

Reflections

By Jamil Bundalli ¹

My internship with the CUI's IPPGUG project in the Philippines was a valuable learning opportunity for a recent Master's in planning graduate. The internship provided me a venue to appreciate applied planning and development theories conceptualized as a strategic framework to build the capacity of and strengthen local governments in developing countries. For my intern reflections I will discuss the two key learnings that I drew from my hands-on experience with program activities, indicators of the successful achievement of my objective to gain significant professional and personal experience and knowledge regarding the planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of urban development programs and projects at the municipal and regional level.

Sustainable Planning

The first concept I was taught at planning school is 'sustainable planning'. Sustainable planning, a component of good governance, encourages transparent decision-making and stakeholder participation with the objective of producing decisions/plans that will be better accepted and supported by stakeholders and hence more likely to succeed. Sustainable planning does not necessarily lead to sustainable ends but it instead is argued as a necessary precursor to achieving sustainable outcomes. Unfortunately the process demands of sustainable planning can be cumbersome and resource demanding - a tremendous challenge to promoting and institutionalizing a culture of good governance in capacity-lacking and resource-poor urban centres. However, over the course of my internship I was privileged to experience and understand the IPPGUG's clever approach to tackling this challenge. The IPPGUG program invests early project resources to build lasting participatory structures such as decision-making and advisory committees that capture a broad spectrum of voices and interests, and then further supports these structures to function using demonstration projects. The medium-term value of building and supporting these structures is that they effectively institutionalize broad participation and transparency into program supported activities. The IPPGUG Philippine partner's experience of working with and benefiting from participatory structures developed under the program will no doubt contribute to a long-term culture of sustainable planning.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation is often an underutilized tool in planning and managing projects evidenced by the little emphasis placed on the subject by my Master's planning program. My experience with the IPPGUG program exposed me to a more dynamic approach to monitoring and evaluation using the activity as a venue for participant self-reflection, celebration of achievements and momentum building, as well as internal program self-reflection, learning, and strategizing.

Almost every other week, I participated in monitoring and evaluation strategy sessions where we reviewed the state of each project that we were assigned to assist. Discussions centred on both project successes and challenges, identifying factors leading to positive results that needed to be

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Mr. Bundalli had also spent time in Kenya where he initiated a participatory energy planning project, assisting rural communities to improve their local energy services.

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recognized and celebrated and factors leading to difficulties that needed to be addressed. We strategized approaches to communicating with our partners to relay our observations seeking long-term impact. For example, we held a participatory monitoring and evaluation workshop where we created an environment for our partners to come to terms with what they had achieved and in many cases their lack of achievements. However, what enabled the process to be effective was the continued internal dialogue within the office on how we understood the state of activities, brainstorming how CUI could better deliver its services.

In summary, my internship with the Philippines office of the IPPGUG program exposed me to and allowed me to gain extensive skills on delivering programs that promote sustainable planning and provide direct capacity building assistance in urban-centres.