



Rapid Field Appraisal of Decentralization

*Cordillera
Administrative Region*

CAR

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Exciting New Initiatives in Governance

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It has been 18 years since Republic Act (RA) 7160 or the Local Government Code (LGC) was implemented in the Philippines. In the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), another kind of autonomy – regional autonomy – was a major topic prior to the passage of the LGC in 1991. In fact, just a year earlier, an organic act (RA 6766) to establish an autonomous regional government for the Cordillera was put to a plebiscite but was rejected². Thus, the LGC, since its implementation in 1992, served to provide some measure of autonomy for the LGUs in the Cordillera while the constitutional provision for regional autonomy remains unfulfilled. Indeed, it has been argued that there are “aspects of the Local Government Code that already constitute the beginning of autonomy...we should recognize that such (autonomy) processes could be found even in the Local Government Code...” (CSC, 2001:252-3, cited in Colongon, 2008: 105).

There are views that the LGC is too limited to address directly some issues that are unique to the Cordillera (e.g. disputes regarding ancestral domain claims that require bodies beyond the local government units (LGUs) to settle)³. Still, the LGC provided a new opportunity and a framework for LGUs and communities in the Cordillera to address some local issues and problems. Many such problems are similar to those found in other parts of the Philippines such as poverty, lack of economic opportunities, and environmental degradation. LGUs including those in the Cordillera were expected to address them using the powers provided for in the LGC.

The results of decentralization could be seen in the LGUs’ initiatives and exercise of their powers and functions. The LGC devolved significant service delivery functions and resources to LGUs, such as local governance and administration, including revenue generation and utilization, delivery of health and social services, local economic development and agricultural development, and environmental management. The devolved powers and functions (Section 17 of the LGC) served as the broad research agenda for the Rapid Field Appraisal (RFA) in CAR.

1 I would like to acknowledge the research assistance provided by Nimreh L. Calde, Assistant Professor of Political Science, U.P. Baguio.

2 A second attempt in 1998 also failed when voters rejected RA 8438 in another plebiscite (Colongon, 2008: 2-3).

3 Even the Indigenous Peoples’ Rights Act (IPRA) is also considered as limited.

What are local government initiatives? In the context of this report, initiatives are specific programs and projects formulated or adopted, financed, and implemented by the LGU to improve its operations, and to respond to specific issues and problems, which go beyond routine activities of local governments.

The RFA on decentralization in CAR reveals that anything that the LGU or its personnel could do depends significantly upon the local chief executive (LCE)⁴. This observation, which could also be found in other developing countries, is especially true where institutionalization of political processes is weak or is still incomplete (e.g. decision-making, planning, and linking them with implementation). In such settings, individual personalities count more than institutions. Indeed, the LCE is one of the most significant variables that determine the results of decentralization. The RFAs for CAR in the '90s already made observations about the important role of LCEs in making or unmaking local governance.

A dominant LCE could mean two things. First, the LCE is visionary, and thus initiates and implements priority programs according to the development plans, which also reflect his own ideas and style on how to realize the goals for the LGU and the community. Or second, the LCE (and other elected officials) implement their own pet projects that are not necessarily derived from the plans, more often leaving the personnel to performing routine tasks according to their mandate as their basis for their day-to-day operations. This has not changed much in CAR after more than a decade.

There are still more of the latter. This is not due to a lack of a vision for the future. There remains the challenge of putting the plans into action or implementing the many beautifully crafted local legislations that are intended to improve the lot of the citizens.

Eighteen years since devolution, many LGUs in CAR remain preoccupied with organizational and administrative concerns. Such concerns reflect the continuing need for capacity building to ensure that development plans are based on sound analysis of the socio-economic and political situation of the community; that these plans are appropriately funded; that the LGU is staffed with people who have the required skills to ensure that plans are implemented; and that the citizens have a voice and participation in these processes. Institutionalizing mechanisms to ensure transparency and accountability remains a challenge in the face of limited engagement of CSOs with LGUs.

Overall, four ingredients require a thorough review and corresponding intervention if decentralization as framed in the LGC will have to produce more results that would benefit the people of the Cordillera. These can be posed as the following questions: (1) What can be done to improve access to resources especially of middle- and low-income LGUs? (2) What minimum qualifications should be required of a candidate/elected

⁴ When asked about development plans and how priority programs are identified, the common response of LGU personnel in CAR is “*depende kay mayor*” or “*depende kay governor*” (“it depends upon the mayor/governor”).

official to ensure that he/she has some basic knowledge and skills in local government administration? (3) How can we mobilize a critical mass of local civil society groups to improve transparency and accountability, as well as in organizing local constituencies that would demand for their basic rights for services and protection by the LGUs? (4) What is a more reasonable term of office (e.g. longer with fewer consecutive terms) for elected officials?

Interventions in these aspects could help infuse new energy to the decentralization project and produce better results. For if the results of decentralization should be viewed as the initial showcase of how autonomy could be used as a tool to address the region's problems, there may not be much to show for those who conceptualize "regional autonomy" to be simply patterned after existing formal government structures and processes.

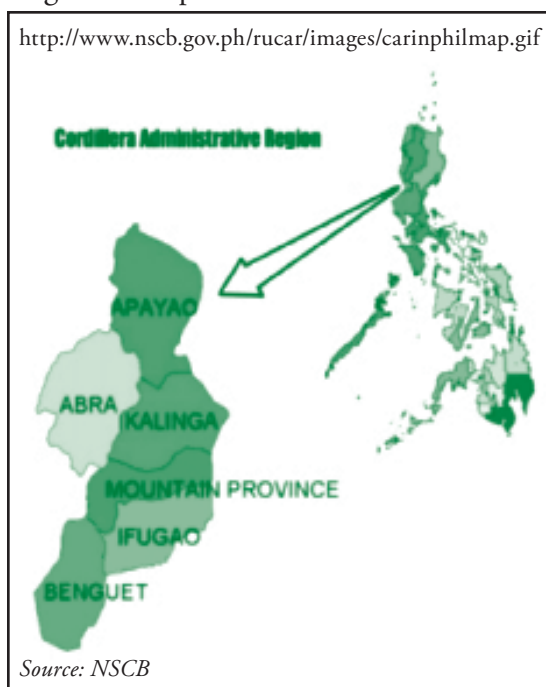
Introduction

The Cordillera evaded Hispanization during the three centuries of Spanish rule over the Philippine lowlands. It became part of the national polity and participated in the larger economic and political life when the American colonial regime was established at the start of the 20th century. It is home to the *Igorot*, a term referring to several indigenous minority groups that reside in the area. Among them are the seven major ethno-linguistic groups called the Tinguian, the Isneg, the Kalinga, the Bontok, the Ifugao, the (Northern and Southern) Kankana-eyes, and the Ibaloy. These people are culturally distinct from the surrounding lowland populations (De Raedt, 1987, cited in Colongon, 2008:1).

The CAR, located in the northern central portion of Luzon, is landlocked. Its total area of 18,293 square kilometers constitutes about 16 percent of the total land area of the Philippines. The region today consists of the provinces of Abra, Apayao, Benguet, Ifugao, Kalinga, Mt. Province, and the City of Baguio (*see Figure 1*).

The Cordillera has a mountainous topography characterized by towering peaks, plateaus, and intermittent patches of valleys. Of the region's total land area, 14,887 square kilometers or 81 percent are public forests consisting of forest reserves, timberlands, national parks, and military reservations. Its elevation ranges

Figure 1: Map of CAR



from five meters above sea level in Abra to a maximum of 2,922 meters at Mount Pulag in Benguet, the second highest mountain in the Philippines. It is the cradle and origin of major rivers of Northern Luzon which are Abra, Agno, Amburayan, Bued, Chico-Tanudan, Naguilian, Siffu-Malig, Apayao-Abulug, and Magat.

Its population was estimated to be 1.5 million in 2007, with an average annual growth rate of 1.5 percent, lower than the nation's 2.0 percent.⁵ In 2007, the region's peoples constituted 1.71 percent of the total population of the Philippines.

Over the last 10 years, provinces from CAR appear on national Statistical Coordination Board's (NSCB) lists of 10 poorest provinces and 10 least poor provinces in its National Poverty Statistics. In 2000, Ifugao was 4th. In 2003, Mt. Province was the 8th. The latest ranking in 2006 included Apayao (4th) and Abra (9th). Meanwhile, Benguet was 5th (2006), 9th (2003), and 7th (2000) in the list of 'least poor provinces' over the same period (NSCB 2006 National Poverty Statistics)⁶.

Following the site selection design of the 2010 Rapid Field Appraisal (RFA), this study covered three provinces, as well as three municipalities within each province, representing the income classes of LGUs based on the classification of the Department of Finance. Abra has kept its status as a 3rd Class LGU, while Benguet has moved a notch from 3rd Class to 2nd Class. Abra has kept its status as a 3rd class LGU, while Benguet has moved a notch from 3rd to 2nd class.

La Trinidad is retained in the list being the capital town of Benguet, which has moved up from 2nd Class to 1st Class. Others in the list for Benguet are new. In Abra Province, Pidigan is retained to represent the "low-income" municipality. It has kept its status as a 5th Class LGU.

The study sites are found in Table 1.

5 This is the latest data available from the National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB). See http://www.nscb.gov.ph/secstat/d_popn.asp.

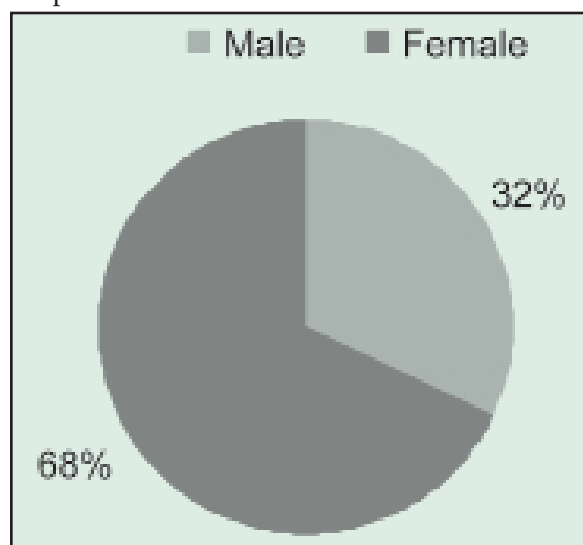
6 The other provinces are not far behind if the list is expanded to include the '20 poorest provinces.' For the same time periods, the following were in the list: Abra (16th) and Mt. Province (15th) for 2000; Abra (18th) and Kalinga (12th) for 2003; and Kalinga (15th) and Mt. Province (17th) for 2006.

Table 1: The RFA Sites for CAR

LGUs Province/ Municipality	Income Classification (as of 2005 per NSCB data)*
Benguet	2 nd Class
La Trinidad	1 st Class
Bokod	4 th Class
Sablan	5 th Class
Abra	3 rd Class
Tubo	4 th Class
Pidigan	5 th Class
Mt. Province	4 th Class
Bontoc	3 rd Class
Bauko	4 th Class
Barlig	5 th Class

*Based on DOF order No. 20-05 effective July 29, 2005

Figure 2: Gender Distribution of RFA Respondents



General Findings

Local Governance and Administration (Including Transparency)

1. The local legislative councils of the various LGUs have shown savvy in crafting legislation on various issues, including “localization” of national laws.
2. Information (notices of vacancies, awards, and budget) is generally available to the public (on bulletin boards of offices, websites, newsletter, and public information desks) if they seek it, but substantive review or scrutiny of this information by the public is limited.
3. Substantive civil society organization (CSO) participation (in local special bodies or LSBs, etc.) is limited to few urbanizing centers. Conversely, the majority of rural, middle- and low-income LGUs can only approximate this LGC requirement by involving government-organized groups in the area. Where CSOs are active, the LGU respondents recognized their significant contributions in ensuring that projects move forward.
4. The templates and tools of planning (e.g. Local Government Performance Monitoring System [LGPMS], Annual Investment Plans [AIP], five-year development plan, etc.) are deemed “useful” in capturing the socio-economic situation of the communities, which in turn inform local development planning. Plan formulation has become a routine (“for compliance’s sake”) that the local legislative council adopts in a legislative resolution. However, it is not used by the LCE or the legislators if they have their own projects outside of the plan.
5. Almost all LGUs across income classes are still Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA)-dependent for up to 92.95 percent for the province and 98.5 percent for the municipality.

6. Personnel Services (PS) make up a big portion of the budget of low-income municipalities (for as much as 78.38 percent in contrast to Social Welfare that gets the lowest across all (but especially in low-income) LGUs (2.78 percent) and Agriculture, which gets the next lowest budget (5.47 percent) among devolved services.
7. LGUs provide flowcharts and directions on procedures for citizens who want to transact business with the LGU. However, many LGUs have not yet fully established or institutionalized their citizen feedback mechanisms.
8. LGUs have Human Resource Offices and personnel that are either created by legislation or designated under the LCE's office. There are sufficient training funds for skills upgrading, although assessing the impact of these trainings on the department or the LGU's performance remains a challenge.
9. The sustained national government agencies' (NGA) "support" to LGUs (guidance and supervision, collaborative projects) representing vertical intergovernmental relations are stronger than horizontal cooperation among LGUs in CAR.

Health and Social Services

10. LGUs have generally sustained the basic routine health services in CAR and are able to manage seasonal diseases.
11. CAR provinces are still high in national child malnutrition rate, but some health personnel question the indicators and measures used by the national government and believe that children are healthy because food is secure and the children's physical size in some areas could be smaller than the standard.
12. LGUs invest in nationally assisted programs for education.
13. More LGUs have invested in ensuring access to safe water.

Local Economic Development and Agriculture

14. Creating opportunities for livelihood and additional sources of income remains a major challenge for many LGUs in the Cordillera.
15. LGUs that are proactive in creating new economic opportunities are receptive and are able to use national assistance for such purposes.
16. Festivals are becoming important in stimulating economic activities in many LGUs.
17. Some LGUs have established additional sources of revenues from Agriculture as 'business income' (outside of usual sources like business taxes).

Environmental Management

18. LGUs have prioritized solid waste management projects in their environmental management and sanitation programs, with varying results.
19. Forest fires remain a problem until now. LGUs cannot seem to address this despite earlier efforts to promote programs like "no forest fires" and other information dissemination drives.

20. Environmental management is constrained by conflicting national laws. This is especially relevant in the Cordillera, which is home to a number of indigenous peoples (IPs) whose protection is the subject of some of these laws (e.g. Indigenous People's Rights Act).

RESULTS OF DECENTRALIZATION

I. Local Governance and Administration

A. Local Legislation

The local councils of various LGUs have shown savvy in crafting legislation on various issues. 18 years since the implementation of the LGC, local legislation has already achieved a level of sophistication that was not observed in the early years of the RFA.

The provincial and municipal governments covered in this study have localized many of the national laws, especially those pertaining to health and social services, and environmental management. However, the more pressing issue is the strict implementation of these laws and monitoring the results. For instance, the list of nicely formulated local ordinances on environmental protection makes it appear that the LGUs are responsive to the environmental issues of the community. Interviews in the various LGUs, though, revealed that they are unable to implement or sustain the implementation of plans and decisions. This is further aggravated by the seeming lack of cooperation on the part of the citizens. Environmental protection remains a major challenge in the Cordillera region. Forest fires continue to destroy the vegetation of many areas of the three provinces covered in this RFA.

The LGU as an institution, given that elected officials come and go, is not lacking in a vision for the future. What is lacking is consistent and sustained action to get closer to the desired goals of the community.

B. Transparency and Participatory Development

Transparency in so far as people's participation is involved is still largely minimal in CAR. One of the main features of the LGC is the role given to non-government organizations (NGOs) and peoples' organizations (POs) in local governance. Their expected presence in local special bodies and participation in public hearings (on one hand) and project formulation and implementation (on the other) was expected to provide some measure of transparency and accountability in government operations. A few NGOs and POs are active mostly in urbanizing centers like Bontoc, Bangued, and La Trinidad. CSOs that have the capability to participate actively in Local Special Bodies (LSBs) are largely absent in other areas.

Box 1. Sample List of Municipal Ordinances (MO) and Provincial Ordinances (PO) in CAR

- MO No. 45, S. 2010. “Barlig Code for Children” or “An ordinance providing for the child survival, development, protection and participation, and establishing a comprehensive children support system in Barlig, Mt. Province, and for other purposes.” (The law incorporates RA 8172 [Asin Law] and RA 7610 [Anti Child Trafficking] and RA 8980 [ECCD]).
- MO No. 43, S. 2010. “The Tourism Code of the Municipality of Barlig.”
- MO No. 40, S. 2010. “An Ordinance Collecting 50% from the Buying Price of Medicines to all Clients of the Municipal Rural Health Unit of Barlig, Mt. Province.”
- MO No. 37, S. 2010. “An Ordinance Imposing Charges for Use of Municipal Aerial Wealth of Barlig, Mt. Province.” (Charges for TV relay and cell sites)
- MO No. 32, S. 2004. “An Ordinance Enacting the Environmental Code of the Municipality of Barlig.”
- MO 1-2003, “Comprehensive Children’s Welfare and Support Program” (Provides for curfew to minors, and sanctions against illegal dispensation of prescription drugs or liquor to minors and children in La Trinidad, Benguet.)
- MO 09-A, S. 2005. “An Ordinance Creating the Council for Women of Bauko, Mt. Province and allocating funds therefore from the Gender and Development Appropriations.”
- MO 09-D, S. 2005. “An Ordinance providing for the Child Survival, Development, Protection, and Participation and Establishing a Comprehensive Child Support System in the Municipality of Bauko, and for other Purposes.”
- MO No. 06-A, S. 2003. “Municipal Ordinance to localize the provisions of RA 9178 or the Barangay Micro-Business Enterprise Act of 2002 and to Prescribe an Amount to defray the Administrative Cost in registering and Monitoring BMBEs in the Municipality of Bauko, Mt. Province.”
- MO 008-D, S. 2003. “A Municipal Ordinance to provide protective measures and penalize domestic violence as defined and for other purposes.” (Bauko)
- PO 96, S. 2010, “An Ordinance Establishing the Mt. Province Pinagpagan Community Health and Social Development Teams in All Barangays of Mt. Province.”
- PO 125, S. 2008, “An Ordinance Creating the Provincial Anti-Environment as Natural Resources Crime Task Force in the Province of Abra.”
- PO 114, S. 2007, “An Ordinance Providing for a Comprehensive and Family Support System in the Province of Abra and Providing Appropriation Thereof and for other Purposes.”
- PO 111, S. 2007, “An Ordinance Creating the Abra River Council, Defining its Functions, Duties, and Responsibilities, Membership and Providing for Appropriations thereof.”
- PO 103, S. 2006, “An Ordinance Approving and Adopting the Abra Environment Code of 2006.”

Generally, however, the level of activity expected from NGOs in terms of engaging local governments is not felt in many areas covered in this research. There are indications of active NGO engagement with the LGUs of La Trinidad (Benguet) and Tubo (Abra)⁷. In these places, the LGU respondents emphatically recognized the important role of NGOs, i.e., that the officials get proper advice, or that projects tend to move forward with NGOs and POs providing checks and balance in the government's performance in the implementation of a collaborative effort.

Some measure of transparency is indicated by the presence of basic information for the public in designated bulletin boards of the LGU. The kinds of information provided in bulletin boards vary from one LGU to another. Information (notices of vacancies, awards, and budget) is generally available to the public (on bulletin boards of offices, websites, newsletter, public information desks) if they seek it. Some have official publications (like the *Mt. Province Monitor* of the provincial government of Mt. Province) while others have an official website (La Trinidad's is working, while others are listed but could not be accessed).

Substantive review and scrutiny of this information by the public or civil society is limited for there are no specific mechanisms for complaints or feedback.

C. Development Planning

One MPDC asks: "Do you know that we prepare as many as 27 different plans for the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG)?" Nevertheless, he thinks that the *Barangay* Development, the Municipal Development Plan (MDP), and the Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) are the most important ones among these. The planning offices in the LGUs, as repository of all information relevant to inform local development planning, incorporate these information in preparing the plans. Quite a significant number of local planning officers and devolved personnel in middle- and low-income LGUs would candidly reveal how little actually of the plans are carried out, despite the fact that these are even supported with adopting resolution in the legislative councils. Especially in low-income LGUs, there is an observation that planning is really for compliance's sake (and this terminology has entered the lexicon of the LGU staff). Some would even be so cynical as to say that any part of the plan that is implemented would be by accident.

In some LGUs, respondents observed an emerging practice of dividing the 20 percent Development Fund between the LCE and the *Sangguniang Barangay* (SB) members for their pet projects (like the Congressional Development Fund of congressmen). These projects are not necessarily attuned to the plans that both the executive and legislative branches of the local governments have adopted.

⁷ La Trinidad is cooperating with the Child and Family Services Philippines, Inc. (CFSPI), People's Initiative for Local and Community Development (PILCD), and Baguio Center for Young Adults (BCYA). Tubo has engagements with the Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government (CCAGG).

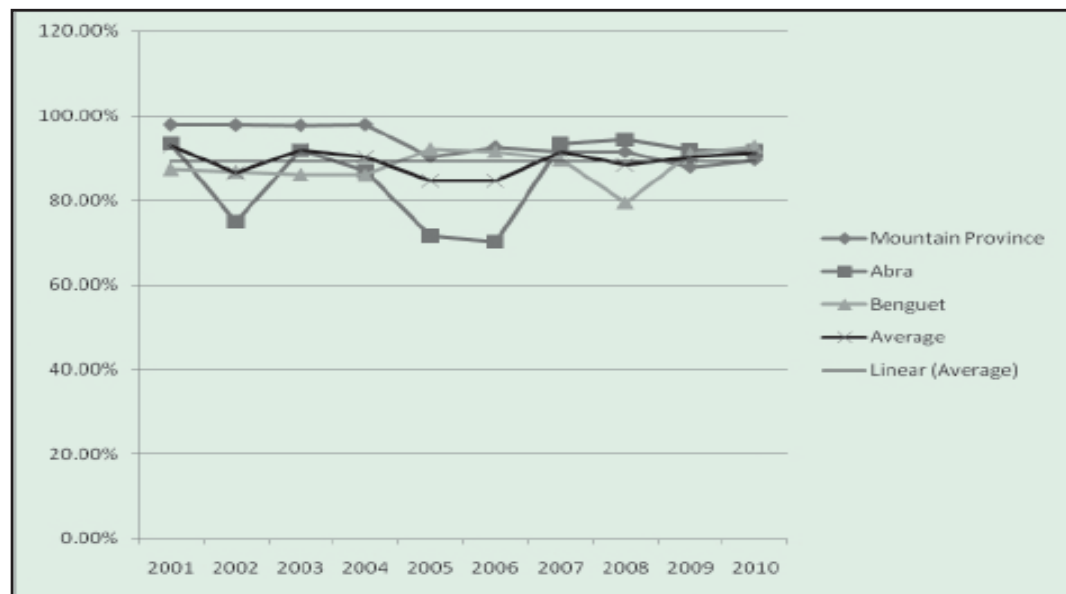
D. IRA and Revenue Generation⁸

With the exception of La Trinidad,⁹ almost all LGUs across income classes are still-IRA dependent.

At the provincial level, Benguet (2nd class) is the least dependent at 82.75 percent, followed by Abra (3rd class) at 83.1 percent. Mt. Province (4th class) is the most dependent at 92.95 percent (see Figure 3).

Among the municipalities, the most IRA-dependent LGU (Barlig) is also in the low-income province, with a dependency of 98.5 per cent (see Table 2). If “other external sources” are added to the IRA, such as share in national wealth or excise tax, the dependency on external sources grows even higher. For instance, dependency goes up to 98.79 percent in the case of Barlig.

Fig. 3: Degree of IRA Dependency: Province



8 The averages are based on 6-10 years where data is available. The law of averages still holds because there is no significant difference across the time (at least 6 years). Notice that 2010 is also included in the presentation of the data for all the graphs. The 2010 data however are only estimates.

9 Interviews in Bangued indicate that the LGU is not IRA-dependent.

Table 2: Degree of IRA Dependency by Municipalities

	LGUs in Mt. Province (Low income Province)			LGUs in Abra (Mid Income Province)			LGUs in Benguet (High Income Province)		
	Bontoc	Bauko	Barlig	Bangued	Tubo	Pidigan	LTr'dad	Bokod	Sablan
% of IRA to total budget	85.13	95.37	98.50	NA	93.68	91.87	53.16	92.82	82.31
Average % of external source to budget	93.87%			86.06%			88.30%		
% of IRA plus other external sources to total budget	85.51	95.86	98.79	NA	98.34	98.19	56.77	96.54	93.56
Average % of local revenues to budget	6.13%			13.94%			11.70%		

This limited data would indicate that IRA-dependence of municipalities seem to correlate with the degree of dependence of their mother province. Thus, municipalities in Mt. Province (the most IRA-dependent province among the areas covered) are likewise the most IRA-dependent within their respective income class. For instance, Barlig is the most IRA-dependent among the low-income class municipalities, while Bauko is the most IRA-dependent among the middle-income class municipalities. Bontoc would also be the most IRA-dependent among the capital towns.

Generally thus, the lower the income class of the LGU, the higher its IRA dependency.

Conversely, almost all LGUs have very little locally generated revenues (see Table 3). The exception is La Trinidad, which has 43.23 percent of its budget coming from local sources. The staff from the planning office explains that the growth in local collection in business taxes and real property taxes happened after the LGU created the Legal Office during the time of Mayor Fongwan. The legal office sent demand letters to concerned establishments and individuals (even boarding houses masquerading as private residences) to pay their taxes and this helped increase the collection.

Table 3: Percentage of Local Revenue to Total Budget by Municipality

Mt. Province (Low income Province)			Abra (Mid Income Province)			Benguet (High Income Province)		
Bontoc	Bauko	Barlig	Bangued	Tubo	Pidigan	La Tr'dad	Bokod	Sablan
14.49	4.14	1.21	NA	1.66	1.81	43.23	3.46	6.44

Some LGUs have established additional sources of revenues from agriculture as “business income” (outside of the usual sources like business taxes). For instance, sales from seedlings from nurseries (e.g. in Benguet, Barlig, Bauko, Benguet, La Trinidad, and Sablan) are additional sources of revenues classified as “business income.” This means that government is engaging in business and not just collecting rental and user fees. In Benguet, a good portion of revenue coming in as “business income” from the sale of forestry products. In 2008, Benguet earned P1.4 million from the sale of agricultural and veterinary products, while its post-harvest facility (Benguet Cold Chain) that stores perishable goods generated P2.5 million.

From the perspective of evaluating LGU initiatives in generating income to fund its programs, and in the Cordillera context where financial resources are limited so that any additional income is most welcome, government engaging in business would be something positive. This, however, may not be positively viewed by those subscribing to the neo-liberal perspective of economic development, or those who may not have a full appreciation of the cultural context of the region.

Table 4: Percentage of Personnel Expenses to Total Budget of LGUS, by Income Level

	Municipalities (Averages)	Province
Low Income	60.48 %	61.10 % Mt. Province
Middle Income	59.91 %	47.29 % Abra
High Income	45.69 %	49.63 % Benguet

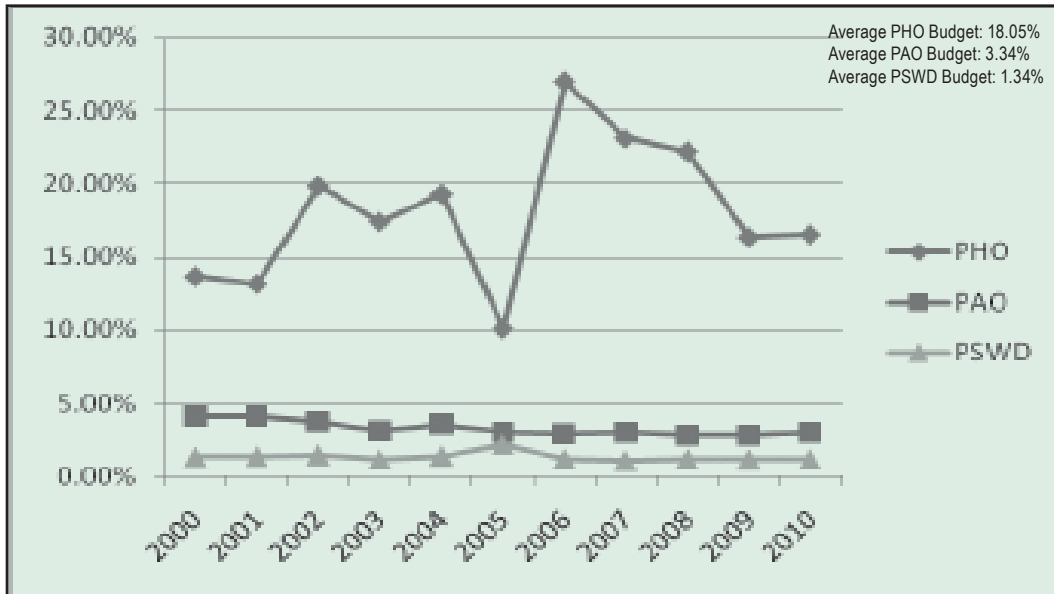
E. Resource Allocation and Utilization¹⁰

Personnel Expenses (PS). Payment of PS eats up a big portion of the budget of low-income municipalities so that there is relatively less money left for programs and projects (see Table 4). An analysis of the budget figures would show that some low income LGUs allocate as much as 70.73 percent (Sablan) and 78.38 percent (Barlig) of their annual budget to PS. These figures show that high-income LGUs tend to have a smaller proportion for PS in their budget.

Sectoral Allocations. Whether one looks at the provincial budget or the municipal budget, the same trend is very apparent. The budget for health is the highest while the budget for social welfare is far behind. The gap is most noticeable in the provincial budget where the health budget is almost 18 times higher than that of social welfare services (18.05 percent compared to a measly 1.34 percent) (See Figure 4 and Figure 5).

¹⁰ The budget figures from the Governor and Vice Governor’s office of Abra as well as the total expenditures of all offices for the year 2009 and 2010 are still being processed at the time of the field in-terview. As such, the same cannot yet be reported here. The budget figures of each of the devolved offices were taken from each of the reports submitted to the Provincial Budget Office but which the Provincial Budget Officer had not yet officially processed because some offices had yet to submit their reports.

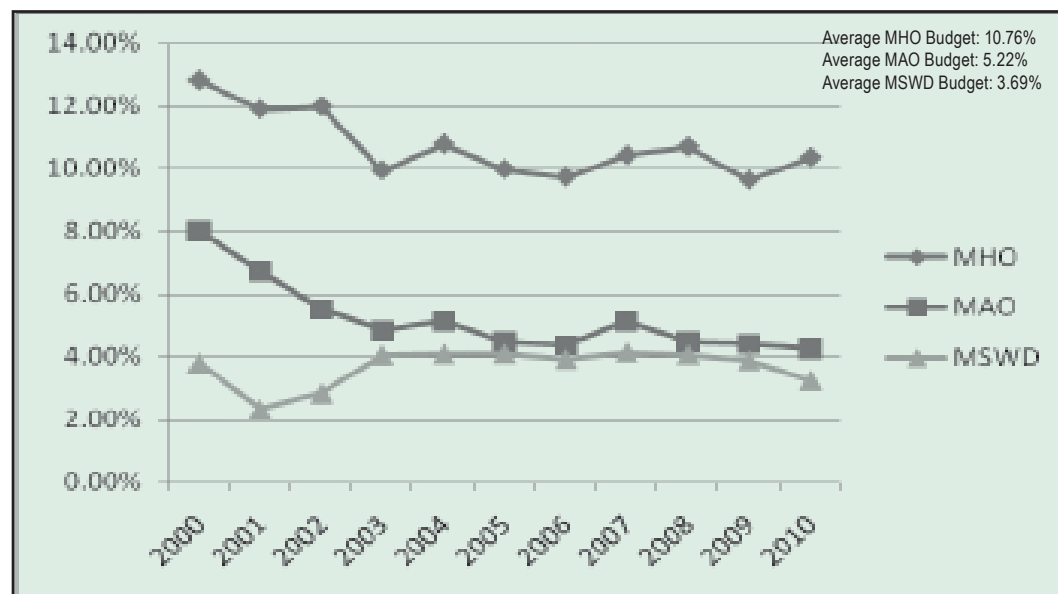
Figure 4: Percentage of Devolved Offices' Expenditure of the Total Budget, All Provinces



If proportions of budgets would be used as indicator of priority, it is clear that Social Welfare Service is at the bottom of the list of LGU priorities. However, it must also be understood that health and social services are lumped together as one “sector.” Moreover, it is apparent that unless hospitals are managed successfully as economic enterprises (a choice made by some LGUs in various parts of the country), hospitals and Rural Health Units (RHUs) will consume much of the local budget.

Social welfare services get the smallest proportion of the budget relative to other devolved services. Nevertheless, the budget figures show that higher-income LGUs tend to increase the proportion of the budget for social welfare, especially at the municipal level (see Table 5).

Figure 5: Percentage of Devolved Offices' Expenditure of the Total Budget, All Municipalities



The budget for Agricultural services is also generally low and is just within the budget levels for Social Welfare Services (see Table 6). It may also be noted that high-income LGUs tend to have less budget for agriculture.

Overall, investments in Agriculture and Social Welfare Services either have steadied (in the case of provinces) or are in slow decline (in the case of municipalities).

The health sector gets the highest budget relative to other devolved services (and topped only by the budget for the Mayor's Office in a number of LGUs). It gets at least double the budget for either the agriculture or social welfare sectors, comparing Table 7 with Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5: Percentage of Budget for Social Welfare to Total Budget of LGUS, by Income Level

	Municipalities (Averages)	Province
Low Income	2.78 %	0.84 % Mt. Province
Middle Income	3.66 %	1.74 % Abra
High Income	5.28 %	1.30 % Benguet

Table 6: Percentage of Budget for Agriculture to Total Budget of LGUS, by Income Level

	Municipalities (Averages)	Province
Low Income	5.47. %	4.57 % Mt. Province
Middle Income	4.41 %	2.33 % Abra
High Income	4.02 %	2.56 % Benguet

It will be noted, however, that Benguet General Hospital gets a smaller portion of the budget compared with other provinces. This is because the hospital has been converted (by legislation) into a local enterprise as of 2006. It receives a fixed subsidy of P40 million per year. The hospital has to generate the amount beyond the allocation for its own requirements. The proportion of the health budget for Benguet could be higher based on reports that the hospital has been seeking supplemental budgets because of shortage in financial resources.

Table 7: Percentage of Budget for Health to Total Budget of LGUS, by Income Level

	Municipalities (Averages)	Province
Low Income	9.55 %	23.54 % Mt. Province
Middle Income	12.53 %	33.00 % Abra
High Income	8.76 %	13.11 % Benguet

For some devolved offices (like social welfare) in low-income LGUs, the budget may not even be enough to sustain their routine services. Moreover, low-income LGUs, which have limited budget, would tend to prioritize infrastructure projects to show some visible projects by incumbent leaders.

F. Customer Service

Whether within the rubric of a Citizens' Charter or in the spirit of facilitating transactions with the local government, LGUs provide flowcharts and directions on procedures for people who would like to transact business with the LGU. However, these procedures do not guarantee efficiency as respondents from the LGU themselves would attest.

For purposes of describing the results of decentralization based on initiatives, this paper did not dwell on describing as "good practices" the LGU personnel's display of behavior that is expected of a regular government employee. Yet, it must be mentioned that for some LGU personnel, they are quite proud of behavioral changes they had to adapt to in the last three to six years because the incumbent mayor is strict and serious about fighting absenteeism and tardiness in the LGU. They consider these as major accomplishments!

Old habits seem to die hard in some LGU offices. Such habits (as the respondents would matter-of-factly admit) include tardiness, unknown whereabouts, or literally sleeping on the job. Some stay at home but are not necessarily absent because one could transact business with them at home, which could be just near the town hall. That we find this still taking place even in a few instances after 18 years of devolution is telling of how some LGUs or their personnel understand the meaning of public trust and the mandate given to them.

G. Human Resource Management (HRM)

All LGUs have offices or personnel that attend to the human resource concerns of the LGU. These offices are either created by legislative fiat or designated under the Mayor's Office. Most of the LGUs provide sufficient funds for training. Almost all respondents expressed satisfaction with regard to their participation in various training workshops. But there have been cases when personnel would refuse to attend trainings because of the distance from the venue, which means they would have to leave their family behind. The challenge for HRM officers is how to assess how these training efforts actually contribute to improving the LGU's performance.

LGUs also upgrade or create new offices to be able to attract and hire people with the needed skills. In some cases, the results could be immediate. For instance, hiring a civil registrar was critical in the registration of births, not to mention that issuance of birth certificate and marriage certificates spell additional revenues for the LGU. A new tourism officer (instead of being an ad hoc work for the *Sangguniang Bayan* [SB] committee on tourism) was able to aggressively formulate a tourism program and strategy for the LGU. Upgrading the position of medical officers in hospitals made the position competitive and allowed the provincial government to keep doctors from leaving and going into private practice. Adjustments in regulations (allowing the doctors to keep private clinics) also balanced the need of the LGU and the personal economic needs of medical personnel.

In some cases however, certain positions have remained vacant for various reasons (no qualified applicant, hiring ban, etc.). Hiring an assessor would have allowed the LGU to re-evaluate real property in its jurisdiction. In another case, the office and position of an environmental officer has been legislated but this was not implemented by the LCE.

There are still a lot of casual employees, especially in places where the government is the main employer. This becomes more pronounced in the year leading up to elections. There is also the prevailing practice of filling a "job order" that allow the LGU to hire additional staff without violating the 45 to 55 percent cap on PS expenditure in the LGU's budget.

H. Networking and Linkaging

Vertical intergovernmental relations, i.e. between NGAs and LGUs, have always been strong in the Cordillera. NGAs have always provided technical assistance to LGUs. However, observers argue that NGAs tend to not just set performance standards and technical assistance, but actually provide direct supervision for devolved personnel, making the LGUs feel accountable for results in their respective sectors in a decentralized – read: fragmented, not centralized – setting. Also noted in the past RFAs, "the LGUs generally respond to the Technical Assistance program offered by

the NGA...infrastructure projects (provided by the NGAs) are viewed as augmentation for the LGUs' limited resources" (Colongon, 1999: 6).

Conversely, horizontal inter-LGU cooperation is still not a major strength in RFA sites. For instance, the BLIST¹¹ Growth Area was conceptualized after the 1990 earthquake affected the economic development in Baguio City and the nearby towns in Benguet such as La Trinidad, Itogon, Sablan, and Tuba. This idea never took off. An observation was made on the BLIST in 1999 that said "what is lacking perhaps is the fuller involvement and cooperation of member-municipalities to promote a metropolitan-wide vision that reflects the collective interests of the major stakeholders in the area" (Mercado and Manasan, 1998: 24). There are new talks about "reviving" the concept as a reaction to a number of environmental threats these communities experienced, such as the worsening garbage problem in Baguio City, water shortages, and the impact of typhoons.

More significantly, the provincial governments in CAR have taken steps toward this direction with the help of NGAs, as well as funding donors. The implementation of Inter-Local Health Zones (ILHZ) with assistance from the DOH and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) provides opportunities for experiences in inter-LGU cooperation. The ILHZ is a "revival of the district health concept as a mechanism to address fragmentation of health services but with Inter-local government unit partnership as a basic framework" (Piñero, et. al., nd:1)¹². Should this serve as apposite experience for municipalities, it could be a model for addressing other similar issues that require collaboration between LGUs.

II. Health and Social Services

Devolved health and social welfare personnel still continue to implement national programs. Guidance from NGAs continue in the form of updates and trainings. Continuing the national program in whole or in part (i.e. depending on the local budget allocation) provides the devolved personnel a "template" to follow. This is especially important in times of budgetary constraints or defaults in leadership and strategic planning in their sector. In such situations, doing what they have been doing with the resources that they have gives them a sense of confidence that they are fulfilling their mandate. Thus, Regional Health Units (RHUs) and hospitals and social welfare offices continue to deliver their basic functions. LGUs focus on a combination of projects that cut across various areas in social services.

11 Refers to the neighboring towns of Baguio, La Trinidad, Itogon, Sablan, and Tuba, which are all in Benguet. The BLIST was even framed in the context of "Cordillera Autonomy," i.e., BLIST was identified as a major growth area in the first Development Plan in 1988 of the newly established CAR (Mercado and Manasan, 1998: 8).

12 It is part of the Health Sector Reform Agenda of the DoH as early as 1999 and as mandated by Executive Order 205 of 2000 (signed by President Joseph Estrada), entitled, "Providing for the creation of a National Health Planning Committee (NHPC) and the establishment of Inter-Local Health Zones (ILHZ) throughout the country, and for other purposes," January 31, 2000.

A. Health Services and Nutrition

Health Services. LGUs have generally sustained the delivery of health services in CAR. As noted earlier, a sizeable portion of the LGU budget goes to health services, relative to other devolved services. While the budget is always never enough for health services, there is no doubt about health being a priority of LGUs in the region. Within the constraints of resources available, the provinces are able to provide basic hospital services. They also meet the basic standards such as the required doctor-to-patient ratio. The RHUs are also able to manage the seasonal diseases. Municipal Health Officers (MHOs), inspired by the support of their LCEs (in terms of TEVs and transportation service), are generally passionate about their work and some go out of the comforts of the RHUs and regularly schedule consultations in the *barangays* (e.g. *Barangay Clinic* of Bokod). Provinces are able to achieve disease-free status, a result of years of efforts and cooperation with municipal governments. For instance, Benguet has been declared rabies-free, while Abra will be malaria-free if there is no case documented within the remaining period of reckoning.

Despite this generally positive description, the ability of RHUs to respond to health needs of the people are threatened by the lack of doctors or MHOs in some municipalities. Abra in particular has only 12 RHUs out of 27 that have a doctor¹³ (as of research time).

Having an MHO is critical to the accreditation of RHU services (such as the Out-Patient Benefits [OPB], MCH, and TB-DOTS) with PhilHealth as part of the social health insurance program. Only those services accredited with PhilHealth would enjoy the benefit of Capitation Funds for services rendered to PhilHealth enrollees of beneficiaries. As of 2008 for instance, of Benguet's 13 municipalities, 11 RHUs are accredited for TB-DOTS (including Bokod and La Trinidad), and all are accredited for OPB (including Bontoc, Barlig, and Bauko). Of Mt. Province's 10 RHUs, six are accredited for TB-DOTS (including Bauko and Bontoc), and nine are accredited for OPB (including Bontoc, Barlig, and Bauko). Abra, which has the most number of municipalities among the provinces studied, have fewer accredited RHUs due to the absence of MHOs. Bangued's RHU is one of the four accredited for TB-DOTS, and one of the six accredited for OPB.

Both Benguet and Mt. Province have reached universal coverage in PhilHealth enrollment, which means the LGUs have insured at least 85 percent of the target indigent families. However, a big number of indigent patients in the hospitals (up to 30 percent or more) remain uncovered. Therefore, there is a gap between the data and the percentage of patients who are not covered by PhilHealth. This becomes even more problematic in Abra where PhilHealth coverage is estimated at only a third of the target beneficiaries.

13 Three of them are employed as 'Doctor to the Barrios,' which means that there is no assurance that they would stay long in their places of assignment.

Some LGUs have seen results in the area of community-based health management promotion. For instance, Bauko's MHO organized the Chongliyan Health Development Association in Barangay Mainit in 1999, to which the Women's Health and Safe Motherhood Project (WHSMMP) of CAR provided an initial fund of P55,450.00. The women's organization used the money to sell reproductive-health products as well as basic medicines in the *barangay*, even before the *Botika ng Barangay* project was set up. This organization reported P35,633.00 as net income in 2009, and continues its advocacy work for responsible family planning in the community. Bontoc's MHO, together with some gay professionals, organized the gay community (patterned after the "Butterfly Brigade" of Boracay) to conduct regular information campaigns on the health and legal risks involved in soliciting sex from so-called "service boys." In both cases, the LGU mobilized civil society to take part in governance.

Earlier, reference to the ILHZ has been made in the context of inter-LGU cooperation. At the moment, the ILHZ is at varying degrees of operationalization. Advances have been made specifically in Benguet, especially with the support from JICA for the "Project of Strengthening of Local Health System in the Province of Benguet." This is illustrative of LGU efforts on investment, health, as well as in inter-LGU cooperation via the ILHZ involving neighboring municipalities around a district hospital. In Benguet, the ILHZ has evolved to include sharing and pooling of financial and material resources (see Annex on Good Practices). In the Mt. Province, the relationship in the ILHZ is more coordinative using a referral system as initially intended. In Abra, some municipalities are still in the preparation stage (like Pidigan) to take part in the effort. In the case of health, the provincial governor could give the impetus for the municipalities to get more involved in improving the health service delivery system.

Revenue Generation in Health. All hospitals and RHUs generate resources from health services by charging fees for services, or marking up, albeit minimally the prices of medicines.¹⁴ This may be "good" from the perspective of revenue generation. However, some health personnel are concerned that some people would not be able to afford to pay even the minimal charges of health services.

Benguet General Hospital has been converted into a "local enterprise" although its prospects for profitability remain in question. Unless hospitals are managed successfully as enterprises (a choice made by some LGUs in various parts of the country), hospitals and RHUs will consume much of the local budget.

LGUs are also cautious about converting hospitals or even RHUs into economic enterprises because unless health insurance is ensured and sustained for the poorest sectors, the "service" component of health care services might be compromised, since they would not be able to afford the cost of health care.

14 Barlig gave services for free, but recently passed Municipal Ordinance No. 40, S. 2010: "An Ordinance Collecting 50% from the Buying Price of Medicines to all Clients of the Municipal Rural Health Unit of Barlig, Mt. Province."

In Pidigan, the people simply cannot afford to pay because they are poor. As it is, despite the health budget, the supply of medicines from the LGU is not enough, prompting people to buy their own medicines. Moreover, most of those coming to the RHU are not covered by PhilHealth, which coincides with the low estimates for PhilHealth coverage in Abra. There are no health centers in Pidigan’s barangay to cater to the peoples needs in the peripheries, and so all services are free. Pidigan is still in progress toward increasing PhilHealth coverage.

RHUs also generally charge some minimal fees for their services. Until Barlig passed legislation to make additional charges for its services (medicines), an argument could be made that low-income municipalities tend to give services for free (see Table 8).

Table 8: LGUs with User fees for Health Services

LGUs Province/ Municipality	With user fees for health services?
Benguet	Yes
La Trinidad	Yes
Bokod	Yes
Sablan	Yes
Abra	Yes
Tubo	Yes
Pidigan	No
Mt. Province	Yes
Bontoc	Yes
Bauko	Yes
Barlig	No*

**Soon, the RHU will impose additional charges for medicines.*

Nutrition and Child Welfare. Abra is said to be on top of the list of LGUs with the most number of malnourished children aged zero to five despite having the biggest health budget (33 percent of the total budget in the last 10 years (see Table 7). About 16 percent of children aged zero to five in Abra are malnourished. While this figure is lower than the national rate of 30 percent (as of 2001), respondents admit that LGUs in the Cordillera rank high in malnutrition. Still, they question the indicators and measurements, particularly those used by NSO. They argue that weight and height may not be the best indicators, because some children of the Cordillera are naturally small, and they are in fact active. As far as they are concerned, the children are actually healthy because they eat sufficient food from their own gardens. They may not have cash, but very few get sick.

To provide service for many cases of children with disability, the local government of La Trinidad (Benguet) adopted and implemented in 2000 the concept of a “Center for the Rehabilitation of Children with Disabilities” as originally conceptualized by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD)-CAR and Breaking Barriers for Children and Young Adults with Disabilities’ (BBCY) Stimulation and Therapeutic Activity Centers (STAC) in Baguio City¹⁵. The LGU maintains the center through the

15 These are community-based centers for children with disabilities 0-14 years. The STAC in Baguio referred to as STAC-5 is operated by the BBCY is a joint project of the *Katipunan ng May Kapansanan sa Pilipinas* (KAMPI), a national federation of 241 organization of persons with disabilities in the Philippines, and the Danish Society of Polio and Accident victims, funded by DANIDA (<http://bbc.org/index.php>).

Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office (MSWDO). Currently housed in a section of the old Benguet General Hospital with its own facilities, the center has an estimated annual budget of P1 million, though it could use more funds to upgrade its facilities and service. Despite the constraints, the LGU has shown political will in taking a major step to implement a specific project to ensure the welfare of a particular segment of its population – the disabled children (see Annex on Good Practices).

LGUs in CAR would typically have Day Care centers in all their barangays. Majority still believe in the value of accreditation of Day Care centers because it ensures the quality of services for the children in the community.

B. Education

The Rehabilitation Center for Children with Disabilities in La Trinidad is also illustrative of investment in education for it has an education component. In fact, there is a separate Day Care Center for Children with Disabilities within the center.

LGUs make use of the Special Education Fund (SEF) to invest in nationally assisted programs for education and other educational activities. For instance, Mt. Province provided for honoraria of Alternative Learning System (ALS) facilitators, SPED, review materials and supplies, Basic Literacy Modules, quiz shows, and attendance to athletic meets. Similarly, La Trinidad provided salaries and payments for day care workers or other financial and material support for the Department of Education's (DepEd) ALS such as providing a binding machine for modules of the students, and computers for ALS Instructional Managers.

C. Social Welfare Services

Infrastructure. Construction of roads and bridges is ongoing in various LGUs in CAR with support from the national government (e.g. Office of the President, members of Congress). Accessibility remains a challenge in many remote places, especially during the rainy season. The new construction (or resumption for some) roads and bridges are a welcome development in the provinces. Bokod is constructing new roads, and Abra is seriously trying to put up durable infrastructure that would allow the people to safely cross the Abra River. Tubo, the second farthest municipality from the capital town of Bangued, has bought its own equipment to facilitate the construction of new access roads to remote villages.

The provincial government of Abra is also instrumental in the construction of mini-hydro electric plants for communities that the province's electric cooperatives cannot service.

More and more LGUs have invested in ensuring access to safe water, although much work remains to be done. Bontoc has its own waterworks and is working on an

acceptable payment system that would ensure better maintenance and sustainability of a clean water supply. Pidigan also has Level 3 water system in the town center.

Some municipalities seek donations for certain infrastructure needs from both the private sector and other government offices. Barlig got a donation for its open gym, which now serves different purposes (sports, graduation ceremonies, etc.). Bokod is constructing its new RHU building with contributions from the provincial government.

Security/ Peace and Order. Mt. Province and Benguet have no serious problems in peace and security, although Abra was in the national news for political violence during the RFA (as it was a period leading up to the May 2010 elections).

The Abra Multi-Sectoral Group, representing the province’s civil society groups and led by Bangued Bishop Leopoldo Jaucian, took the initiative to try and prevent the repeat of political violence experience in past elections. The Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government (CCAGG) served as the secretariat, and included members from the media, police and military, DILG, Philippine Information Authority (PIA), and the Department of Education (DepEd), among others. This was an unfolding story during the RFA, and the results would provide insights on the prospects of peace and development in Abra.

Meanwhile, LGUs in the other two provinces are generally peaceful, with a sprinkling of minor violations. The Bontoc Women Brigade illustrates the active role of CSOs in maintaining peace and order, later recognized by the LGU (see Annex on Good Practices).

III. Economic Development

The Cordillera is basically an agricultural area. However, agricultural and economic productivity remains a challenge in Abra and Mt. Province, while Benguet is facing the consequences of its long history of commercial vegetable production using pesticides and chemical fertilizers.

In Benguet, 54 percent of the population is composed of vegetable farmers. Big companies aggressively campaigned there for the farmers to use their fertilizers and pesticides. To combat this in the past, all the LGU did was to give seminars and not much else.

Recently, the Office of the Provincial Agriculturist (OPAg) adopted the DA’s concept of Good Agricultural Practice (GAP), customizing it for the locality. The OPAg promotes reduced use of artificial pesticides and warns farmers of the long-term adverse effects of artificial fertilizers to the productivity of the soil. Using the scientific approach, the OPAg helps the farmers understand “soil profiling” as the basis for “prescribing the right fertilizer to revive the nutrients of the soil.” The OPAg

provided Techno Demo Farms to demonstrate the proper use of fertilizers. It also put up a laboratory that rears “good” insects to help the farmers avoid using pesticides and slowly shift to organic farming. In addition, the OPAg also supervises a composting center. Finally, to provide aid to farmers in preserving their vegetables so that the farmers can command a better price in the market, the OPAg supervises the DA-provided Benguet Cold Chain, as well as refrigerated vans.

In La Trinidad, the La Trinidad Organic Practitioners (LaTOP)¹⁶ is a success story of LGU assistance to a cooperative (and sustainable organic farming) that eventually became viable and profitable. The Municipal Agriculturist’s Office (MAO) organized LaTOP in 2005 to help small farmers and in response to the need for sustained market for organic products. The MAO coordinated with the ATI-CAR for training and capability building of LaTOP, assisted in its registration, and provided a stall at the public market as marketing support and advertising. The LGU stayed away from the spotlight when the group acquired the needed capacity to let it grow. In three years, “LaTOP was able to break through the barriers of conventional farming...gain(ed) a following in the local market having captured the A,B, and C groups...and sustain(ed) the market growth that it gained since its inception in 2005” (Versola and Pagtan, n.d.).

LaTOP was able to demonstrate that local initiatives involving local farmers, producers, consumers, and support groups (LGU, GO, NGOs) could lead to sustained livelihood. Most importantly, this experience shows that sustainable agriculture is profitable. It is a living model that makes shifting the whole province from destructive and unhealthy pesticide farming to sustainable organic vegetable farming more real and possible, given the implication of current farming practices on climate change and other environmental challenges.

For other LGUs, especially those with limited resources, national assistance provides the needed help to respond to farmers’ post-harvest needs and diversification of income. The introduction of freshwater production by the DA in Bauko is also made possible by proactive involvement of the heads of the local agricultural office.

LGUs that are proactive in creating new economic opportunities are receptive to, and are able to, use national assistance for such purposes.

In other LGUs, economic productivity remains a challenge. National poverty statistics indicating the rest of the region’s relative position in terms of poverty indicators point to the urgent need for significant interventions in this area. Even current discourses among regional line agencies in the Cordillera make constant reference to the poverty situation in the region.

16 Summarized from Verzola, L. and Pagtan, A. “Experiences on Organic Vegetable Production and Vermiculture in the Cordillera: Implications for CHARMP 2 Project.”

Meanwhile, LGUs try to stir economic activities through festival tourism (Strawberry Festival in La Trinidad, Kawayan Festival in Abra, Lang-ay Festival in Mt. Province, etc.).

IV. Environment Management

Environmental management remains a challenge in the region, despite the fact that almost all elected officials have been declaring their commitment to environmental and forest protection since the early days of devolution. The issue of environmental protection in the Cordillera is complex given the different layers of policies operating in the area. First, the LGC did not fully devolve these powers to the LGUs. The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) retains powers over environmental management, which means that the national government could trump local decisions, thus causing uncertainties in local efforts. Second, the ancestral domain claims arising from the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act (IPRA) results in boundary conflicts between LGUs and private citizens as claimants over certain areas.

Against this backdrop, LGUs respond to environmental challenges differently. Benguet has shown in recent years a more deliberate attempt at addressing forest protection through its Relocation of Communal Forests project which is the re-identification of boundaries of communal forests. It is being implemented under the Office of the Governor (as it is not yet legislated as a separate office, albeit an old attached office under the governor's office), with a commensurate budget.

LGUs also have their own solid-waste management programs in compliance with existing national laws. Dump trucks, garbage bins, and signage could be seen around in many LGUs urging the people to dispose of their garbage properly. However, seeing garbage still strewn around certain areas and the rivers indicate the need for better strategies to enforce local laws to engage public support and participation.

La Trinidad has been trying to address its own solid waste concerns since the '90s. In April 2010, it has launched its own composting program funded by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

Despite all the legislations on forest protection and natural resource management, much of the forests in CAR have been under threat. LGUs cannot seem to address this despite their efforts. There were incentives provided for "no forest fires" in Abra, as well as information dissemination and tree planting in all LGUs. Yet, forest fires were going on in certain areas of the three provinces when interviews were being conducted for the RFA.

V. Corruption

Proof of corruption is difficult to establish, and this RFA simply relied on the candid assessments of insiders. Among the LGUs covered, there are more cases where elected officials are characterized as lacking in the ability to steer LGUs toward a vision than there are allegations of graft and corruption. Where there are allegations of corruption, the opinion of some respondents is that it has worsened because devolution strengthened even more the already powerful political clans and families who take turns in local rule. To lend an optimistic tone in this instance, it is still possible that an elected politician from a powerful political clan could decide to use his or her power to turn things around and establish an internal audit system and other mechanisms to ensure greater transparency and accountability, thus reducing corruption.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The RFA aimed to find results of decentralization 18 years since devolution started. Strictly speaking, this would require some baseline data for comparison, which is not readily available. Moreover, there is the difficulty of attribution of any result to the LGUs efforts, not necessarily because of the qualitative nature of the data used for the RFA, but because the services provided by the LGUs would usually include inputs from the NGAs.

Nevertheless, the RFA for CAR originally set out to begin by first finding out LGU initiatives in the area of devolved services. Transferring responsibilities to local political leaders to improve governance and administration, mobilize and use resources for health and social services, stir economic development and agriculture, and manage the environment and natural resources embody the decentralization law's core intention of "bringing development to the countryside," with the local communities and their leaders shaping their own future. Investigating initiatives along these topics should then reveal details such as the outcomes and impact of LGU efforts.

Among these topics, there is still a lot of effort in the area of governance and administration, specifically reorganization and organizational strengthening. New offices and positions have been created or upgraded, presumably to be able to hire the needed personnel to improve the LGUs performance. Moreover, the LGUs continue their capacity building as indicated by attendance of LGU personnel in various trainings to upgrade skills. For some, the positive results are immediate in terms of improving the operations of the LGU (civil registrar, keeping the doctors from leaving). But it is difficult to establish the contributions or effect of training initiatives to improvements in LGU performance.

The level of activity in this aspect is still quite high like the early days of devolution when LGUs were going through a learning curve and were making all the necessary

adjustments in their operations due to the transfer of personnel and responsibilities. Indeed, LGUs have now grown accustomed to many of the devolved responsibilities.

Because reorganization and systems are more or less institutionalized, LGUs are able to continue performing routine tasks in their sectors based on what they were doing prior to devolution. Have LGUs moved on to initiate programs in other areas of their mandate such as revenue generation to be able to finance and deliver health and social services, stir economic development and agriculture, and manage the environment? It is in these substantive areas (the core of local autonomy, perhaps?) that the LGUs in the region vary in performance.

There are relatively more initiatives in high-income LGUs, in both provincial and municipal levels of government in the cases studied. There are more initiatives noted in Benguet (2nd class), compared with Mt. (4th class) and Abra (5th class). There are also more initiatives noted in La Trinidad (1st class) and Bangued (1st Class), than in other municipalities. This coincides with the opinion of devolved personnel in high-income LGUs that it is easier to solicit financial backing to implement their proposed projects. Thus, devolution seems to have more results that are positive in high-income LGUs, regardless of the sources of income. On one hand, La Trinidad is the least IRA-dependent and it is able to take initiatives. On the other hand, Benguet is still generally IRA-dependent, yet it could allocate the needed funds to implement its priority programs.

The initiatives or good practices that have been discussed are not necessarily the dominant trend in the region. They do, however, suggest that LGUs could do more to fulfill their other mandates.

The constraints have always been there. Low-income LGUs could use additional resources just to cope with the cost of devolved functions. For middle-income municipalities, the picture is mixed. There are those where little activity is taking place (e.g. Bokod), while there are other municipalities where the LCE has overcome to some degree the financial constraints and innovate to be able to improve the delivery of services (e.g., Bauko, Tubo). Middle- and low-income LGUs have greater difficulty in pursuing initiatives that may require additional resources. The LCEs may be creative, but there seems to be some built in constraints in terms of human and financial resources, revenue sources (i.e. limited economic activity in many poor and rural communities). The mixed picture depicted by middle-income municipalities is a caution for those who believe that providing additional funds to LGUs would always mean better results. The human resources in and outside the LGU, the LCE, and social capital are important variables in the equation. These findings bring us back to earlier clamor for a review of the formula for revenue sharing. Thus, the revenue sharing for middle- and low- income LGUs may have to be reviewed.

A related concern is the argument that IRA has a substitutive effect, i.e., that the assured revenue sharing due to the existing formula discourages the LGUs (or the incumbent

officials for that matter) from pursuing creative revenue generating measures. It remains a debate that IRA causes LGUs to be complacent and reduces the LGU into a routine mode. If this is even the case, where should intervention be introduced? Surely, reducing the IRA-share of LGUs would not change the other variables in the equation where the expected result is better services and quality of life for the people.

Speaking of variables in the decentralization equation, it has become apparent that the LCE is critical to the LGUs performance of its functions beyond routine. There are problems in linking planning, budgeting, and implementation of plans and projects. To increase the likelihood that an LCE takes a proactive role in using the LGUs powers and resources to achieve results expected from decentralization, interventions could be made from two points. *First* is a policy intervention, i.e., legislating on basic minimum requirements in management skills and knowledge for all candidates running for local public office. *Second* is mobilizing a critical mass of local civil-society groups that demand for their basic rights for services and protection by the LGU, and for greater transparency and accountability.

Some respondents point to the short term of office for elected officials (three years per term, for a maximum of three consecutive terms) as the reason why there seems to be no sense of strategic thinking guiding LGU plans and operations. It may also be time to review the term of office of local officials. It has become a truism that the first year of an elected politician is spent paying political debts and getting to know the ropes of the job, while the second year is when he really gets down to work. Before anything gets completed, it would be the third year and the politician would have to start campaigning (including giving political favors) to ensure reelection. Many agree that a second term is accorded an incumbent to prove his worth.

These are some of the interventions that may be considered to infuse new energy into the decentralization project. Many of the stories from the past RFAs remain the same, with new notable and interesting initiatives that direct other LGUs to new possibilities in exercising their mandate. Without re-energizing the decentralization project (it has been more than 10 years, which was the mandated time to review and revise the law if warranted), it would be tempting to conclude that the possibilities of local autonomy in the Cordillera within the framework of the LGC has been reached. From within their own localities, the peoples of the Cordillera will have seen and experiences by now the result of the local officials' exercise of their powers and local autonomy. Moreover, regional poverty statistics and economic indicators still rank many of the provinces in the region lower than others. Thus, if the LGC constitutes processes of "local autonomy" that are essential to "regional autonomy," it would probably be difficult to argue for an autonomous regional government structure that is patterned after existing government structures and processes.¹⁷

17 An observation was made by a Governor that when the LGC was not yet in effect, local legislators had no powers. "Now, they are like Congressmen...because of the autonomous provisions of the LGC..."

BEST PRACTICE

Benguet Province

Strengthening Local Health System in the Province of Benguet

In July 2004, the Japanese Official Development Assistance (ODA) Task Force has prepared “Japan’s ODA Basic Policy for the Philippine Health Sector” in which Japan International Cooperation Agency conducted a Project Formulation Study in Health Sector in CAR, Bicol, and Eastern Visayas Region from September 2004 to February 2005. As a result of this study, JICA recommended the “Project of Strengthening of Local Health Service System” for the Province of Benguet. This P125-million, five-year project aims to establish a support system for RHUs so that these could provide better health services. It also aims to strengthen the health governance capability and financial system of health care in the province; to review the drug supply system; and to share the lessons and outputs of the project with DOH and other provinces (JICA Benguet Project Progress Report, 2010).



Since the commencement of the project in 2006, it has implemented a Community-Based Monitoring System, as well as put together a health facilities plan and provincial annual operation plan. It has also pre-tested an operation tool, hosted study tours and undertaken various training efforts. It has set up a referral system and monitored skills improvement, and has done PhilHealth advocacy and publicity training, and drug management activity (JICA Benguet Project Progress Report, 2010). The provincial government is implementing the



project through the Provincial Health Office benefiting the cluster of municipalities that make up an Integrated ILHZs, such as the BLISTT area (Benguet General Hospital, La Trinidad, Itogon Rural Health Unit, Itogon Municipal Hospital, Sablan, Tuba, and Tublay), Mt. Trail ILHZ (Atok, Buguias, Mankayan, Bakun), KKK ILHZ (Kapangan Rural Health Unit, Kibungan and Kapangan Community Hospital) and the other cluster composed of Bokod, Kabayan, and Dennis Molintas Memorial Hospital (Aro, 2007).

Thus far, the project found out that the top causes of mortality in the province are lifestyle-related diseases; that aging population with decrease in birth rate is one of the priority health concern in the community; and that there is a decreasing number of young doctors at the rural area, a development in turn due to the increase in the number of doctors who prefer to practice in the urban areas for further training. One lesson learned is that the province should continue its health promotion and strengthen inter-LGU cooperation in sharing of resources, especially between municipalities, and between the RHUs and the provincial hospital.

BEST PRACTICE

La Trinidad, Benguet

Rehabilitation Center for Children with Disabilities

When the DSWD-CAR conducted a survey of children with disabilities in La Trinidad in 1999, it found out that there were many such cases in the area. In coordination with the implementers of the Stimulation, Therapeutic, and Activity Center (STAC-5) in Baguio City, the rehabilitation center was conceptualized in 2000. The Municipal Government decided to adopt the idea as its own project. The LGU operates the center with an estimated annual budget of P1 million through the MSWDO, with the help of two occupational therapists and two physical therapists. The center operates from Monday to Friday to cater to an average of 20 clients a day. Three roving day care workers provide services to clients in the communities.



The free services of the center benefit not just the residents of La Trinidad but even children from Sablan, Benguet and Pugo, La Union. While the center's policy limits clients to those 15 years old and below, it caters to children up to 18 years old. The center is the only one such kind in CAR that is being maintained by the LGU, and which allows children of indigent families to avail of services that are otherwise too expensive for the average individual.

While the center has gone a long way from its dark physical space and limited facilities, it could still improve the quality of its services by way of acquiring facilities and personnel that meet the standards of a rehabilitation center. A more regularized service of a development pediatrician and therapists would allow for a more appropriate rehabilitation and treatment design for every child. Currently, the resources of the center would allow for a once-a-year service of a doctor; the therapists earlier mentioned are volunteers.

Despite the constraints, La Trinidad continues to provide these services, and its efforts have been recently recognized when it became a finalist in the 2009 Search for the Most Child-Friendly LGU.

The MSWDO knows the importance of the services that the center provides to the community. While it is commonplace to find LGUs where programs and projects that are described are the routine work (which are not easy as they are), the LGU of La Trinidad took the big step of implement on its own a project that directly benefited (for free) a specific sector of the La Trinidad community. Despite the constraints, it found creative ways to supplement the meager resources of the MSWDO to run the program (e.g. tapping the NSTP students from a local college to help paint the interior of a portion of the old provincial

hospital to be used as the rehabilitation center, for which the students earned credits; or tapping donations from supportive individuals).

BEST PRACTICE

Bontoc Province

When Drinking Stops at 10 PM in Bontoc: The Bontoc Women Brigade

When nightspots and videoke bars proliferated in Bontoc, cases of drunkenness rose. These also usually led to violence in the home. The elderly Bontoc women took the initiative to monitor the implementation of a local ordinance against selling liquor after 10:00 p.m. in Bontoc (there are several ordinances on liquor ban and prohibition on drinking in public places).



In groups of three, the elderly women patrol the whole of Bontoc, which they divide into zones depending on their place of residence. These teams sweep the different zones (thus a bar would be visited by the different teams on the same night). They patrol from 10:01 p.m. up to 1:30 a.m., seven times a week. Once the women find drunken men on the streets, they take the men's valuables and bring these to the police station for safekeeping. When the men wake up, they know they would have to go to the police station to claim their valuables.



The women do not leave the bars until the sellers stop selling liquor, and until the drunken men finish their last bottle of beer. They are able to exert influence so that the drunken men do not cause anyone harm. Recently, they have begun monitoring teenage boys and girls studying in the local college (with growth in course offerings) who get drunk.

Observers say nowadays drinking noticeably stops at 10 p.m. in Bontoc.

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