the use of feedback and grievance redress mechanism (fear of reprisal from powers-that-be, and fellow beneficiaries alike prevent citizens from making use of complaint mechanism).
• An intervening variable in the mobilization of SKs is the non-implementation of the SK Reform Law.
  o Negative – the priority of SKs is attending to their immediate needs/ responsibilities.
  o Positive – they joined/ stayed because they think G-Watch can help them.
• Monitoring is not something SKs would immediately do (SK both as a sectoral body and as government), hence the need to (1) reframe accountability to engagement with youth programs (2) reassert that sectoral organizations are accountability mechanisms to begin with.

In the learning event, the participants were also asked to generate their lessons learned on the following:

• SK involvement in accountability efforts
• Mobilization of SKs
• Engagement with government agencies
• SK-government agency relationship
• SK-youth relationship
• Role of intermediaries/ facilitators (i.e., G-Watch)
• Others

Group 1

In its report, Group 1 asserted that the youth needs leadership, and that the SKs are in the best position to provide that leadership to the youth. But for the SKs to properly lead the youth, it is important that they follow the right processes.
The group also pointed out that having strong ties with their LYDO will enable the SKs to better mobilize their youth constituency. At the same time, it is important to develop partnerships between SKs and civil society organizations (CSOs). Fortunately, there are areas, such as Southern Leyte, wherein civil society groups are willing to work with SK leaders. In fact, during their small group discussion, Ms. Amelia Mancera of Southern Leyte declared that, “Handa akong sumugal para sa kabataan” (I am ready to bet on the youth).

Group 1 further pointed out that SK-CSO initiatives are likely to be successful if these are visible to the youth. Lastly, the Group affirmed the role of G-Watch as mediator, which bridges the SK agenda to other institutions and stakeholders.

**Group 2**

Group 2 began their report by stating that the involvement of SKs in accountability efforts can be done: (1) if there is clear and adequate information regarding these initiatives; and (2) if the SK Federations are also involved.

They also pointed out that the best way to mobilize the SKs is by using strategies that appeal to millennials (e.g., art exhibits). Transportation should also be provided, especially for SKs that have limited funds. Related to this point, efforts should be made to raise resources by forging partnerships with other groups and institutions.

The Group also shared that engaging government agencies requires tremendous patience, since the bureaucracy tend towards inertia. SK officials in the Group also experienced pasa-pasa (squeezing the balloon), wherein offices would refer them to other offices to escape accountability.

To break this impasse, it is important to have:
- Allies inside the bureaucracy.
- A vertically integrated approach to show that the SK agenda is a shared concern of the youth across levels.
- Passionate SK leaders.

To foster good relationships between the SKs and their youth constituents, the former must practice flexibility and pakikisama (smooth interpersonal relationship). Group 2 also emphasized that SK leaders should reject all forms of vote-buying since this practice corrupts the SK-youth relationship.
Lastly, the Group identified the role of intermediaries. These are the following:
1. Gather information and generate knowledge on SK-related issues.
2. Facilitate learning exchanges between SKs and other stakeholders.
3. Build networks to expand the constituency and allies of the SKs.

**Group 3**

In their report, the last Group stated that the Sangguniang Kabataan can be more effectively mobilized for accountability work if all SK officials (and not just the SK chairperson) will be given compensation.

They also emphasized the need to improve the Implementing Rules and Regulations of the SK Reform Act. Group 3 argued that doing so would address some of the major challenges in the implementation of RA 10742. They claim that at present, Philhealth benefits are still not extended to SK officials, and that several schools still do not recognize the scholarship entitlements stipulated in the SK Reform Law.

To better promote accountability, Group 3 recognizes the importance of allies inside the bureaucracy. They also see the need to create stronger bonds among independent-minded SK officials since they are the leaders who are most willing to undertake accountability work.

As a final point, Group 3 stated that the SK-youth relationship can be strengthened: (1) by regularly convening the Katipunan ng Kabataan (KK); and (2) by addressing the needs and demands of their youth constituents.
The Manual to empower the youth in leading accountability (EYLA) was presented to the participants of the learning exchange to gather additional feedback.

The Manual is written with the aim to guide SK officials in doing accountability by engaging local and national government. Its tone is informal, in order to capture the attention of its young readers. The Manual’s structure follows that of the monitoring tool used for the #SKasGWatch Project. As such, it provides tips and step-by-step procedures on how to do exact accountability, as well as expounding on key skills that they will learn during the process – from scanning and conducting consultations/FGD to using the eFOI platform, among many others.

Mr. Gab Peralta suggested adding quotations from Filipino heroes and icons. Mr. Lester Pangilinan, on the other hand, said that the Manual should provide the sources of the videos featured in the document.

In response to the points that were raised, Ms. Aceron stated that in revising the Manual, they will add an Annex on: (1) the Summary of the SK Reform Law; and (2) the SK Manual. She also pointed out that in the Manual’s introductory chapter, they will add a paragraph clarifying that the document will not discuss how the SKs will perform their legally mandated functions, but will focus instead on how the Sangguniang Kabataan can contribute to the accountability work of G-Watch.

*(For copies of the Manual, check www.g-watch.org.)*

**PROPOSALS ON NEXT STEPS**

In the learning exchange, participants conceptualized their emerging follow-up initiative to deepen their #SKasG-Watch work.

**Samal**

The proposal from Samal participants is entitled SKs Connection to 4ps Core: Youth Development Session. Its objective is to strengthen the connection of SKs with 4Ps beneficiaries.

The proposal outlined several activities from February until August, which are all meant to integrate the SKs in the implementation of 4Ps by empowering the former to handle the Youth Development Sessions.

On the other hand, the group admitted that they may not be able to join the simultaneous Ako, Ikaw, Tayo May Pananagutan (AIM-P) activity on February 14.
because it falls on a Friday, wherein SK leaders are busy with schoolwork. However, SK-Samal clarified that they will still conduct their AIM-P but will move it on a weekend.

Aceron praised the Samal proposal for providing a clear phasing of activities. She then instructed the G-Watch Center to check if there are standard processes for conducting YDS that the DSWD can adopt on a national scale. Aceron also asked the SK leaders of Samal to address the dynamics involving their SK Federation President.

**Southern Leyte**

The proposal from Southern Leyte entitled aims to engage more youth on the issue of accountability and train them as G-Watch monitors. The proponents have listed down several activities from February until August, which includes a ‘Briefing Orientation and Training Workshop for SK Leaders and LYDO.’

As the proposal was processed, the G-Watch Center was given the task of:

1. Identifying the policy that governs LYDOs.
2. Lobby the DILG to make capacity-building for LYDOs as one of the targets in the Seal of Good Local Governance (SGLG).
3. Lobby the DILG Central Office to issue a letter to DILG Southern Leyte to ensure the latter’s cooperation in the #SKasGWatch Project.

**Quezon City**

The proposal from Quezon City is entitled *CHUPIS for 4Ps (Community Honing through United Participation with Indigent Sector)*, which aims to organize SKs and the barangays as an independent third-party feedback and grievance redress mechanism for the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program. It listed down several activities and projects that will run until November.

The project components of the proposal are as follows:

- Kumustahang 4Ps, which will be a monthly meeting together with the Barangay and SK chairpersons to (1) address the issues concerning the 4Ps beneficiaries and their children; and (2) create a strong relationship among 4Ps members.
• 4Ps Pasaporte, which will be a rewards system to increase the level of participation and involvement of 4Ps members in barangay and SK projects.
• 4Ps Welfare Desk, which will document the grievances and concerns of 4Ps members to prompt public officials to take action.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Learning Event was concluded with Closing Messages from Mr. Nickholai Genosas (Samal) who hoped that the initiative continues, and thanked G-Watch and the Canada Embassy for opening their eyes and giving them the opportunity to participate in the project. Mr. Gema Mori (Southern Leyte) then mentioned the importance of knowing, and being active in addressing youth issues. Mr. Lester Pangilinan (Quezon City), in his message, reiterated the need to continue betting on the youth (pagtataya). He also thanked G-Watch and Canadian Embassy for the initiative that he said enabled them to undertake a similar initiative that received a recent recognition from NYC. Ms. Vicky Maglanque (G-Watch Center) finally closed by highlighting the immense potential of the SK as a platform for the youth to be engaged in social issues and be part of the solution. She thanked all the participants, the G-Watch sites that participated, and the partners for the support.

The pilot that covered 23 barangays in 3 cities has shown that SKs can be mobilized and trained to lead accountability initiatives. Mobilizing around 40 SK leaders from the three pilot areas, G-Watch engaged the SK leaders to lead accountability, particularly working with them in monitoring the government flagship poverty reduction program, 4Ps. The #SKasGWatch Project shows that SKs can be mobilized for monitoring of anti-poverty programs, but this needs an enabling environment: (1) integrating the accountability approach in their governance training, (2) facilitating linkages with agencies, (3) supporting policy/framework.

Working in 3 cities with around 40 SK leaders for a pilot-run, the #SKasGWatch Project validated its propositions. SKs can lead accountability in social programs, particularly in serving the youth beneficiaries of the program, through partnership and engagement. DSWD has also recognized the potential of SKs in supporting accountability in their programs. Strengthening the advocacy component of the G-Watch accountability approach would make it fit to what is needed in making this collaboration work.

G-Watch’s engagement with SKs for this work validates that an enabling policy environment is crucial for this form of sectoral representation to perform well. The SK Reform Law is supposed to make SKs perform better, but we found out that it is nowhere close to being implemented. The efforts of SK reform advocates has resulted in some progress, but a lot still needs to be done. The agencies responded affirmatively to the monitoring efforts of SK and G-Watch which serves as an opening for future endeavors towards achieving more transformative goals.
Strengthening the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) as an Accountability Mechanism in Local Governance (#SKasGWatch Project): A Learning Exchange
Solea Mactan Cebu Resort, Cordova, Cebu
25-26 January 2019

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