



YOUTH POWER FOR AN OPEN SOUTH COTABATO

An Initial Look at Possible Youth Interventions in
South Cotabato for Open Contracting and Freedom of Information



WITH SUPPORT FROM



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INTRODUCTION

Despite its potential as a sector to effect lasting change in areas of transparency, accountability, and good governance, the youth sector remains to be an underrepresented sector in the Open Government circles in the Philippines. In fact, it was seen as a breakthrough when the Youth Alliance for Freedom of Information was engaged to serve as the non-government commitment holder for freedom of information in the Philippine Open Government Partnership (PH-OGP) national action plan for the current period. Prior to this, youth leaders were engaged as part of other civil society organizations that they work with – either as staff members, stakeholders, or beneficiaries.

Fortunately, we see a movement towards including the youth in the core of the Open Government discourse in the Philippines. More and more government agencies are including youth engagement in their commitments – a move that looks forward into the future when it comes to lasting effects of today's government commitment to transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement.

Beyond national-level Philippine Open Government commitments, we also see increasing interest among local governments in engaging youth leaders from their communities to be more participative on government processes beyond the Sangguniang Kabataan initiatives. There is definitely a movement towards building multi-sector collaborative efforts, and cross-sector impact and engagement work that is in line with OGP Local commitments.

The challenge now, especially for youth groups, civil society organizations, and government offices, would be to bank on initial efforts and fully commit towards youth engagement as a much more long-term plan than a one-off for public-level open government citizen engagement efforts. There is still much more work to do on reaching out to the widest possible audiences within the youth sector, and it is not something that a single sector – even the youth – can do alone. It will definitely take co-creation, co-learning, co-working for government champions, youth leaders, and civil society actors. That is a reality that we want to work on starting today and the next months and years to come.

With this, the Youth Alliance for Freedom of Information is very honored to write this initial look into possible youth interventions for Open Contracting and Freedom of Information in the province of South Cotabato. Prior to this study, we have been hearing the good work on OGP commitments being put in by the provincial government, and we are very happy to contribute through this initial study on where we can work together in engaging the youth sector further.

As this is just an initial study, given the limitations brought about by the current COVID-19 public health crisis, local lockdowns, and social distancing measures, we are writing this based on initial interviews with subjects from the provincial government, civil society, and the youth

sector. We hope to continue the work on scoping possible youth interventions beyond this document, as we reach out to more youth leaders in the province through further consultation with this initial look as the conversation starter. In the spirit of Open Government, we will co-work with the youth of South Cotabato in improving the work plan included in this study further, and we hope to work with them as well on turning that revised work plan into reality.

This study also aims to highlight possible room for collaboration for different sectors on youth engagement. We will also highlight here possible areas of collaboration beyond the Youth Alliance and the local government of South Cotabato – more likely by involving members of the academe, local advocacy groups, community leaders, business sector, and tech groups based in the province.

For this initial look, we started by reviewing the current initiative of the provincial government of South Cotabato under their current action plan for the Open Government Partnership in their area. This helped us know existing initiatives, and how they have integrated youth engagement in their implementation of commitments. This also informed us of the possible direction we can take on with the local government when it comes to highlighting government efforts on providing better FOI and Open Contracting experience to their citizens.

After that, we did a series of interviews with representatives of the local government, civil society, and youth sector to provided further context to the information we gathered from the abovementioned reports. The interviews with the youth leaders also helped us gauge the level of awareness when it comes to local government initiatives on freedom of information and Open Contracting, and even deeper, their understanding and exposure to these two concepts.

We think this is crucial as we the possibility that youth engagement may be too early if the appreciation of FOI and Open Contracting is not yet that fleshed out based on their current knowledge and exposure. The Youth Alliance also believes that knowing this will help us put forward awareness and education campaigns and activities, which will then empower the youth of South Cotabato to be much more involved and participative in their provincial government's FOI and Open Contracting initiatives.

And for the bigger picture, we hope that this study will also inspire other local governments to also take some time to reflect on how they have been involving the youth in their local transparency and accountability initiatives. South Cotabato is definitely ahead of most local government on being open to collaborating with civil society on these matters; we hope that they will follow the example of the Provincial Government of South Cotabato and put in local commitments related to transparency, accountability, and citizen participation in the months and years to come.

We hope that we get to write initial studies on youth interventions for FOI and Open Contracting with other local governments as well – a future we want to work on, one scoping document at a time.



OPEN GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP IN THE PROVINCE OF SOUTH COTABATO

The provincial government of South Cotabato is the first local government unit in the Philippines to join the Open Government Partnership Local (OGP Local) program. The OGP Local program, according to the province's website, is "an initiative that recognizes and supports the role that municipal, city, metropolitan, state, regional, and provincial entities play in advancing open government, due to their close proximity to citizens and the crucial public services they provide."

South Cotabato onboarded the OGP Local program in April 2018, joining 15 pioneering local governments and 4 other new members in the global movement. With this, the province joins the ranks of other world-class local governments on being trailblazers of committing to pushing for better transparency, accountability, and citizen participation in their jurisdictions.

Based on the current action plan of the province of South Cotabato, there are five existing commitments that responds to the needs and realities of their constituents. These commitments also uphold the value of co-creating with civil society and the private sector in order to actualize these commitments.

The five OGP Local commitments of the Provincial Government of South Cotabato are as follows, based on disclosures on their website for the public's information:



01 OPEN INFORMATION

Increasing Inclusivity in Public Access to Government Information for Inclusive Growth

Problem: The poverty level is still high especially in isolated communities of indigenous peoples. How can the government respond to what people really need when citizens have limited access to government information?

Solution: The public will be better able to access government data and provide feedback both online and offline. They can view and save info on programs and services anywhere on the Internet. If they have no Internet, a direct community engagement program will record what citizens want to ask the Governor. They will then air the Governor's response over the radio.



02 OPEN MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Open and Participatory Monitoring Towards Quality Infrastructure for Increased Urban-Rural Integration

Problem: Infrastructure projects sometimes suffer from delayed implementation and completion. There are times when project quality and fund utilization is poor. Ideally, isolated communities should have better access to basic social services while being economically interdependent. Goods, services, and mobility should also be improved. How can the government deliver the results they want?

Solution: The public will be able to access real-time project monitoring results through an application. They can also give feedback and comments on infrastructure project status. Improved collaboration will help address issues faced in project implementation. Any findings and recommendations will be publicized for better accountability.



03 OPEN CONTRACTING

Enhancing Efficiency and Transparency of the Public Procurement Process

Problem: Completion of infrastructure projects are delayed due to problems in procurement, including not enough suppliers/contractors bidding and delays in service delivery by contractors. Problems like these hinder the timely completion of projects. How can the government improve the project procurement process?

Solution: This commitment will make the procurement process more open both online and offline. They will then be better able to implement quality infrastructure projects as scheduled. The commitment also allows service delivery that is more effective and efficient.



04 OPEN MINING INFORMATION

Developing and Integrating Transparency Standards and Systems for Increased Accountability and Social Responsibility in Extractive Industries of South Cotabato

Problem: People are misinformed about mining activities in the province. They either do not have access to information about such activities, or they are not capable of understanding the information. This has caused tension and conflict within communities affected by mining, and between anti and pro-mining groups. How can the government solve this?

Solution: Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) standards will be integrated. Transparency about mining, quarrying, and energy industries in the province will be improved. People will also be better engaged through the systems this commitment will implement.



05 OPEN LEGISLATION

Broadening Civic Engagement towards Relevant Local Legislation

Problem: Policies affect how localities develop. To reduce poverty, ordinances need to be relevant and effective. The general public must be better engaged for this to happen. Unfortunately, not all legislative measures are open for public hearing. Most people have limited knowledge of these measures. How can the government improve the public's capability to provide input and propose new legislative measures?

Solution: Legislative processes and measures will be distributed both online and offline. Citizens can also be consulted on pieces of legislation over these platforms. This will ensure that the government will pass legislative measures and processes that are relevant.

Relevant documents and disclosures about the OGP Local in the Province of South Cotabato can be found in the Open Government Partnership webpage of the provincial website or in this microsite dedicated to the OGP program of the province.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

In the first two years of the Provincial Government of South Cotabato in the OGP Local program, it definitely delivered in establishing the roots for its five commitments, most notably in Open Contracting and Freedom of Information. This includes the development of systems and a platform dedicated to the province's procurement disclosures and publications, as well as the passage of the local freedom of information ordinance early this year.

With the momentum that it currently has, it seems natural for the next round of action plans to include youth engagement to further intensify citizen participation in the next few years. The provincial

government has started efforts, in fact, to engage the youth on the Open Contracting commitment. However, difficulties brought about by the current COVID-19 pandemic has made it more difficult to do follow-through with students and educators adjusting to the new remote setup for school learning in the Philippines.

The provincial government was also able to successfully get the support and involvement of major civil society players in the province for the OGP local commitments, including those involved in the Provincial Development Council.

Findings on Youth Engagement for Open Contracting and FOI

Most of the declared successes of the provincial government in the past two years for its OGP Local commitments involved setting up processes and must-have items to kick start the rollout of their FOI and Open Contracting commitments. This includes passage of necessary ordinances, development of disclosure platforms, rally support of civil society and the private sector, onboarding of involved agencies and staff under the provincial government, and improvement of internal processes.

With this, youth engagement in these two commitments, are understandably low so far. This can be attributed to two things: (1) introducing the concept of Open Government and establishment of basic deliverables for the commitments take time, and (2) there is no existing advocacy youth groups in the area that focuses on FOI and Open Contracting so far.

The latter can be attributed to the very little knowledge of youth leaders in the province when it comes to the concepts of freedom of information and open contracting. Understandably, when initially introduced with the two terms, members of the youth sector may

find them technical or even abstract to them. Youth leaders may be more familiar with the concepts of transparency and accountability, but freedom of information and open contracting might be two terms that are relatively newer to their ears.

The provincial government, in its first few years of implementing their commitments, definitely put in the work on information and education campaigns related to their FOI and Open Contracting commitments. However, it takes a more specific outreach and language approach for it to be more concrete and relatable to the younger generations.

A notable move in the right direction for the Provincial Government of South Cotabato would be its engagement with the European Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines on engaging university students to write academic papers and research about Open Contracting. The initiative definitely employed the right approach on letting the graduate students know how they can use FOI and Open Contracting to benefit their academic performance – a strategy that the Youth Alliance for Freedom of Information has been highlighting since its inception.

The Provincial Government and its civil society partners should further lead into this strategy by emphasizing the usefulness of FOI and Open Contracting to the youth

on two fronts: (1) that FOI and Open Contracting can help them improve their academic research and performance, and (2) that FOI and Open Contracting can help them in their personal advocacies and in advocating for the interests of their communities.

The local government unit will also be on the right track if they continue to build on their initial engagements with the Sangguniang Kabataan Federation and academic institutions within their province on mainstreaming the concepts of Open Government and Freedom of Information.

The challenge, however, would be on communicating these issues to much younger segments of the youth population in the province. Efforts to beef up information and education campaigns (IECs) through online platforms would be a way to go, by going to digital spaces where the youth of South Cotabato converges. It is also important, however, to translate these efforts offline to make sure that those youth who do not have the privilege of stable Internet connection will also be reached by the efforts.

MOVING FORWARD

In the next two years, the situation is primed for the Provincial Government of South Cotabato to work with civil society, youth leaders, and other members of the private sector in engaging the youth on their OGP Local program commitments. We have created the following recommendations to help steer these activities based on existing opportunities, as well as previous successes.

We have clustered our recommendations into four for this purpose:

1 **EDUCATE** activities refer to campaigns and projects that will introduce and deepen the knowledge and awareness of the youth when it comes to the concepts of FOI and Open Contracting, as well as the relevant issues that connect these topics with their local government and community;

2 **INVOLVE** activities refer to campaigns and projects that bring in youth leaders and organizations to the conversation and activities surrounding the Open Government initiatives of the province;

3 **CONVERGE** activities refers to campaigns and projects that let youth leaders and organization co-create and collaborate with their fellow members of the youth sector, as well as with other community members and sectors in the province; and

4 **LEAD** activities refer to campaigns and projects that let youth leaders take the helm in advocating for FOI and Open Contracting and serving as ambassadors of the advocacy to their community members.



EDUCATE

01 Basic education and information campaigns introducing Open Contracting and Freedom of Information – For starters, we need to introduce these two concepts to the youth as we have noted very little awareness among the general youth. This part will include going to communities and schools to give introductory talks about these topics, producing IEC materials for online consumption, and inviting them to webinars and summits to kickstart their introduction to these topics.

02 Connecting FOI and Open Contracting to public and community interest – After an introduction, it would now be important to connect the two concepts to their needs and realities as community members and youth leaders. Connecting, for example, the issue of Open Contracting to better public service delivery to their grandparents and better school facilities for those who go to public schools in the province are just a few examples of how to take this on.

03 Deepening appreciation and empowering to be capable speakers about the topic – At this stage, with all their knowledge about how FOI and Open Contracting to their communities, we can now work on empowering the youth to speak about these with their relatives, fellow youth leaders, educators, and other people they interact with. This is essentially deputizing them to take on the role of enhancing awareness of the general public about these two topics, which we will prepare them through more focused capacity development sessions.



INVOLVE

01 Increase youth representation in Open Government consultations and activities – While we have seen some youth activity in the past, we recommend making this a must by ensuring the inclusion of youth leaders from different parts of the province of South Cotabato. Involving them in stakeholder consultation and co-creation activities would make them feel heard and would increase the likeliness of long-term involvement from the side of the youth.

02 Co-create Open Government activities with the youth – While this might take a bit of time to capacitate the youth in working hand-in-hand with the provincial government and other members of civil society in co-create activities, it is definitely a possibility in the next year or two. Bringing in younger perspectives in the co-creation of Open Government campaigns and projects might contribute greatly to the overall impact and reach of the activities.



CONVERGE

01 Support creation of new advocacy youth groups in the province – University and schools serve as the home for most youth organizations in the province. There needs to be an encouragement to further diversify existing campus-based organizations and convene new community-based youth organizations focused on FOI and Open Contracting. These advocacy organizations can be assisted and guided by the provincial government and its civil society and academic partners.

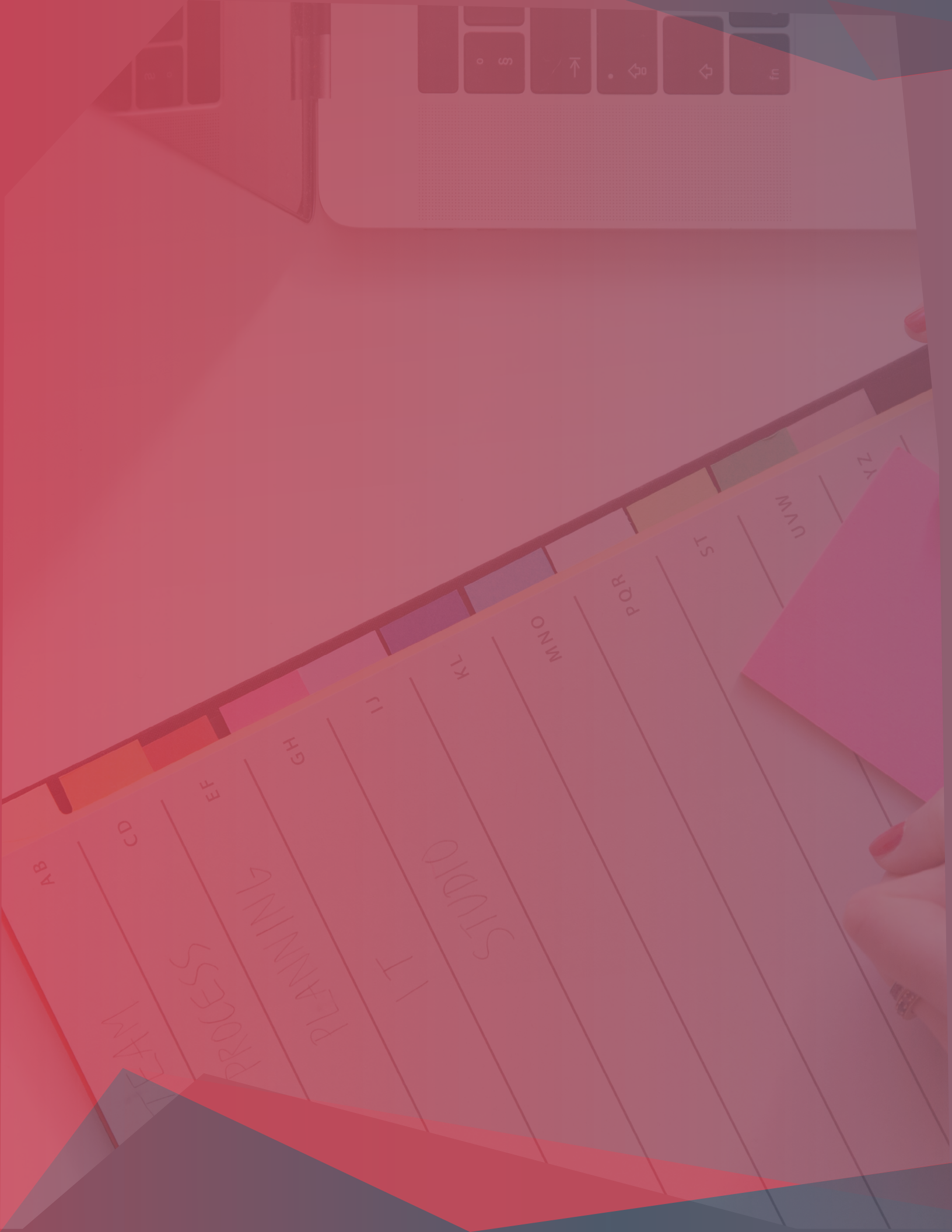
02 Create spaces and events for youth interaction and collaboration – Once we have much more diversity and participation in the youth scene in the province, the next step would be to create events and platforms wherein the youth leaders in the province and collaborate towards creating ideas and solutions related to FOI and Open Contracting. This level of engagement, of course, should still be interest-based: a suggestion would be engaging student journalists as one strand, campus youth leaders as another, community youth leaders as another, and young academic scholars as another group.



LEAD

01 Provide opportunities for youth leaders to speak on FOI and Open Contracting – In the upcoming years, youth will be capacitated enough that they actually have the knowledge and skills to engage other members of their communities and introduce them to open contracting and freedom of information. They can echo what they learned in their training and exposures, and relate how these OGP local commitments connect to their community's interests.

02 Provide space for youth leaders to initiate own campaigns and activities on FOI and Open Contracting – With support from the provincial government, civil society organizations, and academic institutions, empowered youth leaders can also organize their own campaigns and activities to increase awareness and engagement on the abovementioned topics within their own communities, and across other grassroots sector – which may include women, LGBTQI+, farmers and fisherfolks, indigenous peoples, workers, volunteer groups, and other marginalized sectors of their communities.



TEAM

PROCESS

PLANNING

IT

STUDIO

AB

CD

EF

GH

IJ

KL

MNO

PQR

ST

UVW

YZ



INITIAL WORK PLAN

On the side of the Youth Alliance for Freedom of Information, we have drafted this initial work plan on possible youth engagement that we can co-work with the Provincial Government of South Cotabato and other civil society organizations in the province, as our way of starting the conversation towards actualizing findings and recommendations of this initial look. This work plan, of course, can still change based on updates when it comes to

COVID-19 mobility restrictions and inputs from partners on these initiatives. We hope that, at the very least, this serves as the conversation starter when discussing youth interventions for FOI and Open Contracting OGP commitments of the province.

SIX-MONTH WORK PLAN

January to June 2021

ACTIVITY/CAMPAIGN

RATIONALE

IMPLEMENTATION DETAILS

01 Educate the youth of South Cotabato about FOI and Open Contracting basics

Type of Engagement:



At the very least, there needs to be baseline knowledge among the youth leaders about the topics of FOI and Open Contracting for them to be fully engaged in these issues.

Organize in an online webinar series format, from January to February 2020

02 Consult youth leaders about this work plan and gather insights on possible additional or complementary activities, as well as with the action plan for the next round of OGP Local commitments of the province

Type of Engagement:



After introducing FOI and Open Contracting, it is also crucial to include them in the next conversations, including adding more or suggesting revisions to this work plan. They should also be included in the consultation process for the next action plan of the provincial government on the OGP Local program.

Organize in an online summit format towards the end of February 2020.

The schedule of consultations for the action plan of the next round for the OGP Local program will be dependent on the schedule set by the Provincial Government of South Cotabato

03 Engage educators from public schools and universities and educate them about FOI and Open Contracting, while capacitating their learnings to their students and colleagues in the academic community

Type of Engagement:



By engaging teachers and school officials, we are involving more people as a multiplier to reach out to more youth leaders from South Cotabato. This will also serve as an encouragement for them to feature FOI and Open Contracting initiatives of the province in their discussions with their students.

The engagement with teachers can be done during school breaks to lessen pressure on the current workload given adjustments to remote learning. May to June 2020 would be an ideal time for this.

04 Set up a meeting among engaged youth leaders to check possible collaboration points and initiate possible co-learning sessions based on their initial engagements on the Open Government commitments

Type of Engagement:



This can be a way to facilitate collaboration among newly engaged members of the youth sector and assess where we can improve our strategy towards growing this number and improving our outreach and engagement plan with them.

This should happen during school break, so the ideal timing for this would be May or June 2020.

SIX-MONTH WORK PLAN

July to December 2021

ACTIVITY/CAMPAIGN	RATIONALE	IMPLEMENTATION DETAILS
<p>01 Do capacity building activities on grooming youth leaders to be speakers and experts about FOI and Open Contracting</p> <p>Type of Engagement: </p>	<p>At this point, there will be youth leaders who are apparent to be possible thought and action leaders in the field of FOI and Open Contracting in their communities. Their capacity on speaking about these issues should be further honed as they can influence other members of the community.</p>	<p>This can be done as a series of masterclass sessions from July to August 2020.</p>
<p>02 Establish a chapter of the Youth Alliance for Freedom of Information in South Cotabato</p> <p>Type of Engagement:  </p>	<p>Existing youth organizations that are engaged in FOI and Open Contracting can be the founding members of the Youth Alliance for FOI chapter in the province/region. Establishing this will help them connect with other FOI youth leaders across the country and enable them to contribute to the learning and lobbying efforts at the national level.</p>	<p>The work for this can be from July to September 2020, with the official launch of the chapter to coincide with the fourth anniversary of the Youth Alliance.</p>
<p>03 Check the possibility of including youth organizations and alliance in the Provincial Development Council</p> <p>Type of Engagement: </p>	<p>Established youth organizations and alliances can be further involved in the mix when it comes to the discussions on FOI and Open Contracting by including them in the Provincial Development Council, or at the very least, be recognized as a partner by the provincial government in development efforts.</p>	<p>This can be an ongoing effort throughout the whole period.</p>
<p>04 Co-produce IEC materials with the provincial government and other civil society partners</p> <p>Type of Engagement:  </p>	<p>The engaged youth organizations can take the lead and collaborate with the provincial government and civil society partners in producing online and offline material that makes information and awareness-building about FOI and Open Contracting much more accessible to other members of the youth sector and the South Cotabato community.</p>	<p>Efforts for the production of these IEC materials can be an ongoing effort throughout this whole period, with at least one IEC material released per month.</p>

SIX-MONTH WORK PLAN

January to June 2022

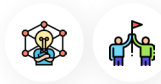
ACTIVITY/CAMPAIGN

RATIONALE

IMPLEMENTATION DETAILS

01 Involve the widest possible network of youth leaders in engaging local election candidates to commit to Freedom of Information, Open Contracting, and Open Government initiatives across all levels of the local government.

Type of Engagement:

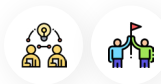


With the local elections coming up in May 2022, it is an opportune time to engaging all local candidates to be champions of FOI, Open Contracting, and Open Government, regardless of affiliation. Beyond the provincial government, there is a need to engage the city and municipal-level candidates, to ensure that Open Government values are present in their jurisdictions even without the provincial government keeping an eye on them.

Preparations for this can start as early as January 2022, with actual engagement with candidates happening from April to May 2022.

02 Produce IEC materials about the importance of electing officials who support FOI, Open Contracting, and Open Government values.

Type of Engagement:



In partnership with civil society organizations in the province, the youth can take on producing videos, blogs, and posters about the importance of voter awareness in these topics and having elected officials championing these values.

Preparations for this can start as early as January 2022, with the release of IEC materials can be from February to May 2022. At least one IEC materials should be released per month.

03 Hold the first South Cotabato Open Government Youth Congress

Type of Engagement:




Engaged local youth leaders can host their first-ever youth congress, and further increasing reach of the movement by clinching attendance of university students in the activity.

Preparations for this can happen as early as January 2022, with the actual congress happening in April or May 2022.

SIX-MONTH WORK PLAN

July to December 2022

ACTIVITY/CAMPAIGN	RATIONALE	IMPLEMENTATION DETAILS
<p>01 Plan out the youth outreach and engagement plan with the newly elected local government leaders.</p> <p>Type of Engagement:  </p>	<p>As we take out awareness and engagement efforts further in the cities and municipalities, discussions on youth outreach and engagement about FOI and Open Contracting should be done with newly elected and re-elected officials. The discussions should include possible localization of existing provincial initiatives and engagement of grassroots sectors in the Open Government commitments.</p>	<p>This should be done in July 2022.</p>
<p>02 Do a university tour for the creation of the new youth action plan for South Cotabato on FOI and Open Contracting</p> <p>Type of Engagement:    </p>	<p>A convening of multi-stop university tour will put youth engagement and network expansion in the province as the top priority, employing all types of engagement in this massive effort.</p>	<p>This should be done from August to October 2022, recruiting newly engaged youth organizations to the chapter of Youth Alliance for FOI in South Cotabato.</p>
<p>03 Involve youth leaders in the creation of the new round of action plans for the OGP Local program.</p> <p>Type of Engagement: </p>	<p>As another period for the OGP Local is nearing its commencement, engaged youth leaders should also be involved in the co-creation process of the updated OGP commitments.</p>	<p>This will heavily depend on the schedule set by the Provincial Government of South Cotabato.</p>
<p>04 Do an assessment of the implementation of the two-year work plan on engaging the youth on freedom of information and open contracting.</p> <p>Type of Engagement:   </p>	<p>With the two-year work plan detailed in this study rolled out fully, there needs to be an assessment of where we can further improve, and employ learnings in the next work plans for youth engagement in the province.</p>	<p>This can be a series of focus group meetings or one large convening, happening sometime between October to December 2022.</p>



EDUCATE



INVOLVE



CONVERGE



LEAD

