

Conclusion and Recommendations



Coming to the end of our narrative, how do we sum up the strong wind of GRRB that has coaxed out LGU-CSO partnerships in Hilongos and Sorsogon City, ruffling the status quo and redefining governance with the touchstones of inclusion (gender) and efficacy (results)?

Let us sum up the past two accounts by examining, in turn, the steps of the GRRB process, the GRRB activities undertaken, the gains and benefits of the GRRB process, and the various lessons learned.

The three phases of the GRRB process are assessment and planning, training and mobilization, and piloting (action component).

An extended note on research

Before the first plans could be drawn up, painstaking assessment was undertaken through: a situation analysis or socio-economic profiling of the two project sites; a gender appraisal of policies to determine whether LGU projects were gender-sensitive; a budget and expenditure analysis to track how budgets were spent; and impact analysis to check whether results promoted gender equity and equality.

The socio-economic profiles portrayed Hilongos as an agricultural municipality, majority of whose inhabitants live below the poverty line with monthly household incomes of P11,000.00 or less; and Sorsogon City as having active civil society organizations with nearly half of its over 149,900 population living in the rural areas.

Apart from demographic data, the profiles carried baseline information vital to planning. For instance, the fact that Hilongos' farmers and fisherfolk reported declining rice harvests and fish catch, respectively; and the fact that Sorsogon City had rising rates, infant and maternal deaths. Later these would be linked to key problems in the pilot sites: destruction of irrigation systems caused by long-term riverbed quarrying in Hilongos, and the existence of two health service delivery systems in unhealthy and wasteful competition in Sorsogon City.

The gender research study on Sorsogon City's health PPAs reported that: in spite of increasing budget allocations on health, the incidence of infant and maternal deaths and malnutrition rose during the period covered; women and men played largely passive roles in the public health care system; only a few gender-specific health programs targeted women; and these limited benefits were undermined by the above-mentioned competing systems.

On the other hand, Hilongos' gender research study highlighted the active roles played by women in rice and coconut farming and fishing, and women's greater share of domestic work resulting in multiple burdens. Sparse and non-sex disaggregated data rendered shaky a seeming correlation between increased spending on agriculture and

declining malnutrition rates. Although some agriculture PPAs appeared to be “related to the needs of women farmers”, no conclusion could be drawn as to whether they promoted gender equality because the service delivery system was “gender blind”, not differentiating between women and men.

Thus, in both project sites, gender was not consciously integrated into all phases of the development cycle.

Summary of GRRB activities

Wide-ranging GRRB activities included:

- ♀ Research
- ♀ Advocacy
- ♀ Awareness-raising
- ♀ Training/capacity building
- ♀ Assessment and planning
- ♀ Monitoring and evaluation
- ♀ Policy analysis and design

Research findings were eye-openers, providing the bases for sound planning. According to the August 2004 – February 2005 project report:

- The program appraisal report and budget/expenditure analysis raised awareness on the important link between resources (inputs) and results (outputs and outcomes). Higher expenditures do not always translate into better results.
- For Sorsogon City CSO representatives, the analysis served to validate and build a stronger case for their advocacy points on the LGU’s health program.
- For the agricultural personnel in Hilongos, the analysis helped to examine their assumptions about women and men farmers.
- For LGU leaders, the appraisal process is deemed a useful undertaking that should be replicated in their other LGU programs.

The rigorous research process was critical to identifying the fundamental problems of quarrying and uncoordinated health care and in addressing these in subsequent planning and strategizing. Otherwise, the GBI project could not move forward.

Advocacy marked each phase of the project with orientation meetings, public fora, consultations, partnership building sessions with LGUs and CSOs including women’s groups, and even FGDs, which were primary tools for data-gathering and validation. The project staff, consultants and resource persons sought to convince stakeholders on

the imperative of shifting from the stalled 5% GAD budget approach and the canned method of drawing up budgets to the new GRRB approach.

In the process, the GRRB advocates employed a variety of methods including dialogues, case studies, lectures-cum-discussion, testimonies, one-on-one conversations, power point presentations, etc. Thus, project commitments were made by LGUs and CSOs, individually and in tandem, to the project as a whole and to its various components.

Awareness-raising also informed the GRRB process particularly on gender issues and concepts through seminar workshops with an expressly gender content (e.g. two gender sensitivity training seminars and Trainers Training in Sexual and Reproductive Rights for Hilongos stakeholders) and as inputs in the various training activities. The first six inputs in Part II directly deal with gender: issues, challenges, frameworks and strategies.

Awareness-raising (or 'conscientization', Spanish for consciousness-raising) targets both hearts and minds, for conceptual knowledge alone cannot move people while an emotional appeal alone can soon run dry. The Hilongos research finding that "Women are farmers too", backed by hard data, had the power to change mindsets and motivate action. Likewise, a deeper appreciation of gender concepts such as the multiple burden led a Sorsogon LGU official to understand that flexitime was based not on female caprice or whimsy but on a concrete need to balance work inside and outside home on the part of mothers, and fathers, too.

Assessment and planning was undertaken at the start of the project (National Inception Workshop) and at about mid-point through the Strategic Assessment and Planning workshops for both project sites during the first quarter of 2005. The former introduced general features of the project while starting with the latter, both teams were tasked to produce, refine and enhance plans that ranged from specific (focused on agriculture and health) to comprehensive (covering the entire range of LGU concerns).

Workshop exercises in earlier seminars also asked both teams to draft mini-plans such as those seeking concrete outputs-outcomes-impacts in Hilongos' agriculture and Sorsogon City's health sectors. Planning was usually a joint LGU-CSO activity although, on occasion, it was undertaken by one or the other (e.g. Sorsogon City CSOs' re-entry plans). Thus, plans ranged from GAD planning and budgeting (for 2005 and 2006) to those related to the PIME cycle, and to resource mobilization.

Training/capacity building sought to teach skills in planning and budgeting (and in the entire PIME cycle) from a gender perspective. It introduced participants to a wide array of tools and frameworks essential for planning that was GRRB. Thus, training and capability-building constituted the biggest block of major activities (seven out of 17); and forms roughly half of Part II inputs.

Training first focused on gender, tackling the strategy of gender mainstreaming and its concomitant tools of gender planning and gender budgeting. Then it interfaced with project and program training against a matrix of local governance, producing gender-based indicators for each stage of the project cycle. This dual interface lent a double edge to the planning process, measuring PPAs with the three Es (effectiveness, efficiency, economy) and a fourth: gender equity and equality.

One special input was a mix of advocacy and awareness-raising, highlighting the need for further training. Addressed to CSOs, it dealt on local governance as venue for people's participation.

Monitoring and evaluation basically refer to project (GBI) monitoring and evaluation undertaken at two levels: national and local. Mechanisms for the former included the project team consisting of staff and consultants as well as the project steering committee which met periodically to evaluate progress and make plans. Local-level monitoring and evaluation mechanisms included the municipal technical working group (MTWG) for Hilongos and a project steering committee for Sorsogon City, in addition to the secretariat (WELFARE and LIKAS). Thus, obstacles and deficits were identified and addressed with timely interventions.

At the level of LGU planning, monitoring was acknowledged as critical to the project development cycle whose absence or weakness often spelled failure. Results-based planning and budgeting meant performance-based to be measured through performance (objectively verifiable) indicators. However, indicators could further ramify into output, outcome and impact indicators. At the same time, they had to have a clear gender dimension. Thus, in regard to the Hilongos GAD Plan, instead of citing the number of hectares deprived of irrigation by heavy quarrying, it was recommended to seek data on the number of households displaced as a consequence of quarrying.

Policy analysis and design meant taking stock of national policy relevant to the project and if supportive, bringing advocacy down to the local level and translating it into local resolutions, ordinances and executive orders. For example, the GAD plans and budgets had to be incorporated into the LGU's executive-legislative agenda (ELA). The Local Government Code has also enlarged space for local policy and program initiatives. Policy making also encompassed vision-mission-goal (VMG) statements, which both LGUs found it necessary to review, enhance and reformulate. Where policy, official or unofficial, was found detrimental to public interest, the LGU-CSO partnership deemed it imperative to undertake advocacy to undo and redress years of its destructive consequences as in the Hilongos quarrying issue.

Benefits and advantages of the GRRB process

The difference between conventional LGU planning and budgeting in the country and the GRRB process may be likened to fishing with a single bait with little guarantee of a catch in numbers, and fishing with a net. What are the benefits and advantages of GRRB?

First, it improves efficiency. Concrete targets are based on real gender (related) needs validated by organized constituents. There is no automatic carry-over of a past year's budget. There is a progressive and logical translation of issues into objectives, activities, targets, GAD indicators and budget. This reverses the established practice of starting with canned figures and ending with a rationale.

Second, it improves monitoring. With clear performance indicators, timetables, tasking and budgets, deficits can easily be pinpointed and snags addressed before they develop into full-blown crises. Or differently put, "who does what, when, where and how".

Third, it is vital to tracking implementation. With targets and responsibilities established every step of the way, it helps ensure that objectives will be achieved on time. Obstacles and delays can be anticipated and timely interventions and alternatives planned.

Fourth, it improves transparency and accountability. Before the first plan is laid out, GRRB starts with research, assessment, evaluation. This thoroughgoing process helped surface the underlying problems key to solving malnutrition and addressing women's health in Hilongos and Sorsogon City, respectively. These were declining rice harvests due to irrigation systems damaged by unmitigated quarrying in Hilongos and two parallel and competing health service delivery systems that dissipated resources and energies in Sorsogon City.

Likewise, GRRB's framing the planning and budgeting process within the context of good governance and gender-responsiveness ensured at the outset that CSOs and women's groups would hold public officials accountable for non-delivery of targets, demanding transparency in decision-making. As one woman leader declared, barangay decision-making and budgeting can no longer remain a closed-door process.

Fifth, it ensures that benchmarking of national and international commitments is part of the planning process. Thus, GRRB takes into full account national policy mandates pertaining to GAD targets, landmark legislation advancing gender equity and equality (e.g. Anti-Violence Against Women and Children Law), and international commitments such as those deriving from the CEDAW and the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.

Impact

The project's key impact is developing within the partners the awareness and acceptance of a better way of developing local plans and budgets, which is to link these with intended results. Thus, the two local government units have committed to applying the new budgeting process to other sectoral programs. For the LGU partners accustomed to input-based budgeting (and simply copying line items from the past year's budget), this new way of planning and budgeting has required them to adopt a shift in mindset and in the way they do budgeting.

Lessons learned and corollary recommendations

However, the awareness of “results” in budgeting (particularly for LGUs) still needs to evolve into thinking “outcomes” and “impacts” and not just “outputs”. This requires continuous mentoring of and advocacy with the LGUs concerned. Thinking “impacts” is compelled by demands of gender equity and equality that are measured in long-term effects on women, men and children in households and communities.

A second lesson learned is that lack of sex-disaggregated data can stymie GRRB’s best-laid plans. Therefore, partners must improve and institutionalize local monitoring and tracking systems in LGUs.

Third, GRRB requires technical skills on the part of planners and implementers, but political savvy is key to having budgets approved and implemented. How to counter, for instance, traditional political bias for infrastructure projects that ensure name recall during elections? GRRB partners must have the skill to convince politicians that supporting GRRB as a tool of good governance is to their political self-interest.

Fourth, capacity building for both LGUs and CSOs needs to be sustained so that gender budgeting is not an individual endeavor limited to those who have been trained by the project and have developed knowledge and skills, but becomes an organizational commitment. It is imperative that the LGU and the community together build an organizational culture that is gender-responsive and participatory.

Fifth, GRRB challenges the transparency and accountability of local governance because it is inclusive and participatory. Thus, GRRB is a tool for curbing corruption and promoting good governance. Advocacy for sustaining and expanding GRRB in LGUs can be made within this broader context.

Sixth, GRRB needs to take into account broader planning and policy developments. Governance does not happen in a vacuum and GRRB must be knowledgeable about new laws and policies with the potential to undermine or enhance GRRB goals. For instance, the new education policy introducing sex education in public schools bodes well for greater advocacy for women’s health and rights. Another example is an existing law that prescribes a certain percentage allocation of bank loans for agriculture. Hard-pressed and organized agricultural communities such as those in Hilongos can check this out as potential source of funds.

Seventh, GRRB needs to prioritize specific aspects so as not overload the clothesline, so to speak. A judicious focus on agriculture for Hilongos and maternal health for Sorsogon City enabled the optimal use of limited resources for piloting purposes. A premature expansion to other targets with half-baked lessons invites failure and disaster.

In conclusion

Florencia Casanova-Dorotan, the project manager, during the End-of-Project conference in early August summed it up best:

“The challenge for all stakeholders is to move from the quota-based budgeting system to one that is totally gender-responsive. The even greater challenge is to move into results-oriented and rights-based planning and budgeting. But the good thing is that it is possible.”