Learning to be Strategic

A G-Watch Think Piece on an Alternative Approach to Sustaining Reforms Based on MAVC Experience in the Philippines

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This think piece shares key lessons of G-Watch from the Making All Voices Count (MAVC) experience in the Philippines based on a learning process with the MAVC grantees from March to August 2017, which focused on the role of strategic action and adaptive learning on the issue of sustainability. Alongside this piece are two case studies on two selected MAVC grantees, one focusing on when and how digital technology works and the other on how learning for a strategic shift happens which are to be published separately by MAVC.

This piece is not an assessment of MAVC. It does not intend to explain why and how some worked/ did not work in the MAVC experience in the Philippines. The six key lessons shared in this piece from this learning process, which are enriched through review of related literature and secondary materials, are not exhaustive of the entire MAVC program in the Philippines. Only the experience of the MAVC grantees who actively took part in this process were taken into account and the level of participation of MAVC grantees in this process was varied.

This think piece is deemed useful as a source of lessons for the development community and civil society organizations who seek to undertake and take part in similar initiatives, as a source of research agenda for researchers and think tanks especially for those who are trying to distill what the MAVC program can say about specific research questions and as documentation of insights and ideas that can be used in the future for those who took part in this learning process.

For G-Watch and its partners, specifically, this will inform how it moves forward as it reboots to an independent action research organization.

G-Watch, MAVC and the Issue of Sustaining Reforms

Sustaining open government reforms until they achieve their desired impact and become irreversible changes in governance and politics is an issue that both government and civil society continue to grapple with. Civil society groups undertake initiatives after initiatives that get discontinued as soon as the funding runs out, with the same problems persisting. Innovations, buzzwords, "models" flood the scene at one point, and before understanding how they work (or did not work), another batch of innovations, buzzwords and models are up.

Meanwhile, many reform initiatives in government also get discontinued largely because of political transitions. Reforms die out and everything goes back to 'normal' as soon as the 'champions' leave or the political leadership changes. Improved performance is often a fluke or a temporary situation that happens

for as long as an adhoc intervention is there. Often, everything goes back to zero even after so much energy and resources have been poured into a reform effort.

The issue of sustainability is linked to the question of impact of transparency-participation-accountability (TPA) initiatives. Are we making any difference or are we just going in circles? The feeling can be likened to sitting in a rocking chair: moving back and forth but not going anywhere. The idea is if the changes achieved in initiatives (results) can be 'sustained,' then new problems and issues can be tackled moving forward, leading to deeper and more meaningful change. How realistic is this idea and is this how to best approach this issue?

Though the issue of sustainability has been taken up extensively, there has yet to be a systematic and collective effort to grapple with it, analyze how the issue is being approached, what is wrong with such approach, and offer an alternative approach.

G-Watch is formerly a social accountability program of a university founded in 2001 that is currently rebooting, in transition to being an independent national action research organization embedded in constituencies of civic and advocacy-oriented organizations all over the Philippines aiming to contribute in the deepening of democracy through the scaling of accountability and citizen empowerment. G-Watch, as an organization, has grappled with the issue of sustaining reforms in transparency, participation and accountability in order to achieve substantive change for quite awhile now given its many pioneering work on social accountability.[1]

G-Watch has done the scanning for MAVC at the start, producing a report that served as a baseline reference for the country strategy and program implementation plan in the Philippines. G-Watch director-convenor, Joy Aceron, (one of the writers), was a member of the Research Outreach Team (ROT) of MAVC tasked to assist the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) in the implementation of the research, evidence and learning component of MAVC, specifically in overseeing conduct of research projects and research uptake at the country level.

In its reboot to an independent action research organization, G-Watch aims to raise the voices of those closest to action in knowledge development. It also aims to explore an alternative way of producing knowledge that is critical-analytical, but at the same time practical and useful to practitioners, who G-Watch considers as collaborators and partners in knowledge development and research in partnership with allied international research centers and think tanks.

MAVC is a unique global program on accountable and citizen governance that puts learning at the center. Reflecting on the MAVC experience, there are lessons on the challenges and opportunities on learning and doing strategic citizen action that can be very useful for organizations like G-Watch and other development actors.

MAVC's strategy involves grant-making especially targeting the 'unusual suspects,' to 'make all or more voices count, providing conducive environment

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[1] For more information about G-Watch, check its new website: www.g-watch.org.

(support, linkages/ brokering) for innovation and scaling, particularly the use of ICT solutions to address persisting problems in governance and facilitate and enabling learning towards being strategic and sustainable citizen action.[2]

This think piece reflects on the experience of MAVC in the Philippines on 'learning to be strategic' as an alternative approach to addressing sustainability. This paper attempts to put forward an "alternative approach" to sustainability that is premised on strategic action and learning in order to address the limitations and weaknesses of what the paper describes as the "mainstream approach" to sustainability. One of the G-Watch's main observations is that while adaption was common in MAVC in the Philippines, learning to be strategic was rare. Finally, the paper points to the potential of learning towards strategic action in MAVC that may build the needed sustainable elements and political clout through proper facilitation and approach.

This piece is a product of the reflection of G-Watch of its involvement in the MAVC program: (1) conduct of country mapping that informs MAVC's strategy in the Philippines, (2) research on vertically-integrated civil society initiatives in the Philippines, and (3) its learning activities with MAVC grantees from May to August 2017 that focused on how to best grapple with the issue of sustaining the gains of open government initiatives, like the different MAVC initiatives that were undertaken in the Philippines in an attempt to put forward an alternative approach to sustainability.[3]

One of the main learning activity that served as basis for this piece is the Learning Event that took place on August 17, 2017 attended by MAVC grantees and G-Watch partners. The Learning Event reflected on the key lessons learned from MAVC experience and relevant initiatives.

Below are the six key lessons of G-Watch on the MAVC experience that reflects and synthesizes the key findings and insights from this learning process.

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[2] For more information about G-Watch, check its website: www.makingallvoicescount.org.

[3] The learning process undertaken to produce this think piece and the two accompanying case studies took place from May-August 2017 (6 months) involved the following activities and steps: (1) Review of the perspectives put forward by the donors and the common practices of CSOs, what this piece refers to as the 'mainstream approach' to sustainability, specifically reflecting on their strengths and weaknesses; (2) Crafting of an 'alternative approach' to sustainability by learning from the initiatives that have been sustained over time, such as the vertically-integrated initiatives profiled by G-Watch, brainstorming with G-Watch leaders and validating with MAVC grantees through a learning event; (3) Quick scanning of MAVC initiatives by reviewing proposals and reports, particularly learning from a few initiatives[3] determined in consideration of the following criteria: (a) with community engagement: operation involves communities and at the community level, (b) touches directly on the key themes of MAVC: issue of disaster management or participatory budgeting, (c) with digital technology application, (4) willingness and availability of the initiative; 4) In-depth learning from two initiatives through case study selected in consideration of the following criteria: (a) use of innovative tech-based solution (at least as proposed/ planned), (b) demonstrated practice of 'adaptive learning,' (c) designed to contribute in responsive and accountable governance, (d) willingness of the grantee to be case study material, and (e) approval of the MAVC-PH learning team; and (5) Facilitating collective learning and reflection with MAVC grantees and G-Watch leaders.

An 'Alternative Approach' to Sustainability: What and Why?

Lesson #1   *What needs to be sustained is the capacity for collective action, enabling citizen action in an ever-changing environment.*

Recent research points to growing empirical evidence suggesting that strategic approaches have more potential to achieving sustainable change (Fox 2014, Halloran 2015, Fox and Aceron 2016). The study on vertical integration (Aceron and Isaac 2016, Fox and Aceron 2016) documented initiatives that have achieved considerable gains through multi-level engagement using a wide variety actions involving various actors in a broad coalition/ networks.

One key factor in the cases documented was the ability of the groups to sustain the campaign for years to win significant policy victories and improvements in governance performance. The ability of the groups to adapt their tactics and actions amidst challenges and opportunities was also key to their success. The organizations learn about their environment to come up with appropriate actions and response at a given level.

The challenge is to bring current actors of TPA in the Philippines to think along the lines of strategic actions. This becomes imperative given the crisis in civil society action and democracy in the Philippines at present.

This is challenging given the prevailing practices of tactical and bounded actions that have been perpetuated by mainstream development partners. Tactical initiatives are also easier, simpler and more manageable. There have been plenty of "modeling" and "piloting," but scaling up actions to create a critical mass that will affect power shifts have been rare. (See Fox 2014 for difference between tactical and strategic and Fox 2016 for the concept of scale.)

How to support uptake of strategic approaches among civil society is one challenge. Framing it as an alternative way of approaching sustainability posts a possibility that this paper explores.

First, what is the common approach and what are the problems and challenges to it that hinder strategic citizen action.

There are different 'common' perspectives on the issue of sustaining reforms. Reviewing how the different donors ask their grantees about sustainability and asking the MAVC grantees the question "how do you approach the issue of sustainability," the perspectives can be categorized into the following overlapping categories:

- Initiative-focused sustainability – how the initiative will be sustained, replicated, multiplied
- Organizational sustainability – how the organization will be sustained
- Capacity-based sustainability – whether capacities of target beneficiaries have been enhanced with the assumption that such enhanced capacity will be utilized
- State institutionalization – continuation of gains through policies and systems in government
- Societal Institutionalization – creation of networks, platforms (online/ offline), communities

The table below summarizes the kind of questions asked by donors[4] and the response of MAVC grantees on the specific actions they have taken to address the issue of sustainability following the categories above.

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[4] The perspective of donors reflected upon here is limited on what is written on their relevant documents, particularly their Call for Proposals, which serve as guidance to civil society groups.

	Donor Questions	MAVC Grantees
Initiative-focused sustainability – how the initiative will be sustained, replicated, multiplied	UNDP: "Describe the plans your organization has to assure the sustainability of the activity supported by the grant funds. How will your organization measure the sustainability of the product or activity? How will the funds contribute to the sustainability of your organization?" EU: Describe a dissemination plan and the possibilities for replication and extension of the action outcomes (multiplier effects), clearly indicating any intended dissemination channel. AUSAID: What mechanisms does the project have to sustain its benefits after DAP assistance?	Piloting for replication (Bantay Kita, Shontoug, CODE-NGO, iBudget)
Organizational and financial sustainability – how the organization will be sustained, how to ensure funding continues for the organization and initiatives	EU: Institutional sustainability: e.g. structures that would allow the results of the action to continue to be in place after the end of the action, capacity building, agreements and local 'ownership' of action outcomes. AUSAID: Describe practical steps and specific plans to ensure sustainability in terms of organizational/institutional capacity as well as financial/technical viability of the project. EU: Financial sustainability: e.g. financing of follow-up activities, sources of revenue for covering all future operating and maintenance costs. AUSAID: Describe practical steps and specific plans to ensure sustainability in terms of organizational/institutional capacity as well as financial/technical viability of the project. ADB: It is the objective of ADB to cooperate with competent, experienced NGOs that have substantial knowledge in their fields of expertise, and with which cooperation is appropriate and mutually beneficial for ADB, NGOs, and governments. In project and programming work, ADB cooperates with NGOs when such cooperation supports and contributes to the effective- ness and sustainability of operations.	Fund-raising/ proposal development/ follow up project (IWPR, Shontoug, Bantay Kita) Sustain the organization (Shontoug)
Capacity-based sustainability – whether capacities of target beneficiaries have been enhanced	GPSA: How will we build sustained capacity with our project participants/beneficiaries and key audiences beyond, for example, one-time training or capacity building events? AUSAID: Describe practical steps and specific plans to ensure sustainability in terms of organizational/institutional capacity as well as financial/technical viability of the project.	Technical capacity of the communities (Shontoug) Develop a technology/ monitoring tool (Bantay Kita)

	Donor Questions	MAVC Grantees
State institutionalization – continuation of gains through policies and systems in government	EU: Policy level sustainability: e.g., where applicable, structural impact (improved legislation, consistency with existing frameworks, codes of conduct, or methods).	Integrate, mainstream the initiative in government processes from the start (IGNYTE, Shontoug, CODE-NGO, iBudget) "Institutionalization with funding (ULAP, iBudget) Adoption of policy or system (ULAP, CODE-NGO, BK, iBudget)
Societal Institutionalization – creation of networks, platforms (online/ offline), communities,		Engage different stakeholders/ partnerships - IGNYTE, IWPR, Bantay Kita, Shontoug, iBudget Association of organizations/ coalitions - IWPR, CODE-NGO, Shontoug, BK Website - IWPR, CODE-NGO Community ownership: BK, Shontoug
Others	EU: Environmental sustainability: what impact will the action have on the environment — have conditions been put in place to avoid negative effects on the natural resources on which the action depends and on the broader natural environment?	

Questions asked by donors like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the European Union in their Call for Proposals can be categorized as initiative-focused. There are MAVC grantees who also define sustainability in terms of replication, which can be categorized as initiative-focused. There are questions of EU on sustainability that center on organization and financial sustainability. Some MAVC grantees also share the same perspective as they approach sustainability of their initiatives in terms of future fund-raising and proposal development.

We observe that Australian Aid and Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA) advances a capacity-based sustainability in their Call for Proposal documents, which is similar to how some MAVC grantees approach sustainability: technical capacity and development of tools. There is also a perspective that looks at sustainability in terms of how it is embedded in the state in the form of policies, processes and mechanisms, which is quite common among MAVC grantees and a perspective that focuses on how the action and/ or its gains get embedded in society. EU's question on sustainability goes so far as looking at environmental sustainability.

In the discussions with MAVC grantees and G-Watch leaders, there are problems discussed in employing these mainstream perspectives. The first two tend to create an

environment that pushes competition among organizations, causing fragmentation and weakening of social capital within civil society. The practice of 'piloting' for replication also ignores the unique context.

Furthermore, organizational and financial sustainability perspective tends to push organizations to spend too much time and resources on 'technocratic' concerns as demanded by donors (donor-driven), limiting time and energy for advocacy and action which is demanding in being strategic. In fact, of late, there has been growing concern and criticisms on the 'technocratization' of CSOs.[5] Neither is enhanced capacity of target beneficiaries mean these capacities will be utilized towards a desirable ends.

The idea that initiatives need to be continued and replicated and organizations must behave like corporations may have also hindered growth and learning, as same ways of doing, same players, same problems, same analysis of the problem and same solutions are reproduced and multiplied, while context continues to change and evolve demanding different action and response (Notes, Learning Event, 17 August 2017). Furthermore, the mainstream approach to sustainability in the TPA field posts serious problems and limitations in effecting sustainable change because it targets goals that are subject to/ depended on the existing power structure. As a result, instead of effecting power shifts, it perpetuates the status quo by focusing on the "buy-ins" of powers-that-be (government, donors, etc) and organizational sufficiency.

Meanwhile, the assumption that policies and systems adopted in the government will be implemented and will continue to be observed/ practiced has long been proven to be often wrong based on the experience of the Philippines, as discussed in the Learning Event. There is no guarantee that when a law is passed, it will be implemented, like in the case of the Reproductive Health Law advocated by civil society for decades, passed into law four (4) years ago, yet implementation continues to be pending today. (Notes, Learning Event, 17 August 2017)

Given these challenges on the mainstream approach, an alternative view, hence, must check the directionality of power shifts specifically. What is being sustained and enabled over time?

Informative in developing this 'alternative approach' to sustainability is learning from a research on vertically-integrated citizen-led reform campaigns. One key factor in the cases documented was the ability of the groups to sustain the campaign for years to win significant policy victories and improvements in governance performance. The ability of the groups to adapt their tactics and actions and learn to make strategic shifts (if needed) amidst challenges and opportunities was also key to their success. The organizations learn about their environment to come up with appropriate actions and response at a given level at a given time.

We, hence, refer to this alternative approach as a movement perspective on sustainability. It is premised on one key thought: what needs to be sustained is the capacity for collective action. This is because meaningful change takes a long time and collective action problem evolves over time. History will not end because power is dynamic. This is a point of departure from the mainstream notion of sustainability that is premised on sustaining the organization, initiatives/ projects, champions and impact (changes in government) that largely relies on access to funding and buy-in of the State. The alternative comes from a power perspective with a grounded analysis of power based on: (1) sustaining collective action; (2) continuing the advocacy; and (3) leveraging knowledge.

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[5] This has been raised in civil society circles and social accountability/ anti-corruption conferences. One good read on this is the article of Sunil Babu Pant on The Guardian entitled 'Why grassroots activists should resist being 'professionalised' into an NG' that was released on 7 July 2017 accessible here: https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2017/jul/07/why-grassroots-activists-should-resist-being-professionalised-into-an-ngo?CMP=share_btn_fb

A portion of the discussion during the August MAVC-G-Watch Learning Event elaborates on this premise:

The alternative approach puts in the center the citizen as a building block of collective action. It goes beyond projects since it sees organizations as part of a bigger whole, whether these are networks, coalitions or collectives. Key to this is an ecosystemic view of TPA actions that, "convey the idea of going beyond bounded projects to address systemic accountability problems…connecting accountability initiatives so that the whole could be greater than the sum of the parts" (Fox and Halloran 2016). Central to the alternative view is a clear strategy—it has a clear analysis of the problem, a clear goal or change agenda, and has a well identified set of actors as well as actions/ tactics/ approaches, which consider important factors such as time and context.

Following this alternative approach, this think piece argues that the issue on sustainability issue this paper problematizes can be addressed through strategic citizen action. Strategic citizen action is defined by G-Watch as follows:

(1) Undertakes strategic action such as vertically-integration, a strategic approach that involves multi-level, multi-actor and multi-action engagement. (See Fox & Aceron 2016 and Aceron & Isaac 2016),

(2) takes scale into account (See Fox & Aceron 2016 and Fox 2016): rooted and with strategic alliances and broad constituencies at all levels,

(3) understands power dynamics and employs a political perspective of TPA work,

(4) a learning organization that generates lessons from performance towards achieving its targets,

(5) aims for long-term impact with sustainable/ self-sustaining change processes and power shifts,

(6) TPA initiatives as link to a broader progressive agenda. *(G-Watch Reboot Concept Note, internal document)*

Enabling strategic action requires a shift from institutional/ organizational approach to movement-building approach: from organizational-focused and donor-driven approaches to strategy-centered and collective action-driven.

To sustain the MAVC gains using movement-building perspective, the lessons and evidence on citizen action generated through it must be carried forward to build, enhance and/or revise MAVC's strategy to support collective action that will guide similar future initiatives.

How does citizen engagement lead to responsive and accountable governance?

Lesson #2   *Collective actions are sustained if citizens engage. Citizens engage if they are affected and moved by the problem being addressed and if they see results from their engagement, determined by their capacity to demand and the willingness and capacity of government to respond.*

Citizens engage if their felt needs are addressed, making the groundedness and relevance of an issue so important. The case of International for War and Peace (IWPR) partners and Shontoug communities have shown this. IWPR project with MAVC involved enabling of community media to engage in budget monitoring, while Shontoug MAVC project capacitated indigenous people communities in disaster planning and management. IWPR partner, WATCH North Cotabato has shown how to organize massive citizen action against corruption that angered people. Shontoug Foundation has been able to mobilize the communities to manage their disaster planning and response.

Jansept Geronimo of RIGHTS, on the other hand, shared that based on their experience (See Aceron and Isaac 2016 for the case study on Katarungan), citizens engage if an issue is "*ramdam sa bituka*" (felt in the gut). In their case, if they are to mobilize poor peasants, they should be able to deliver the proper mass line. It is therefore important to use the "*tamang lenggwahe*" (correct language). This is affirmed by Rorie Fajardo of IWPR who shared that based on the experience of CANA, what works is gut-level story telling that makes "our narratives simpler and our ideas accessible."

The other key to deepening citizen engagement is to expand the base of the citizens who actively engage to make the voices of the unheard heard, turning the processes inclusive and open. MAVC addresses this by particularly targeting the "unusual suspects" to add to the voices being heard. But what does unusual suspects mean?

The term "usual suspects" usually refers to big organizations in Manila with technical expertise on anti-corruption and good governance. These are the organizations that commonly receive funding from big donors. The other understanding is to engage the grassroots, poor communities, disadvantaged sectors.

Looking at the five focus initiatives of this paper, MAVC has achieved the objective of reaching the "unusual suspect" given the definition above.

> IWPR - Community media in Cotabato
> IGNYTE - Tech developer in Legazpi
> Shontoug - A faith-based foundation in Baguio helping IP communities
> Bantay Kita - A nationwide Coalition working with a local NGO in Northern Mindanao and an IP community
> CODE-NGO - Poor disaster prone LGUs

Except for IGNYTE that was tapped through Open Call, the way these organizations and their communities are tapped is through an existing partnership. This means it does not always have to be new organizations or communities. Sustaining existing ones that work or have shown track record would be another option.

Meanwhile, while mobilization of citizens seems to have come easy for most of the MAVC initiatives, the question is whether citizen mobilization by CSOs has been turned into a political clout that will pressure governments to respond to issues that the government would otherwise ignore.

Constructive engagement is central in the MAVC strategy in the Philippines. The limitation of constructive engagement is how it pulls the CSOs to where the government is at. Whether it has been successful in pushing the boundaries of what government should do

in response to what the citizens need is a question. The exchanges in the MAVC-G-Watch Learning Event shown in the table below provide a rich inside look into this emerging debate.

Constructive engagement vs. contentious politics (MAVC-G-Watch Learning Event, 17 August 2017)

- Jennifer Javier, INCITEGov: OGP is a platform where the CSOs and the government can work together. What the CSOs can do is limited even in making government comply with what they promised to do. The OGP is not a platform for the CSOs to command the government. We cannot make the government do what we want them to do just to make the relationship work.

- Eunice dela Cruz, ULAP: What matters is quality of representation. Not all of us can be there, so we need representatives who can really forward and verbalize our concerns and go back to us to report and get feedback. In engaging the government, it is going to the table and offering partnership. It is not demanding. It's like: "Hi, we're here, this is what we can offer." It's like we want to help, let's talk. And let's partner, we will be with you throughout this.

- Arvi Miguel, Bantay Kita: Now political transitions are always a concern. But the thing is when we go to the negotiating game or when we get to implement a project, what is actually the spirit of the engagement that you would like to espouse. It cannot be antagonistic: "we will be coming here as CSOs, we will be demanding this and that, and you should do your part, it is your responsibility as the government." No. What we always want to espouse is the spirit of collaboration. We have these concerns that we would like to be acknowledged as part of the bigger concerns. And if the government doesn't have an immediate solution, we go back to the table so we can propose what we can do. This way, we will get more buy in from the state, instead of being competitors or at-arms, we are walking hand and hand to resolve each and everybody's problem.

- Fed Marcelo, DAMPA: But what do you do if the government itself undertakes efforts to undermine participation?

- Joy Aceron, G-Watch: Fed's question is very important. There is limit to what government will respond to. If the government is responsive, there is no need for civil society, especially those that push for needs of the people. The government has a lot of interests to attend to and the interests, concerns and agenda of the people are frequently less priority. This is the reason civil society needs to push. If the bottomline of engagement is engaging on issues/ agenda with government buy-in, that automatically limits what can be pushed by civil society. How do we push the boundaries of engagement so that we actually get to claim the rights and take participation as our right and not as something granted to us and given out/allowed by the state. The problem with constructive engagement is that it tolerates and even nurtures a patrimonial state. I totally understand the need to balance, but how do we ensure that we do not look as if we are begging in the process and neglect the disposition that this is our right and responding to us is the duty of government officials as public servants. Civil society is really meant to provide that kind of dynamics that will push the state. The state is specifically created to maintain a specific system at work. Social movements move, state stays.

- Shigemi Muramatsu, ANSA EAP: Based on our experience in iBudget, one of the things we can do is strengthen the existing platform where government and civil society converse. For example, strengthening of the special barangay assembly or hopefully later on barangay assembly. We exhaust those existing platforms. Second, the importance of capacity-building and usual communication that we set this kind of engagement wherein we are on equal footing that will make it easier to attend to the humanistic side of the problem, not technical.

Documentation Report, MAVC-G-Watch Learning Event, August 17, 2017

The question of scale is situated in this discussion on how citizen engagement leads to responsive and accountable governance. Citizens engage if their felt needs are addressed - and if their needs are responded to, which is where government responsiveness comes in. Citizens want to see results, yet in the Philippines, there seems to be a strong (and perhaps violent) dissatisfaction towards the current political order for failing to make the life of many better. This sense of disillusionment and dissatisfaction could be affecting the

propensity of individuals to participate, undertake and join collective action.

This speaks of the limits of the impact of citizen action in the Philippines despite the projection of vibrancy and breadth of civil society. Behind all the many and colorful actions, where is the political clout? In a country experiencing 'democratic deficit' because of money politics and corruption that puts power in the hands of a few, the way to make those in power respond to citizens under a framework of democratic accountability (and not the corrupt-prone and disempowering system of patronage) is by reaching a certain scale - the needed numbers (the critical mass), alliances and actions across all the levels of decision--making. While the research on vertical integration supported by MAVC had examples of this kind of strategic citizen action, only a number of the MAVC grantees have utilized multi-level approaches.

What was the experience of MAVC in learning to be strategic to sustain its gains? One key observation is that *adapting was common, but learning to be strategic was rare.*

MAVC Director Fletcher Tembo defines learning as follows:

> "Learning' implies a continuous examination of our assumptions, asking difficult questions and seeking answers both from ongoing practice and from intentionally designed, evidence-based research ... It includes learning from mapping processes and interventions at different levels in the accountability ecosystem, and using this learning to create vertically integrated and strategic influence at these different levels. *Our learning can help us to achieve transformative change that is moving towards more sustainable, powerful, fulfilling and democratic systems and actor behaviours.*" (Making All Voices Count 2016: 45)

When asked how they have practiced 'adaptive learning,' the MAVC grantees shared a variety of answers that involved adjustments in their part to respond to challenges and hurdles that they have come across in the course of implementation. Below are some of these 'adaptive learning' applications:

- In securing the buy-in of decision-makers (IGNYTE, Bantay Kita, CODE-NGO, INCITEGov
- In securing the involvement of the community (Bantay Kita, IGNYTE, iBudget, NOAH
- In overcoming practical hurdles, such as time, logistics, scheduling of activities, delays in release of funds/ making (IGNYTE)

- In making the technology component work (Bantay Kita, Shontoug, IWPR)
- In adjusting the plan to make sure that it addresses the immediate need of the community/ stakeholders (Bantay Kita, ULAP)
- In sustaining the project (almost all)

Adaptive Practices without Strategic Shifts

The kind of learning observed in MAVC initiatives hardly involved "asking and rethinking assumptions and difficult questions," "mapping processes at different levels in the accountability ecosystem" or "using learning to create vertically integrated and strategic influence at these different levels" as Fletcher Tembo understands learning.

The practice of adaptive learning observed/ shared centered on adapting, surviving and coping. Adaptive learning has been reactionary and more towards addressing operational/ practical challenges. It is not learning to be strategic. Perhaps the term itself brings one to think like that - it is about 'adapting,' i.e.' adjusting, coping, surviving given the challenges.

The initiative that has a more explicit effort towards adaptive learning is the project of INCITEGov in ensuring the continuity of OGP given the political transition after elections. The need 'to think and act politically' was needed to manage the transition and ensure government's buy-in. The sharing of the INCITEGov representative in the MAVC-G-Watch Learning Event shows that there was power analysis going on as the CSOs maneuver this delicate terrain. There was thinking of what kind of incentives and what

OGP gains can be used as leverage. It was pragmatic and calculating to get the buy-in.

However, the intention was to maintain the same space using the same approach: constructive engagement using transactional approach. This was effective in maintaining the space, indeed. What that space can achieve and the implication of the approach of keeping it on the capacity of civil society and the attitude of government towards civil society has yet to be seen.

Adaptive Learning in INCITEGov's Engagement in OGP

Question: How did the civil society manage the transition of OGP to the new government?

Jennifer Javier, INCITEGov: We had to prove the new administration that CSOs have value-added to convince them to have CSOs in the table co-chairing this partnership and having CSOs have voice in terms of direction and policy setting. We did all the groundwork independent of the government to prove we have value and we have big help. It is a big help that the government, especially Sec. Diokno, got exposed to how the international OGP works. The Paris trip was a big help to get the buy-in of Sec. Diokno, Grace Poe and Sec. Andanar. OGP is an international platform so there is an international pressure to this current administration to sustain or to continue the partnership so I guess yung international arena has claimed a big role. The joke is because of the Paris summit, we got the buy-in of Sec. Diokno. Maybe because it shows how the other countries experience the harmonious relation ng civil society and government.

Documentation Report, MAVC-G-Watch Learning Event, 17 August 2017

Single Tactics and Approach instead of Multi-Level, Multi-Action

The approaches being employed by organizations are observed to be limited and not linked to other approaches and tactics. In a conversation with one of the communities of Shontoug, when we asked what will they do to ensure that their disaster management plans will be funded by their governments, the community leaders shared that they would rather engage foundations and NGOs to support their plan because governments are slow to respond based on their experience. In a dialogue with the community of iBudget, when we asked what will they do if the LGU officials do not keep their promise of funding their projects, it took some time for the participants from the community to respond, through one said they can get back at the government official in the elections. Such action, however, is not part of the design of the initiative and our general feeling is that citizens being mobilized by CSOs are no longer being taught of contested politics and claim-making as part of wide array of approaches strategic citizen action can undertake.

In a sense, learning to be strategic requires solid power analysis not to fit in with what authority can give, but to demand more from authority to effect real change. Because it aims for systemic/ sustainable change, such learning requires rethinking and critical reflection of basic assumptions that inform one's goals and vision. Learning to form/ build coalitions on shared analysis, goals, aspirations and language to harness collective action and build political clout is also a huge part of learning to be strategic. This also means combining diverse approaches and tactics to improve effectiveness.

Reflecting on the lessons from the vertical integration research, key to multi-level integrated citizen action is a clear and specific goal/ sustainable change that is rooted in citizen needs.

To be strategic is demanding and it is rare that one organization alone could pull it off. All the vertically-integrated initiatives studied by G-Watch had coalition-building component. For MAVC initiatives in the Philippines to be strategic, therefore, attempting to link them together as part of one holistic strategic program is a useful approach. Coalition-building efforts should

have been a central approach to ensuring that MAVC initiatives were strategic. Has it been supportive of real grounded coalition-building or, like many donors, facilitative of fragmentation?

A quick scan of the MAVC initiatives in the Philippines point to disaster management as the most common policy issue tackled (CPA, CODE NGO, Shontoug, NOAH, IGNYTE). However, most delve on the question of mechanism or approach to citizen engagement without specific policy goal. These mechanisms include the Open Government Partnership/ OGP (ULAP, INCITEGov, JRIG), participatory budgeting, (ANSA-INCITEGov-ULAP, ANSA-CMB, participatory audit (ANSA-CPA) and collective space for innovation (HiFi, MAP.ph).

The lack of a single policy change agenda could have possibly made it more challenging for MAVC grantees to learn to be strategic even with the presence of spaces for sharing of experience, updating and collective learning, not an uncommon pitfall of global/ multi-national/ international funding facilities. While there have been efforts to coordinate and share updates among the MAVC grantees, one key challenge in bringing everyone together was a question of specific common goal/ sustainable change rooted in citizen need that each initiative contributes to.

Need for a Conducive Environment for Learning to be Strategic

There is also a question of the incentives for organizations to learn new approaches and the time they have to do so. While the flexibility of MAVC was noted as supportive and conducive of the ability of the organizations to adjust/ adapt (IGNYTE, Bantay Kita), adapting and learning new approaches takes time and for many, there was just not enough time. Real learning is rare because it takes time, a good intelligent design and unique kinds of relationships between and among CSOs, donors and researchers.

The other challenge is correct uptake of ideas and concepts. Jalton Taguibao of Tech4PRI shared his observation about some of the initiatives that seem to have adopted a

misconception of the notion of micro- and macro-levels—that "*Kung nagagawa sa komunidad, baka maaari ding gawin sa nasyunal*" (If it can be done at the community level, it is possible to be replicated at the national level). He further pointed out that, "*Kada antas, iba ang stratehiya, iba ang diskarte*" (Every level requires a different strategy and different set of actions). This is important to stress out because in the Philippines, context varies on every level of decision-making and every local official and bureaucrats at every level can be veto players of a reform. This makes it imperative to develop multi-strategies per level through community organizing (CO) and mass movement building, while creating alliances within the State. The question is if this idea is picked up correctly by those that tried to use multi-level approaches.

In fact, there might be a need to reflect on how MAVC as a program in the Philippines has demonstrated a strategic shift when needed. One opportunity/ need for a strategic shift for the program should have been in the entry of the new government when the participatory budgeting (which was MAVC-PH's main theme) was abolished, priorities have changed and configuration of key actors in state-society engagement/ constructive engagement changed. What was needed then to explore was a shift from constructive engagement to pressure politics especially on Bottom-up-Budgeting (BuB), to push back against abolition. Such shift, while mentioned in the country analysis for the Learning Plan, was not taken up.

Who is Learning is Key

Meanwhile, the case of WATCH North Cotabato, a province-based organization that is a local partner of the IWPR in its MAVC project, shows a rare case of learning towards a strategic shift. WATCH North Cotabato is endeavoring a strategic shift: from single approach of pressure politics to employing an integrated approach: pressure politics and constructive engagement. The case study noted that what enabled the strategic shifts was convergence of interests, capacity-building and linkaging and track record, orientation and groundedness of the

organization and its leaders. (Tugawin and Aceron 2017)

The organization's analysis of the problem that informs its framework of engagement is also a factor. For example, for organizations like RIGHTS, their actions are guided by a framework for engagement (Documentation Report, Learning Event, 17 August 2017), which is informed by political analysis and discourse (or ideological disposition/ history). This could mean that learning must also involve. This is how learning is crucial to be strategic. Sound analysis, solid empirical basis and grounded theorizing is crucial to inform a strategy and framework of engagement for a long-term action. A good question to ask is if there are organizations that are more predisposed to deeper social and historical analysis that is crucial to strategic action.

The case of WATCH North Cotabato and the vertical integration initiatives show that the orientation/ historical background of the organization seems to play a part in the initiatives' propensity and capacity to do strategic shifts. Who is targeted to be learning, hence, is key.

Learning to be Strategic in the Use of Digital Technology

Lesson #4   Digital technology indeed posts opportunities for innovative solutions to address existing goals in governance, but it also posts dangers and pitfalls and applying it to transform and boost collective action has been rare.

The Theory of Change of MAVC points to the advent of new technologies as an opportunity to create innovative solutions or enhance existing efforts in addressing persistent problems and challenges in governance. In this light it tried to understand when and how the use of technology enables citizen engagement. The table below shows the goals specified in the proposal of MAVC grantees with technology component.

	Make information more accessible	Intermediation *(to generate feedback and report for transmission to authorities; to facilitate exchange of information)*	Infomediation *(to make the information more understandable to users; to transmit and receive information)*
Continued Tech	NOAH (website/ mapping) CODE-NGO (website) JRIG (website) PCIJ (datasets)	IPWR-CANA (online reporting) MAP.ph (website for crowd-sourcing of info)	IGNYTE SHONTOUG (participatory offline mapping, two-way radio)
Discontinued Tech/ Pursued 'blended approach'	Bantay Kita (online reporting) ULAP-EITI (online database)	ANSA-CMB (online feedbacking) ULAP-BuB (online reporting)	

Nuancing the Use of Digital Technologies

What is common in the use of technology in the experience of MAVC grantees is how it supports dissemination, generation and consolidation of information. However, the challenge for those that failed to make technology work was the access to information, translating information into tech form using language that is understandable and encouraging people to provide/ report information.

One the other hand, MAVC grantees who attended the MAVC-G-Watch Learning Event shared the growing concern over the "dangers and pitfalls" of the use of technology: use of social media for harassment and intimidation, security and privacy issues,

dissemination of fake news, perpetuation of existing marginalization of those without access. (Notes, Learning Event, 17 August 2017.) Also, a more transformative application of digital technology to enable and boost collective action has yet to be seen.

The experience of MAVC in the Philippines on the use of digital technology validates the need to nuance when and how digital technology will be useful. While some experience shows that the use of digital technology gained results and value-added to what they do (IGNYTE, Bantay Kita, NOAH, CODE-NGO, FMA shared in the Learning Event), digital technology is only a component of the initiative that will have to involve other approaches and tactics to achieve a goal. This makes it crucial to know the gap that

technology will fill in first before it is applied. The experience of IGNYTE is a good case for this. Balangay is integrated in the overall effort on improved disaster management of the city of Legaspi, which makes it relevant and useful. Strategic thinking was key here in the useful application of digital technology: in order to fill a gap in governance, ground the application on people's needs and experience, and enable collective action.

The ongoing research of Sheena Opulencia on accountability mechanisms utilized in Yolanda also yielded the same point. The research shows that mechanisms and platforms alone are not enough. Complementing actions must be taken to enable these mechanisms to support accountability in disaster management – actions such as system/ structure within government, awareness campaign, mobilization and capacity-building of citizens, partnerships, etc. In fact, it is very clear that in most cases, use of digital technology alone cannot lead to citizen engagement, especially responsive and accountable governance (Notes, Research Grantees Meeting, 18 July 2017).

"People-ware Before Software"

The Philippine MAVC experience highlights the centrality of the people in the use of digital technology in governance. Peoples are the users of technology, hence what must be developed must correspond to their situation and needs. IGNYTE studied the situation of the communities to develop an app the respond to their needs. The app uses Filipino language to make its content accessible to the people.

In contrast, for IWPR-CANA, the application of digital technology did not precede a clear understanding of how such innovation can be useful in ongoing efforts. This experience is instructive of a crucial element in the choice of people of technology to use. IWPR-CANA's partner WATCH North Cotabato has been successful in using radio and Facebook in mobilizing people and generating feedback in the past, yet the new technology introduced by IWPR-CANA through MAVC (online reporting) did not work. People did not use it for reporting/ feedbacking. The case study on WATCH North Cotabato shows that trust and familiarity is a factor in that choice of technology to use. People use technologies involving people they trust and are familiar with, especially in initiatives as sensitive as reporting incidences of corruption and abuse. (Tugawin and Aceron 2017)

The same was the experience of ULAP. The design made wrong assumptions about the situation on the ground (internet access, capacity, readiness) that resulted to an inappropriate application of technology (interview notes, dela Cruz, 20 June 2017). As pointed out in the Learning Event, "define the need first before determining the technology, not the other way around;" "do not sacrifice the advocacy over technology" (Notes, Learning Event, 17 August 2017).

The experience of Bantay Kita in exploring the use of digital technology is a good case of using technology that is appropriate according to need in a way that yielded benefit/ gain to the advocacy. The box below shares this experience in detail.

Bantay Kita's 'Innovative' Use of Digital Technology with an IP Community

Bantay Kita, in its adjusted project design, initially explored using an online mapping technology that uses geotagging to map the mining areas. This was later on adjusted to digitized community mapping that was for internal use of the community. Because the LGU has the capacity and to ensure the buy-in of government agencies, Bantay Kita tapped the LGU to assist in the digitization.

The adjustment was done because the participation of the community in the mapping itself was deemed important for the community to own the map. It is kept for internal use and not published online to avoid exposing the community to players that can make use of the information to take advantage of the community.

The use of technology in this case is not what is commonly expected: it is not online and it is simply to

enhance (digitize) a people's output (manual community map), but it worked in a significant way. According to the IP leaders that we interviewed, because there's a digitized map, they have a complete understanding of what constitutes their ancestral domain. Before, without the digitized map, no one has a complete knowledge of it. More importantly, because the mapping was participatory and the output is owned by the community, this simple map is viewed to be critical in avoiding future conflicts, which were common before on the issue of land boundaries. Furthermore, the digitization of the map involved the LGU, the government agencies concerned accept the map as legitimate that they in fact intend to use it for planning development interventions/ services for the community.

(Based on interviews with Datu Eulogio Kalingayan, Datu of the IP community in Rosario, Agusan del Sur; Beverly Besmanos, Bantay Kita; Rex Linao, Foundation for the development of Agusanons, Inc.; FGD with LGU and NCIP officials, 27-28 July 2017.)

The Central Role of the 'Action Strategist'

Lesson #5   *Adapting to situations is natural to grounded organizations. There are many varied ways this is done by different organizations, but key in 'connecting-the-dots' is the person designing, facilitating and adjusting the initiative on the ground.*

Global Integrity defines Adaptive Learning as follows: "...adaptive learning — a structured, data-driven, problem-focused and iterative approach to learning by doing, which engages with local political realities while drawing on experiences from elsewhere — at the heart of their efforts to design and implement effective governance reforms. In so doing, we help reformers close the gaps between policy commitments and implementation and contribute to better governance and development outcomes." (Hudson, 2016)

In interviewing the MAVC grantees and studying some of the initiatives, the 'adaptive learning' practice or ways and means to adapt/ adjust to situations observed by G-Watch is more embedded in everyday engagement of the key actors. When asked, how do they learn to adapt/ adjust to situations, the following were identified:

- Use of planning/ analytical tools or process/ brainstorming – ULAP
- Grounded knowledge/ based on experience/ reacting to challenges as they come – IGNYTE, IWPR, Shontoug, CODE-NGO, Bantay Kita
- Learning from past projects/ experience, with the current project as continuation - ULAP, IWPR, Shontoug, CODE, Bantay Kita
- Collaboration with partners who become source of knowledge and skills needed – IGNYTE, Bantay Kita, Project NOAH
- Monitoring and evaluation (internal and external-reporting to donor) – IGNYTE, IWPR, Shontoug, Bantay Kita, CODE NGO
- Learning events - Bantay Kita, IWPR

These 'adaptive learning' practices are embedded, not top-down. Except for the use of analytical tools and M&E (which were also used very informally usually, as described), the practices are not exactly methodological and systematic. Also, their adaptive learning process has been collaborative with the key actors of their project, including the community, serving as their learning partners. As Beverly Besmanos shared (notes, interview, 27 July 2017): "*Ang daming natutunan* [you learn a lot] if you are coming together. We work with stakeholders in projects because they help you make things happen."

What resulted in these learning exercises are adaptive practices. One crucial question is whether adaptation is the same as learning or adaptation is enough.[6]

In Between Strategic Action and Adapting

Learning to adapt is different from learning to be strategic. However, in between these are practices that "connect the dots," efforts that translate activities to outcome, operations to

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[6] In an email exchange with Prof. Jonathan Fox (August 9, 2017), he shared that in International Relations literature, there is an approach that distinguishes learning and adaptation. A footnote from one of this papers published in 1998 entitled "When Does Reform Policy Influence Practice? Lessons from the Bankwide Resettlement Review" makes a point that we find useful to quote here: "For a comprehensive discussion of the institutional-learning approach, see Ernst B. Haas, When Knowledge is Power: Three Models of Change in International Organization (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). Learning refers to "situations in which an organization is induced to question the basic beliefs underlying the selection of ends" (p.36), Haas' broad overview of diverse international organization finds that "adaptive behavior is common, whereas true learning is rare" (p. 37).

impact and a single action to related approaches and actions in a given initiative.

What is observed in selected organization's effort to 'connect the dots' is the central role of a unique actor: the 'leader' who makes things happen on the ground, translating the plans into realities, making the plan/ design work, adjusting it according to what is needed by linking with different critical actors/ stakeholders and connecting the different actions/ approaches/ tactics; a person who is engaged in the action itself, while being involved as well in the thinking, designing, learning and reflection.

Jonathan Fox in an article (2017) calls this kind of actor, the 'Action Strategist': "civil society thinkers and policy reformers who are directly engaged with transforming governance by promoting citizen action from both above and below."

G-Watch found an action strategist in every initiative that displayed adaptive practices that try to connect the dots:

- Sister Julie Garwinen for Shontoug Foundation
- Frei Sangil for IGNYTE-Balangay
- Abner Francisco of WATCH-North Cotabato for IWPR-CANA
- Beverly Besmanos for Bantay Kita

Sister Julie was pivotal in securing the active participation of the community for Shontoug DRRM Hub project. A known community organizer in Cordillera, which is part of her mission as a nun, Sister Julie has been engaging the community on various issues for several years already linking them up with concerned national government agencies and NGOs. She was also involved in Shontoug's linkaging with city-level local government officials. As an officer of the city-/ regional-wide coalition of NGOs, she is crucial in bridging the community and the city and regional level NGO actions and in sustaining such operation.

Frei Sangil is an Information Technology professional who manages a tech developer company. A native of Legaspi, she herself confronted the problem she wanted to

address through a tech solution. With her exposure in the tech industry and involvement in Legaspi civil society, she was well positioned to create the necessary connections that enabled her to navigate the realities of governance to ensure a useful application of technology. Being young, she was able to tap outside the usual suspect (e.g., an organization of anime enthusiasts who became volunteer operations group for the project) and she displayed an open disposition towards learning.

Abner Francisco is a well-known community media practitioner and radio commentator in North Cotabato. He has a wide following on radio and social media that he uses to mobilize for anti-corruption and good governance advocacies. He heads WATCH North Cotabato and leads the the strategic shift they are currently going through with the help of IWPR. He facilitates, coordinates and orchestrates the linkaging with the local government officials and the accompanying advocacy campaigns. Being a media practitioner, he has also written several articles about their initiatives, serving as the group's spokesperson as well.

Beverly Besmanos is based in Mindanao and handles the operation of Bantay Kita in Mindanao. Mindanao is a complex context. In navigating such demanding terrain, it is crucial that Beverly is a Mindanaon who knows about its history, people and culture. In Bantay Kita's project, her role was pivotal in making sure that the project works.

How an Action Strategist Works

Bantay Kita initially explored using digital technology in making the management of the royalty being received by their indigenous people community transparent, but this objective had to be scrapped totally because it was not feasible on the ground. The original design largely developed at the national did not fit ground realities. It had to be adjusted.

Beverly linked up with a local NGO (also a member of Bantay Kita) that helped her in reaching out to the IP community. Through Bantay Kita network, she made sure that the concerned agencies of the government, such

as the National Commission for Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), was part of the process all throughout. Most importantly, she performed the most difficult task of tackling an issue that responds to the need of the community at the same time relevant to the local NGO, local government and national government agencies and Bantay Kita as a national coalition.

In a fast-paced life of practitioners and CSOs, learning could be daunting, a luxury not everyone can afford. Doers 'think with their feet,' as they say. Adapting and adjusting is natural to organizations because they have to make things work. Beverly Besmanos calls it "on-the-go learning." How well they do so and how strategic (multi-level, multi-action, broad) and effective are their actions is determined by-and-large by the presence of the action strategist who connects the dots.

Learning as a Platform and Enabler of Coalition-Building for Strategic Action

Lesson #6	*Separate and diverse organizations can be moved to working as one coalition and community with an ecosystemic view of accountability where each one can play a part or find their place in a whole. Integrated approaches like accountability ecosystem and Scaling Accountability allows such encompassing framework with a hold and direction. This process - which involves both relationship-building, collective and critical thinking and introspection that is grounded at the same time informed by theory and empirical research - needs to be properly and ably facilitated.*

The MAVC-G-Watch learning event on "doing citizen engagement differently" is informed by a report on an international learning event that G-Watch co-hosted with the Accountability Research Center (ARC) and International Budget Partnership (IBP) in 2015 in Washington, DC. The report points to the need to facilitate the 'connecting the dots' on the premises on accountability ecosystem, so that 'the whole is greater than the sum of its parts":

"In contrast to the conventional idea of "scaling" as involving the replication of local pilots, our use of the term was intended to convey the idea of going beyond bounded projects to address systemic accountability problems. To get at this issue, the conveners' agenda focused on different ways of connecting accountability initiatives so that the whole could be greater than the sum of the parts, which we called "integrated approaches to civil society monitoring and advocacy." This umbrella concept tries to capture both public interest advocacy across different levels of governance, as well as citizen engagement with governmental checks and balances institutions." (Fox and Halloran, et.al., 2016)

It was on this premise that G-Watch attempted to map the different MAVC and other initiatives using the Scaling Mapping tool (Fox and Aceron 2016, Aceron and Isaac 2016), so as to see if the participants could locate themselves and 'connect the dots' in the process. It demonstrates how vertical integration's scaling accountability mapping matrix could 'extract' the strategy behind the MAVC program implementation in the Philippines to distill the gains in terms of where the program was present and the innovative solutions/ spaces/ tools that it had introduced. This then showed where (what actions at what level) was it lacking/ needing more effect/ intervention in the future given a specific target policy/ governance reform win. The exercise only assumed that the different actions are part of one campaign aiming for one clear goal (usually, a policy win) since in reality, the initiatives had different policy goals.

The table below showed the result of the exercise. Taking the MAVC grantees and G-Watch partners as one, the mapping shows a vertically-integrated presence, though it seems lacking in monitoring and engagement with State accountability institutions. The group as a whole has the track record, capacity and propensity to fill-in all the gaps, connect the dots to undertake integrated, strategic action. The only question is for what end.

	Barangay	City/ Municipal	Provincial	National	International
Table 1: Constituency-Building Across Scale					
Grassroots Organizing	Dampa LayerTech Shontoug Bantay Kita G-Watch	LayerTech Shontoug RIGHTS G-Watch	IWPR DAMPA CODE BK Shontoug G-Watch		DAMPA
Coalition-Building among Shared Constituency	DAMPA HCS Shontoug RIGHTS	Shontoug HCS CODE RIGHTS G-Watch	IWPR HCS RIGHTS G-Watch	HCS FMA RIGHTS VOICE DAMPA G-Watch	HCS FMA Voice RIGHTS
Cross-Sectoral Constituency-Building	DAMPA FMA RIGHTS	G-Watch	CODE-NGO Shontoug G-Watch	FMA RIGHTS Voice DAMPA G-Watch	Voice G-Watch
Mass collective action	DAMPA HCS Shontoug	RIGHTS Shontoug	IWPR FMA RIGHTS	IWPR FMA RIGHTS G-Watch	
Public education	DAMPA LayerTech Shontoug FMA G-Watch	Shontog LayerTech G-Watch	IWPR G-Watch	IWRP FMA G-Watch	FMA IWPR
Independent CSO Monitoring	Bantay Kita G-Watch	G-Watch	IWPR BK G-Watch	G-Watch	
Horizontal Exchanges of Experiences		DAMPA G-Watch	DAMPA HCS G-Watch	Voice HCS G-Watch	Voice G-Watch
CSO Policy Alternative	G-Watch	CODE-NGO G-Watch	G-Watch	FMA CODE-NGO G-Watch	FMA
Use of ICT	DAMPA FMA	FMA	FMA	FMA Voice G-Watch	FMA Voice

CSO Interfacing with the State	Barangay	City/ Municipal	Provincial	National	International
Policy Advocacy with the Executive	RIGHTS DAMPA IWPR Bantay Kita G-Watch	DAMPA CODE-NGO G-Watch	Heritage Bantay Kita G-Watch	HRC CODE-NGO FMA RIGHTS G-Watch	DAMPA
Policy Advocacy with the Legislative	DAMPA	DAMPA G-Watch	G-Watch	Dampa FMA HCS RIGHTS G-Watch	
Legal Recourse	RIGHTS		IWPR	RIGHTS G-Watch	
Participation in "Invited Spaces"	DAMPA G-Watch	IWPR G-Watch	G-Watch	RIGHTS DAMPA FMA Voice HCS G-Watch	Voice G-Watch
Participation in "Claimed Spaces"	RIGHTS	CODE-NGO G-Watch	IWPR G-Watch	LayerTech CODE-NGO Voice RIGHTS G-Watch	Voice G-Watch
Engagement with Accountability Agees		G-Watch	Bantay Kita IWPR G-Watch	DAMPA RIGHTS FMA IWPR G-Watch	

Table 2: Interfacing with the State

Multi-level engagement is a way to think and act politically. The exercise shows that such process can be facilitated using the Scaling Accountability tool. Learning can be a way to build coalitions too. More importantly, the willingness and enthusiasm of the participants in this exercise that the potential is there to nurture a multi-level, multi-action coalition for as long as it is facilitated according to a certain approach that is premised on strategic action.

This process of bringing different actors and initiatives together in a multi-level strategic action is promising in addressing future challenges and constraints and taking advantages of opportunities of collective action for as long as clear policy change agenda is collectively defined and shared. This process undertaken in the Learning Event is a good first step in building the needed political clout to achieve sustainable changes. Many of the participants in their evaluation expressed the appreciation of the process, which can be carried forward to a full-blown coalition-/ community-building effort that can sustain the gains and make use of the lessons learned from MAVC and related initiatives.

This think piece shares an alternative approach to sustainability and uses this framing to put forward key insights on learning to be strategic from the Making All Voices Count (MAVC) experience in the Philippines based on a learning process with the MAVC grantees which focused on the role of strategic action and adaptive learning on the issue of sustainability.

It asserts that strategic citizen action is sustainable Transparency-Participation-Accountability effort. An alternative approach to addressing sustainability that can be explored is learning to be strategic because what needs to be sustained is the capacity for collective action, enabling citizen action in an ever-changing environment through learning.

Collective actions that are strategic are observed as more promising in delivering lasting and sustainable results. Learning is key to being strategic, yet strategic action is hardly the purpose of the observed practice of 'adaptive learning' in MAVC. While adaption was common, there was hardly a case of strategic shift. Single approach or tactical interventions were common, while multi-level and multi-action approach was hardly observed. The absence of a single policy change goal, weak coalitional processes and top-heavy decision-making could be a factor. In rare situations where strategic shift was observed, orientation and groundedness of the organization and its leaders is deemed a factor for such strategic shifts or learning to be strategic. Who is supposed to learn, hence, is key.

Adapting to situations is natural to grounded organizations. There are many varied ways this is done by different organizations, but key in connecting-the-dots is the person designing, facilitating and adjusting the initiative on the ground, the action strategist. What is observed in selected organizations' 'adaptive learning' is the central role of the action strategist: the 'leader' who makes things happen on the ground, translating the plans into realities, making the plan/ design work, adjusting it according to what is needed by linking with different critical actors/ stakeholders and connecting the different actions/ approaches/ tactics; a person who is engaged in the action itself, while being involved as well in the thinking, designing, learning and reflection.

Strategic thinking is key in the useful application of digital technology: in order to fill a gap in public management, ground the application on people's needs and experience, and enable collective action. The experience of MAVC in the Philippines on the use of digital technology validates the need to nuance when and how digital technology will be useful. Use of digital technology alone cannot lead to citizen engagement, and especially responsive and accountable governance. The Philippine

MAVC experience highlights the centrality of the people in the use of digital technology in governance. Peoples are the users of technology, hence what must be developed must correspond to their situation and needs.

Separate and diverse organizations can be motivated to working as one coalition and community with an ecosystemic view of accountability where each one can play a part or find their place in a whole. Integrated approaches like accountability ecosystem and Scaling Accountability allow such encompassing framework with a hold and direction. Multi-level engagement is a way to think and act politically. This process - which involves both relationship-building, collective and critical thinking and introspection that is grounded at the same time informed by theory and empirical research - needs to be properly and ably facilitated. A key way forward is to use learning to be strategic as a platform and enabler of coalition-building for strategic action and continue building the capacity for learning to be strategic.

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Key Informant Interviews

Besmanos, Beverly. (2017, July 27). Bantay Kita. San Agustin, Surigao del Sur.

Celzo, Rhea Joy. (2017, August 2). Individual Balangay app user. Legazpi City.

Dela Cruz, Crystal Eunice. (2017, June 20). Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines (ULAP). Quezon City.

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Marasigan, Rio. (2017, August 1). University of the Philippines-Nationwide Operational Assessment of Hazards (UP-NOAH). Quezon City.

Paragas, Marietta. (2017, July 6). Shontoug Foundation. Baguio City.

Sangil, Frei. (2017, June 14). Layertech. Legazpi City.

Learning Events, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Community Visits

2017, August 17. Making All Voices Count (MAVC) and Government Watch (G-Watch) Learning Event. Pasig City.

2017, August 16. Government Watch (G-Watch) Core Group discussion. Pasig City.

2017, August 10. FGD with members of Watch Cotabato. Kidapawan City.

2017, August 5-6. Site visits to target communities of the joint project of ANSA-EAP, CODE-NGO and ULAP. Bohol.

2017, August 2. FGD with Legazpi City local government officials and civic leaders. Legaspi City.

2017, July 18. Making All Voices Count (MAVC) Research Grantees' Meeting. Pasig City.

2017, July 5. FGD with the villagers of Bauko, Mountain Province.