

**G-Watch Monitoring of the
Department of Education and the
Department of Public Works and Highways**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Government Watch (G-Watch) of the Ateneo School of Government undertook monitoring of the Department of Education (DepEd) and the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) through a grant of \$24,000 from the Partnership for Transparency Fund. The project was carried out after Memoranda of Agreement between the Ateneo School of Government and the two government agencies were signed. It ran from October 2003 to September 2004.

In DepEd, the onward delivery of textbooks from districts to elementary schools was tracked. The findings revealed that the difficulty in accessing the textbook distribution fund and other administrative problems could potentially lower public schools' access to textbooks by 21%. These also weakened adherence to the procedures of distribution at the local level.

In DPWH, various infrastructure projects were checked. The weak capacity of the agency to monitor its yearly projects, which was only 10%-15%, manifested in several cases of long delays and high cost increases in project implementation, especially in foreign-assisted ones.

These monitoring reports on DepEd and DPWH promoted transparency by (a) providing reliable information on government performance and (b) gaining the agency's acceptance, viz. DPWH, of civil society's participation in project monitoring.

The DepEd utilized the report to explore ways of improving its delivery system. It issued a directive on the proper utilization of the distribution fund while the Commission on Audit offered to help facilitate release of the funds.

The DPWH responded to the report by reviewing the problematic projects and affirming the role of civil society participation in strengthening its monitoring system. The Office of the Ombudsman also initiated an investigation of two problematic projects in response to the report.

By and large, G-Watch has paved new grounds as an anti-corruption and good governance initiative by pioneering the extended monitoring of DepEd's textbook delivery from the districts to the elementary schools and by setting the arena for civil society participation in DPWH through the expanded monitoring of public works projects.

Sustaining the momentum gained through this exercise is now the challenge to both G-Watch and the government agencies monitored. It is hoped that G-Watch's continuing program of engagement with the government in monitoring its services will spread the positive effects of current accomplishments.

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The onward delivery of 263,771 textbooks from 15 districts to 155 elementary schools was monitored. The areas selected belonged to 4th to 6th class (or poor) municipalities in Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao.

Findings

1. Average pick-up/distribution rate of textbooks was 79%, with a range of 31% to 100%. It took one month to eight months to complete the distribution.
2. Normative process of distribution was not followed. Instead of the district property custodian distributing the textbooks to the elementary schools, the elementary school teachers picked them up using personal or Parent Teacher Community Association (PTCA) funds.
3. District offices complained of lack of distribution funds. Ten out of 14 districts knew about the existence of the "P1/textbook distribution fund". Only one of the districts visited was reimbursed for transport expenses.
4. There was resource-responsibility mismatch because the division holds the textbook distribution fund while the task of distributing the textbooks is assigned to the districts.
5. Some schools opted not to claim their allocation due to accountability problems posed by (a) impractical procedures for accounting and auditing of expenses, (b) poor storage facilities that expose textbooks to damage, and (c) "untimely" delivery of textbooks.
6. Unchecked or poor recording of allocation resulted in variations in textbook-pupil ratio.

Reactions and Responses Generated

1. DepEd utilized the G-Watch report to discuss ways to improve its system of textbook delivery. Concerned DepEd personnel, line agencies, suppliers and civil society groups were called in for the discussion.
2. The plan to use cola trucks for the delivery of textbooks to the elementary schools in the barangays was cited and explored.
3. DepEd Usec. Luz directed the prompt release of distribution funds and the return thereof to the central office if unutilized.
4. The Commission on Audit announced relaxation of rule on reimbursement to facilitate use of distribution funds.
5. Director Casiano of the Department of Budget and Management concurred with the recommendation to incorporate the textbook distribution fund in the teachers' allowance to dissolve any procedural and accountability problems.
6. DepEd noted a suggestion from a civil society group, Education Network, to include the repair of storage facility for textbooks in the *Brigada Eskwela* program.

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS AND HIGHWAYS

Twenty-six infrastructure projects were monitored. In terms of status, nine of the projects were completed and 17 were on-going. In terms of fund source, 11 were foreign-assisted and 15 were locally funded. In terms of geographical spread, 16 projects are in Luzon, four in Visayas and six in Mindanao.

Findings

1. Foreign assisted projects incurred longer delays than locally funded projects for both completed and ongoing projects.

Completed foreign-assisted and locally funded projects had an average delay of 6.5 months and 1.6 months per project, respectively. Ongoing foreign-assisted and locally funded projects were delayed by 13 months and 1.9 months per project, respectively. The longest delay recorded was 1 year and five months.

2. Bad weather condition, peace and order problem, revision in plans and right-of-way problem were mostly cited as causes of delay.
3. Foreign-assisted projects incurred higher cost increases than locally funded projects.

Completed foreign-assisted and locally funded projects had an average cost increase of P49 million and P15,429.00 per project, respectively. Ongoing foreign-assisted and locally funded projects increased cost by an average of P72 million and P324,825.00 per project, respectively. The highest cost increase recorded was P143.4 million or 29% of original project cost.

4. Change in work, new items of work and inspection at 95% completion and repair of defective works were cited as causes of cost increases.
5. Special concerns included a case of subcontracting, bidding irregularity, multiple contracts in the Bislig Bridge project, and miscomputations in the Program of Work.

Reactions and Responses Generated

1. DPWH sent memo to managers of problematic projects.
2. The Office of the Ombudsman initiated the investigation of two problematic cases.
3. Non-government sector, represented by Makati Business Club and Philippine Constructors Association, remarked about the inclusion of the element of necessity in the design of construction projects.
4. The League of the Municipalities of the Philippines took the opportunity to request DPWH to give it greater oversight function on infrastructure projects.
5. DPWH declared its concurrence with the involvement of civil society organizations in the agency's project inspections.

NOTES ON CORRUPTION AND THE G-WATCH IMPACT AS AN ANTI-CORRUPTION INITIATIVE

Corruption in government program implementation occurs in both the central office and the local offices. The so-called “big fish”—officials in high position and in control of large amount of public funds—are usually found in the former. The latter, taken individually, is not always as scandalous as the former, but taken collectively also cripples the operation and erodes the integrity of the entire bureaucracy.

The G-Watch monitoring mainly detected symptoms of corruption at the local sub-units of the national agencies, DepEd and DPWH. In DepEd, it focused on the Division and the District Offices. The Division Office’s mishandling of the P1.00 per textbook distribution funds resulted in the failure of the some of the districts to distribute the textbooks to the schools. Upon knowing about the funds allocated for the distribution and having experienced the difficulty of retrieving the textbooks from the districts, many public school teachers would readily suspect that corruption has had a hand in the use of the funds.

In DPWH, the monitoring dealt with the District Engineering Offices for the locally funded projects, and the Project Management Offices for the foreign-assisted ones. Various types of corruption surfaced here as evidenced by the slow progress of and the undisciplined spending for the infrastructure projects. These include the District engineers and supervisors getting commissions from contractors for signing a favourable progress report, local politicians receiving kickbacks for endorsing a certain contractor or supplier, rebels extorting money from the contractors as revolutionary tax, etc.

The way things are done at the local level ultimately reflects on the central office. However, while the top officials are accountable for the behaviour of their subordinates in view of their oversight function, the local officials are no less accountable for their own actions and decisions, especially those that are tainted with corruption.

Now, the G-Watch effort contributed in reducing corruption in the country by serving as the citizens’ watchdog, which amplified, and consequently strengthened, the check-and-balance mechanism in government functioning. It sent clear signals to both central and local offices that their performance and behaviour are being watched. This message was further concretized and propounded in a public venue where DepEd and DPWH interfaced with other government agencies and with the non-government sector regarding the results of the monitoring. Such an interface broke any possible notion that corruption within the agency is a “territorial” matter, i.e., only internal controls and measures could solve it. Moreover, the seriousness of the message was even reinforced as G-Watch championed the sustained participation of citizens in the monitoring of program implementation through constituency-building for each agency. But G-Watch’s most vital contribution to the anti-corruption advocacy is the employment of simple tools and methods, which generated the presentation of objectively specific and easy-to-understand findings, facilitated action-oriented discussions, and motivated more citizens and civic groups to participate in governance.

The “ripple effect” of the project’s accomplishments is now being felt as various groups and sectors adapt and replicate the G-Watch approach in preventing corruption. These include the following:

- The Coalition Against Corruption (CAC), a national anti-corruption network of business, church-based, and civil society groups, uses the concept and template of citizens’ mobilization to monitor the procurement of medicines in public hospitals.
- The Boy and Girl Scouts of the Philippines, in cooperation with other volunteer groups, such as the Education Network, the Alliance of Concerned Teachers and the Alliance of Volunteer Educators, continue the counting of textbook deliveries in districts and high schools nationwide. This voluntary work may also extend to the monitoring of the delivery from districts to the schools since the problem in this area has already been established.
- The Association of Ministers and Ministries in Nueva Ecija, an Evangelical church group, expressed interest in mobilizing their members to do monitoring of public works.
- In the National Conference of the Association of Schools of Public Administration in the Philippines (ASPAP) last October, the University of Makati, the Ateneo de Zamboanga and the Municipal Government of Appari stated plans to adapt the G-Watch method.
- In the public forum held last November 2004, the government employees union asked for assistance as to how they can use the G-Watch model.
- A new Cebu-based anti-corruption group called Barug!Pilipino currently consults G-Watch for their strategic planning. They received training on procurement monitoring from G-Watch last December 2004.
- A module is currently being developed for the monitoring of the procurement of the Armed Forces of the Philippines. This was a special request from the Office of the Ombudsman and is intended to be used by their Junior Graftwatch Units. The module is patterned after the textbook monitoring.