

Social Contracts for Political Accountability

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Tool summary

Social Contracts for Political Accountability (SCPA) between citizens and politicians/public officials were initiated in the late 90's by some Philippine-based civil society organizations (CSOs) in order to promote transparent and accountable governance. Such contracts have since been used in many parts of Philippines, and in a range of countries around the world to pro-actively promote performance-based, platform-oriented politics and active citizenship. ICODE (Iloilo Caucus of Development NGOs), a provincial network of CSOs is one of the pioneers in the use of social contracts whose key approach has been "Accountability Not Lip Service" which is a public disclosure/feedback and performance evaluation mechanism driven by citizens' queries.

What is it?

The SCPA is a binding written agreement between the stakeholders (i.e. those who govern and the governed) aimed at fostering transparent and accountable governance. They are tools for social accountability initiated by citizen groups to hold public officials, politicians and service providers to account for their conduct and performance in terms of service delivery, mandated responsibilities and public obligations. SCPA is aimed at ensuring regular interactive dialogue between citizen-voters and the specific government/political actor concerned, to fulfil their commitments to the development agenda defined in public platforms.

The SCPA is also intended to encourage active citizenship, leading to a more balanced relationship between politicians and citizens/civil society actors, and allowing the voice of the disadvantaged to be heard in the policy and planning process. The SCPA promotes performance-oriented leadership as citizens-voters begin to choose leaders not for "good speeches", but for their "performance" and capacities to lead and govern. The SCPA provides a framework whereby participation can happen at different levels and civil society can participate for best results. In the Philippines, CSOs have used SCPA in conjunction with innovative modes of citizen engagement, emphasising the participation of a critical mass that can create social pressure. Ever since the model Local Government Units (LGUs) in the Philippines started institutionalizing performance accounting mechanisms through ordinances, the SCPAs have gone

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beyond the electoral phase and become integrated into the regular performance evaluation mechanisms of the public administration cycle.

How is it done?

The SCPA process involves five stages of activities spread over the pre-election and post election phase. The five stages are preceded by certain prerequisite activities such as: educating voters (typically conducted through a half-day programme in each village and, orienting and organizing local CSOs for engagement in electoral and local governance processes (at least six months prior to the elections).

A diagrammatic representation of the whole SCPA cycle is given on page 10 of this document.

Pre-election phase

Stage1- Formulation of a Peoples' Agenda: The formulation involves a series of sectoral consultations for a duration of 2 to 4 hours at the village level, at least a month prior to the commencement of electioneering campaigns. The Peoples' Agenda is prepared as a manifesto of the collective, unified, priority concerns of the various socio-economic groups like farmers, labourers, women, youth, vendors, etc. and are addressed to political candidates. This is followed by preparations (typically requiring approximately one month) for the Candidates Forum, involving a series of activities by the CSOs to publicize and promote the activity through posters in public places such as markets, churches, and government buildings. Stage one concludes with the drafting of preliminary Terms of the Covenant Agreement between the LGU and the citizens' representatives.

Stage 2 - Candidates' Forum: The Forum brings together all electoral candidates (typically for a period of about four hours) for a face-to-face exchange with local citizens. At the Forum, the Peoples' Agenda is presented and responses from candidates are sought. The presence of media representatives at the Candidates' Forum is very vital to promote the cause, widen the dissemination of information to the larger public and to document the proceedings, agreements signed and the commitments made.

Stage 3 - Signing of the SCPA: This stage involves the signing of a contract between citizen-voters and the candidates - usually calling for Clean, Honest, Accountable, Meaningful and Peaceful (CHAMP) elections and transparent and accountable governance (mechanisms". The SCPA stipulates a contract between the candidates and the voters, by which the candidates, if elected, agree to be held accountable through ongoing public evaluation of their performance.

Post-election phase

The activities in this phase begin after the elected officials assume their offices and mainly involve lobbying for legislative resolutions to institutionalize the provisions of the SCPA with budgetary allocations.

Stage 4- Performance monitoring and evaluation: This is typically a half-day interactive public platform to act as a mechanism for feedback and feed forward, held in public plazas and attended by thousands of voters and the elected officials. The purpose of the public platform is to evaluate the actual performance of the elected officials, vis-à-vis their pre-election commitment to the people's agenda and the terms of the SCPA. The first such platform is held soon after the completion of 100 days in office and is held every six months thereafter. Yet again, the media plays a very critical role in helping the platform revisit the pre-election commitments and broadcasting the progress of the development platforms, programs and projects.

It is quite possible that a particular session may not be able to respond to all the queries posed by citizens. In such instances, the LGU undertakes follow-up activities during the legislative sessions such as proposing the recommendations from the performance evaluation process for legislative action and adjustment of plans in the light of feedback. These actions by the LGU are recorded and presented in the succeeding public feedback platform.

Stage 5 - Institutionalizing the SCPA: This is a rigorous process where CSOs deliberately and proactively launch advocacy campaigns to bring pressure on LGUs (for example, by working with local champion legislators) to pass resolutions and ordinances for institutionalizing the public feedback platform as well as the SCPA with budgetary allocations.

Benefits

- SCPAs have served to reduce corruption and enhance transparency, accessibility, responsiveness and accountability of political candidates and public officials.
- SCPAs have prevented a wide range of malpractices such as abuse of public funds, tardiness/absenteeism, poor planning/budgeting and project implementation and unethical conduct of public officials. Even in challenging contexts, creative and persistent approaches have succeeded in improving systems of public disclosure and feedback.

- The stigma of shame due to poor performance has restrained many elected public officials many from running for public office again as many who have tried have been severely defeated.
- The SCPA initiatives have a strong gender-equity component and have succeeded in espousing women's rights and assisting women candidates to gain equitable access to political offices and don leadership roles.
- SCPAs have the potential to create a snowball effect with success stories in some LGUs inspiring other LGUs to proactively adopt social contracts for transparent and accountable governance.
- SCPAs are potent instruments to build political will for pro-poor and people-friendly policies and plans while also acting as a catalyst to infuse transparency in the electoral process and resisting money and muscle power in politics.

Challenges and lessons

- SCPA initiatives have proved highly successful and sustainable in small towns and villages are rather high, but have been less successful in larger towns and cities.
- Citizen's engagement and participation: The participation of a critical mass of citizens is crucial as politicians always fear greater numbers. Hence, CSOs must emphasise community mobilization and ensure a critical mass to command respect and attract the attention of the politicians.
- Public disclosure and transparency: Elected leaders are obligated by the SCPA to publish periodic reports, share legislative and executive plans and allow tracking of their performance. Such activities pressure the politicians to constantly review their platforms and foster political will to deliver their promises. In the same vein, CSOs are also required make reports of their activities publicly available.
- Right of Access to Information: The SCPA stipulates peoples' right to access public information such as the fiscal plans, projects performance reports etc. of the LGUs. Municipal officials like the treasurer, budget and accounting officers are also expected to publish information including revenue and expenditure reports and make them accessible to the public. CSOs can use this information for budget advocacy.
- Media: The role of media is crucial for disseminating relevant information to the larger public and raising critical awareness on pertinent issues
- Objective and rigorous tools for monitoring: The use of evidence-based approaches such as public expenditure tracking, budget analysis and advocacy, poverty monitoring (and training local CSOs in applying these tools) helps generate reliable and fact-based feedback and adds to the credibility of the exercise. However, it would be prudent to familiarize the community/local CSOs first with less-threatening approaches like voters'

education, candidates' forum etc. and as the process and the local partners mature more purposive and complex methodologies for citizen's monitoring may be operationalised.

- Presence of progressive political leaders, especially young executives, and community leaders and CSOs who can engage the LGU, has been found to be a critical factor of success and sustainability of the initiatives.
- Factors such as history of chronic political conflicts or intense political rivalry, prevalence of counter-progressive and dynastic traditional political culture, poorly organized CSOs and passive citizenry are considered to inhibit the full realization of social contracts.

Key resources

Abadeza, B. Voters' Education and Social Accountability, a blog posted on Tue, 23 Jun 2009 on Affiliated Network for Social Accountability in East Asia and the Pacific (ANSA-EAP)

<http://www.ansa-eap.net/?q=blog/voters-education-and-social-accountability>

☞ ANSA-EAP is a regional network promoting the practice of social accountability by providing a common platform for exchange of information and experience and by providing capacity building opportunities and technical assistance to citizen groups and governments. The blog is about Youth Vote Philippines, a consolidated force of progressive, reform-minded youth groups and organizations, which aims to anchor it's voter education campaign on the millennium development goals (MDGs) emulating the ICODE's SCPA initiative.

Citizen Reform Agenda 2010 (CReforms 2010): *Reforms 2010 Means Saving Lives and Giving Hope*, a blog posted on 21.11.09

<http://www.bloggen.be/philippinenews/archief.php?startdatum=1253596312&stopdatum=1253682712>

☞ A very useful blog on CReforms 2010, an alliance forged by CSOs in Philippines aimed at pressuring the candidates to pledge their commitments to reforms, in view of the forthcoming elections 2010.

Diakonia Asian Regional Office (2007): *Domain 4 - Change in democratic governance at all levels* (P 135-167) in Partnership in Diversity- Best Practices and Lessons Learned- Final Evaluation of Philippine Development Programme

http://www.diakonia.se/Documents/public/RESULTS_AND_HIGHLIGHTS/Diakonia_Philippines-Final_Report_March_2007.pdf

☞ This report provides a concise description of ICODE's work in Iloilo province on promoting participatory local governance with references to it's initiative using SCPA.



ICODE, NGOs Inc., the Philippines

<http://www.angelfire.com/journal2/icode/index.html>

☞ ICODE is a dynamic, responsive and empowered network of non-government organizations (NGOs) in Iloilo province that enhances a people-centered, equity-led, sustainable and integrated area development. ICODE has been a pioneer in using The Covenant Type Agreement for Transparent and Accountable Governance.

IRIN News: “ZAMBIA: Politicians sign contract ahead of vote”, a news report dated 17th August 2009.

<http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=60398>

☞ The report describes the campaign launched by Citizen’s Forum, a Zambian CSO to mobilize political leaders to sign social contracts as a pre-election commitment to bring about reforms and infuse transparency and accountability in governance

Lusaka Times: *Citizens forum, ZAMWA insist on social contracts for the candidates*, posted on October 20, 2008

<http://www.lusakatimes.com/?p=4854>

☞ This news report is about the call given by the Citizens Forum and the Zambia Media Women Association (ZAMWA) to Zambians to demand for commitment on the National Constitution Conference (NCC) from each of the four presidential candidates in the forthcoming elections.

Malawi Economic Justice Network (2004): *Content Based Elections-2004- The Citizen’s Manifesto*

http://www.sarprn.org.za/documents/d0000756/P846-MEJN_CS_Manifesto.pdf

☞ The main objective of the Citizen’s manifesto was to guide the civil society and the Malawian populace to focus on socio-economic issues and ideologies (rather than personalities) in choosing and, thereafter, supporting and assessing and monitoring their elected government. The Manifesto was also used as a tool to elicit candidates and parties’ commitment to the issues raised in the manifesto.

Pamangkutanon sang Banwa (Citizens’ Query) Bingawan, Iloilo Province in Philippines: *Kwentahan Hindi Kwentohan (Accountability not Lip Service)*,

http://www.panibagongparaan.com/pp06/pdf/Project_Summaries.pdf

☞ This is a project proposal brief on implementing the SCPA in Bingawan municipality by Pamangkutanon sang Banwa (Citizen’s Query), a multi-sectoral participatory governance program in Bingawan covering 6,000 voters across 14 Barangays.

Philippine Information Agency release on 22/04/2005: *Mindanao Mayors to ink anti-corruption covenant*

<http://www.pia.gov.ph/default.asp?m=12&sec=reader&rp=1&fi=p050422.htm&no=7&date>

☞ The news report is about the event held on April 23-24, 2005, in which the Mayors of 16 cities in Mindanao region in Philippines were expected to sign a Covenant of Commitment to Transparent and Accountable Governance in a two-day workshop on transparency and accountability.

Philippine Daily Inquirer: *What for is the covenant?* posted on 10/04/08

<http://opinion.inquirer.net/inquireropinion/letterstotheeditor/view/20081004-164537/What-for-is-the-covenant>

☞ This is a news report about Justices of the Court Of Appeals who proactively signed a “covenant” in which they committed to “repair the damage caused” by the bribery scandal linked to the case of Manila Electric Co. versus Government Service Insurance System.

Teves, Maria Althea. *2010 Philippine Presidential election to be based on issues: Fact or fiction?* September 26, 2009

<http://feudart.com/2009/09/06/2010-philipine-presidential-election-to-be-based-on-issues-fact-or-fiction/>

☞ The news report is about Citizens Reform Agenda 2010 (CReforms 2010), an umbrella of CSOs which shall engage the candidates and political parties in the 2010 elections by having them commit to the covenant they have drafted, and respond to the key agenda and issues in the CReforms 2010 papers. The key issues which must be addressed by 2010 candidates are corruption, political and electoral reform, environment and sustainable development, local government reforms, and human development.

Transparency & Accountability, Philippines

<http://www.transparency-accountability.org/Foundations/foundations.html>

☞ The site gives details of a forum of political leaders in the Philippines who have proactively committed to create a movement for the Covenant on Transparency and Accountability in view of the forthcoming elections in 2010. The site also gives the legal foundation for such a covenant and template of the Covenant itself.

Case studies

Community organizing and mobilizing for SCPA in Batad Municipality, Philippines

The SCPA had an eventful beginning with an exposure programme for the local movers (CSOs, LGU partners) to an initiative in Luzon municipality. The participants were enthused with the experience of transparency-at-work in Luzon and vowed to replicate the same in Batad, Iloilo and make it even better. However, there was a need for an impetus to trigger the initiative which came in the form of a massive voters' education campaign organized by ICODE during the local government elections of 1998 in partnership with the PPCRV (a church-based organization with nationwide local chapters).

ICODE was asked to facilitate the Candidates' Forum and the outcome of the election was fair and clean, and the electorate had shown maturity in their choices of leaders as a result of which many independent-minded, poor candidates emerged as winners. The newly elected mayor had toppled a dynastic leader, but faced empty coffers at the municipality. The municipal employees were upset when they discovered non-payment of benefit remittances. The mayor verbalized his need for transparency and ICODE was roped in as the technical advisor which, with the help of PPCRV, other CSOs and local champions, crafted the strategy for a Participatory Local Governance (PLG) programme.

ICODE provided capacity building to the partners. One of the basic gaps ICODE had identified was the limited competencies of community leaders in taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the Local Government Code (LGC) for meaningful participation in processes of local governance. In order to address this gap, ICODE organized training sessions for community groups on the content of the LGC and, in particular, its provisions for citizen/civil society participation in Local Development Councils (LDCs) and Special Bodies. The trainings also included strategies and tools on how to demand accountability of public officials. After the trainings, CSOs and CBOs were encouraged to participate in the LDC and to take part in processes of Community Development Planning and Annual Investments Planning. Different sectoral groups such as peasants, urban poor, fisher-folks, youth, women, cooperatives, etc. were mobilised. In accordance with the SCPA signed during the election campaign, the mayor of Batad, along with other elected leaders, public officials and civil servants, was called upon to publicly report the progress on the implementation of campaign promises, plans and accomplishments. Due to effective mobilisation efforts of local CSOs, the turn-out at these public reporting events was huge, with members of churches, CBOs, schools and ordinary citizens coming in hundreds to pack the town plaza.

Source: refer page 141-144 in the following document
http://www.diakonia.se/Documents/public/RESULTS_AND_HIGHLIGHTS/Diakonia_Philippines-Final_Report_March_2007.pdf

Kaya Natin! Launches New Champions of Good Governance, Philippines

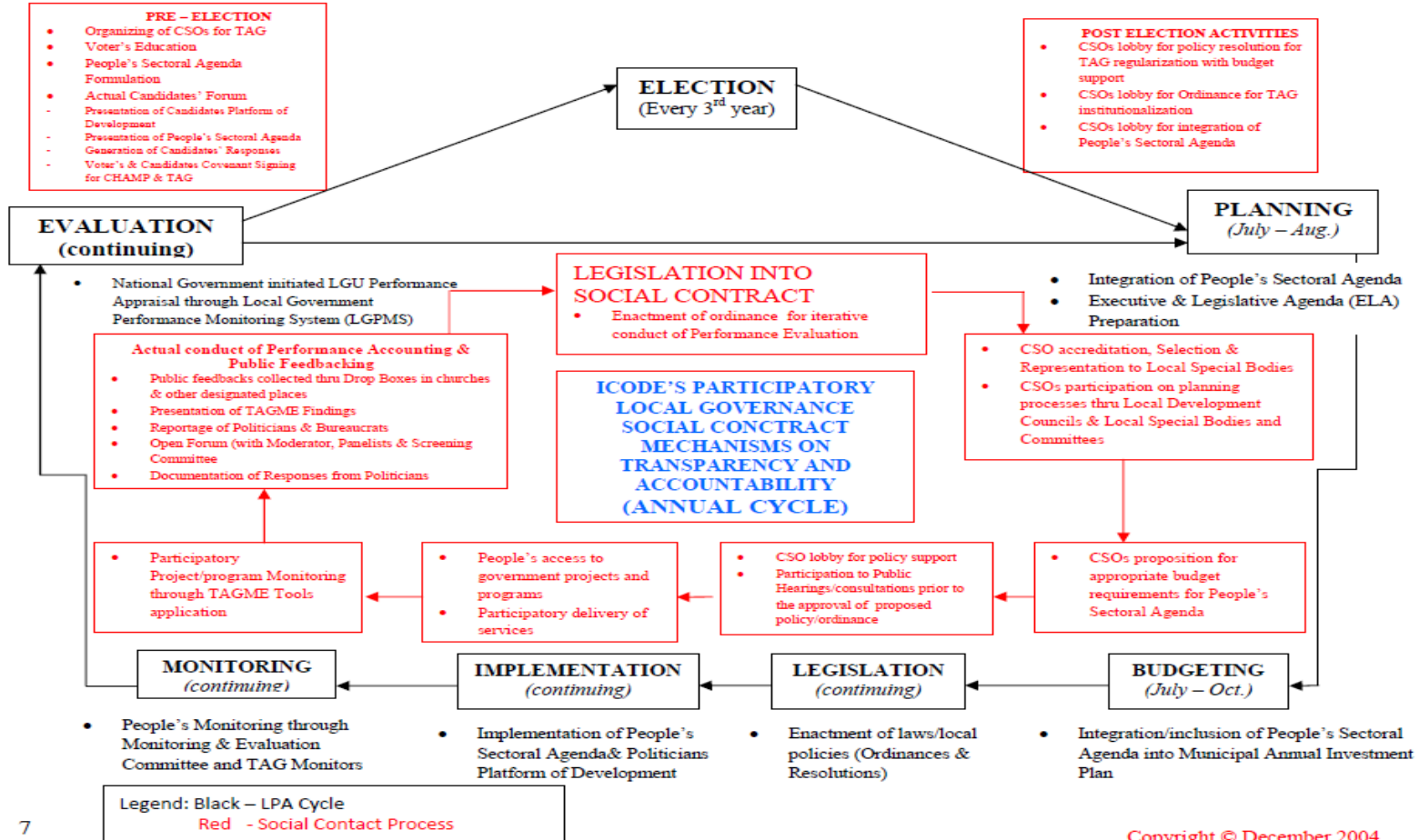
Kaya Natin! is a movement composed of good Filipinos from different sectors of society that aim to espouse genuine change and ethical leadership in the Philippines. In a launching ceremony held by Kaya Natin! on April 24, 2009 at the Ateneo de Manila University, it introduced to the public seven new faces of good governance from all over the Philippines, in addition to the five already chosen earlier this year. The new government officials are mostly mayors from cities and municipalities in Luzon and the Visayas. They will be joining Naga City Mayor Jesse Robredo, Isabela Governor Grace Padaca, Pampanga Governor Ed Panlilio, Ifugao Governor Teddy Baguilat, and San Isidro, Nueva Ecija Mayor Sonia Lorenzo as they advocate issues such as transparency, social accountability, and people's participation in government.

As part of the launching ceremony, all twelve local officials signed a covenant of good governance, pledging to support the eradication of illegal gambling and graft and corruption, the extension with reform of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program (CARP), and electoral reform. The covenant also includes a position on charter change, where the champions agree that a constitutional amendment before the elections next year would not be acceptable, as well as a pledge to practice transparency and social accountability in their local government unit and let the people participate in governance.

Source:
<http://kayanatin.com/blogs/kaya-natin-launches-new-champions-of-good-governance/>



The Mechanics of the Social Contract Harmonized with the Local Public Administration Cycle



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