

# PHILIPPINES

## THE REAL WORK IS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION

The Philippines is one of the eight countries that founded the OGP. As early as mid-2011, a steering committee was established to drive the process of developing the OGP Action Plan, which was occurring in tandem with the government's Good Governance and Anti-Corruption Plan. 'Given the limited time, we contacted ten network organisations and among themselves they selected three to become interim members of the committee,' explains Patrick Lim of the Governance Cluster Secretariat, which handles the Philippines' OGP engagement. A key civil society player involved from the outset has been the Right to Know, Right Now Coalition, which comprises 160 organisations and individuals representing various sectors of society – farmers, fishing communities, trade unions, the church, academia, professionals, rights and democracy movements, legislators and the media. 'For more than a decade we have been

a consistent and strong advocate of the right to information for citizens based on the Philippine constitution,' says Annie Geron. The two business sector representatives on the nine-member multisectoral steering committee have a track record of over 30 years of pushing for governance reforms and transparency within the business sector.

**'We bring two key perspectives to the table: the view that transparency and governance are good for consumers and for business, and a strong emphasis on metrics.'**

says Guillermo (Bill) Luz, Co-Chair of the National Competitiveness Council. While the infrastructure of the Steering Committee was been put in place at the outset of joining the OGP, it was unable to hold meetings with all its members in 2012 because the CSOs finally

elected their full complement of representatives in March 2013.

The consultation process for gathering inputs and feedback on the first Action Plan took place separately within the three main sectors: government, civil society and the business community between August and December 2011. Within government, proposals were requested from the various agencies. These proposals were based on the four OGP principles and fell into two categories: ongoing and planned initiatives. Once shortlisted by the Secretariat, they were presented to the Governance Cluster technical working group, which comprises assistant and under secretaries. The plan was later presented to and approved by the President.

With its members and specific interest groups (budget, procurement, legislation), the Coalition conducted awareness-

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- Patrick Lim, Governance Cluster Secretariat

raising sessions on the issue of making government information openly available through the use of such strategies as e-group discussions, flyers, handbills and position papers. Coalition member organisations and print and broadcast media were rallied to inform the public and enhance participation. Social networking sites were also utilised for gathering inputs.

According to Annie, of the total submissions/inputs proposed, 25% was actually incorporated in the final plan that was presented to and approved by the President in January 2012. From the government's perspective, reflecting on the process, 'we feel that the consultation process should have been much wider, undertaken throughout the country, thereby broadening engagement and participation of civil society,' says Patrick. From the business perspective, the Action Plan was

considered to be 'rightly ambitious and not a problem as long as it was consistent with the core objectives and mission of the OGP' says Bill.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF METRICS

While the number of submissions and proposals received is positive given it was the first national action plan for the OGP, the challenge has been one of prioritisation - sifting the 'wheat from the chaff'. It has also been necessary to ensure that the submissions are strategic and can be adequately financed. 'The implementation and monitoring of the plan is where the hard work begins,' says Bill. The steering committee has been exploring different ways of capturing data that reflects the citizen's perspective - including customer and perception surveys. This will aid the measuring the impact of policies and, in particular, whether and how any improvements in services are being felt. The push is for a dual

approach: increasing access to information and transparency on the one hand and simplifying government procedures and processes on the other. However, the Coalition is of the opinion that the indicators used do not provide sufficient information and lack substantive meaning. 'It's not clear what "fulfilled", "partially fulfilled" and "in progress" really mean,' says Annie. In addition, she adds,

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*'we believe civil society needs to play a bigger role in the discussions of which commitments should be incorporated and the capacity to monitor the commitments needs to be enhanced, otherwise we won't know whether or not they are being fulfilled by government.'*

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A concrete pilot project in the Action Plan has been Bottom-Up Budgeting. Working with over 590

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communities, the aim is to change the dynamics of engagement between local politicians and citizens, and local government and national government. 'People can now see the budgets that have been allocated for the priority projects they have identified, in terms of sector, geographically and per department,' explains Patrick. The next step will be to show not only how budgets are constructed but also how they are spent. 'Because citizens were directly involved in the selection of priority projects, we expect they will be more motivated to monitor these projects and ensure that they are properly implemented,' he adds.

#### MOVING FORWARD

Reflecting on the achievements to date, many critics believe much more needs to be done with regard to the Philippine government fully embracing the global open data movement.

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says Annie. In February 2013, the Centre for Law and Democracy and the Institute for Freedom of Information sent an open letter to the OGP International Steering Committee bringing to its attention the failure of the current Congress to pass the necessary, long overdue legislation, despite a broad and determined national campaign. They called upon the Steering Committee to take action to signal to the Government of the Philippines that its actions are not in accordance with the norms and expectations of the OGP. Civil society has pledged to continue lobbying government. 'The people's movement for the FOI lives on. The message of the Right to Know,

Right Now campaign is 'we will not bury the FOI Bill. Instead we keep it alive and recommit to pushing it in the 16th Congress.' In response, the Budget and Management Secretary Florencio B. Abad has asserted that the pursuit of greater public access to information is an integral element of the Aquino Administration's Good Governance and Anti-Corruption (GGAC) Plan for 2012 to 2016. 'President Aquino believes that we can curb corruption more successfully and strengthen public institutions if citizens are given greater access to official information. The FOI Act alone will not improve access to information. Under the GGAC Plan, we are pursuing other initiatives to enable meaningful freedom of information, including technologies that will automate the processing and public disclosure of data, as well as clearer and faster mechanisms for public requests for documents,' he added. Membership of the OGP provides

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international support and pressure in the drive to implement reforms within the country and it provides a platform for learning from the experiences of other countries. The Philippines has put 'its honour on the line. The President and the leadership have put their names and faces on it, promising greater transparency and open governance. There is no turning back,' concludes Bill.

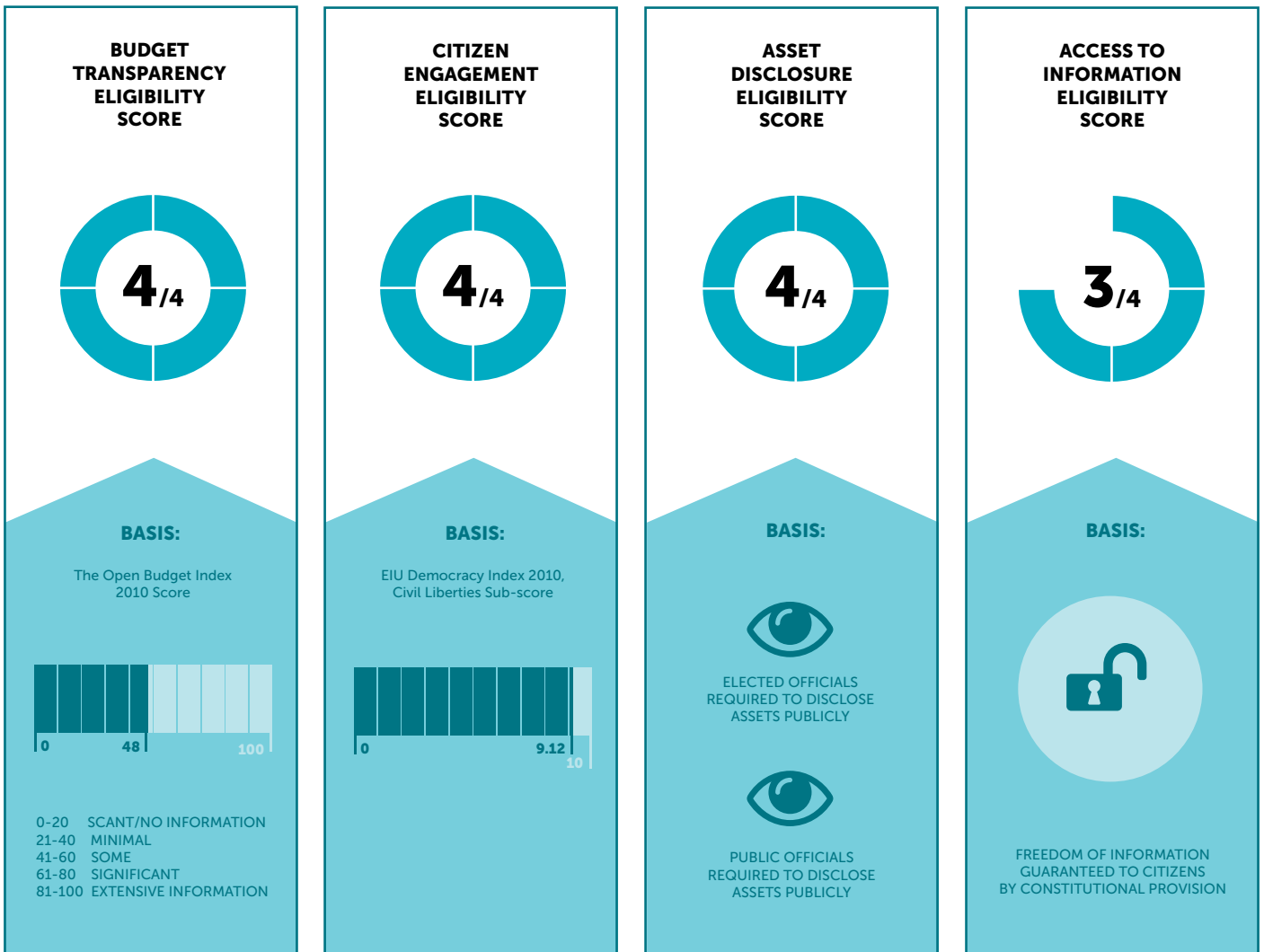
🔗 For more information or to get in touch with one of the people interviewed, please e-mail [nvaart@hivos.nl](mailto:nvaart@hivos.nl).

OGP MEMBER SINCE:  
September 2011

CURRENT STAGE:  
2nd Action Plan

OGP SITE:  
Pending

# PHILIPPINES OGP ELIGIBILITY DATASHEET



**TOTAL OGP ELIGIBILITY SCORE: 15/16**

