

How the Caucus of Development NGO Networks (CODE-NGO) of the Philippines Practice Legitimacy, Transparency and Accountability in its Operations?

By Roselle S. Rasay, Acting Executive Director, CODE-NGO

When CODE-NGO was founded by the 10 largest CSO networks in the Philippines in 1991, it was mainly to scale up the impact of the work of civil society on national development, as well as to differentiate themselves from fly-by-night NGOs that mushroomed at that time.

The Philippines then was a young democracy, having thrown out a 20-year martial law and authoritarian government of President Ferdinand Marcos through the People Power Revolution of 1986. As a new democracy, it received the favor of many donor governments which supported the development of the country. The succeeding government of President Corazon Aquino in 1986 was also friendly to civil society, the role and contributions of which to national development has since been embodied in the 1987 Constitution. Because of the goodwill created by being the first democracy in Asia, funding support from the international community poured into the Philippine government as well as to the civil society sector. However, many new NGOs sprung out, some of them created by politicians or dubious personalities which would want to take advantage of the funding made available for the sector.

The decision of the 10 largest NGO networks to form CODE-NGO was precisely to address this situation – to establish the legitimacy of CSOs in the Philippines. CODE-NGO's creation in 1991 was anchored on the consensus arrived at by the members of the founding networks as embodied in its basis of unity document – the Covenant on Philippine Development and Code of Conduct for Philippine CSOs. (This document is accessible here <http://code-ngo.org/basis-of-unity/>). CODE-NGO's very creation and history then is grounded on a Legitimacy, Transparency and Accountability (LTA) practice.

CODE-NGO was also among the CSO networks which established the Philippine Council for NGO Certification (PCNC) in 1998. The PCNC www.pcnc.com.ph is a non-profit, independent body authorized by the government through the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) to certify NGOs as donee institutions. Donations received by a donee institution are tax deductible. This makes them attractive as partners to corporate givers. Being certified by PCNC means undergoing a rigid assessment by peers on the areas of governance, financial management, administrative and personnel management, project development and management and networking/partnership building. An NGO can be certified for 1, 3 or 5 years depending on its performance in the assessment.

The work of CODE-NGO members in demonstrating their legitimacy did not stop with the signing of the Covenant and Code of Conduct and formation of PCNC. Since 2012, CODE-NGO has been organizing a signature campaign among its members to renew their commitment to the CODE-NGO Code of Conduct (See Annex A). To date, 73% of the 1,600 base organizations affiliated with our member networks have signed this renewal of commitment.

Further, since PCNC was established, CODE-NGO has continued its 'Good Governance Campaign' of having its members certified by PCNC. However, because of its rigid certification

process, only 10% of CODE-NGO affiliates are certified. The smaller organizations who could not afford a PCNC certification are instead doing a self-assessment using the 'Good Governance Checklist', a 17-point checklist of indicators that provide a minimum measure of good governance for CSOs (see Annex B). To date, 529 CODE-NGO affiliate organizations are compliant with this checklist.

In 2011-2014, CODE-NGO became part of a 3-year capacity building initiative called "Strengthening the Capacity of Philippine CSOs Project." The project involved the development of a self-assessment tool called the CAT (Capacity Assessment Tool) so that a CSO can evaluate or rate itself in terms of its organizational development or maturity in the areas of Governance and Leadership, Financial Management, Administrative and Personnel Management, Project Development and Management and Resource Mobilization. The CAT is accessible here – <http://code-ngo.org/cat/client/index.html#/page/learn-more-capacity-building-framework>. While the tool reflects compliance with Philippine laws and context, some indicators may also apply to CSOs in other countries. The CAT becomes a basis for CSOs to identify areas of organizational weakness and strength, so they can craft their capacity building plan.

Learning from this project, CODE-NGO developed two more CATs – in the areas of Networking and Member Relations and of Advocacy Effectiveness. These two areas are more relevant to networks like CODE-NGO and its direct members. These may be of interest as well to other AGNA members which are of the nature of networks or coalitions.

Through the years, these were how CODE-NGO has practiced LTA and has promoted an environment and process of life-long learning for its members and leaders.