

A Review of Citizen Participation Issues, Responses, and Prospects for Reform in Local Development Councils

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This article conducts a review of citizen participation in local governance within the context of the local development councils (LDCs). It argues that the Local Government Code has prescribed citizen participation with a limited set of standards, namely, the 25% civil society membership in the LDC and the administrative indicators of activities that the LDC must perform. The Code and subsequent LGU performance measures it influenced have insufficiently addressed the roles to play and capacities needed by civil society to realize higher levels of citizen participation in the LDCs. Moving forward, the study takes stock of citizen participation initiatives that make explicit the roles and capacities of civil society organizations in local decision making and draws lessons to suggest prospects for deepening and increasing citizen participation in LDCs. The article ends with a note that citizen participation should be in the core agenda of proposed amendments in the Code.

Keywords: *local development council, local government units, citizen participation*

Introduction

Former Senator Aquilino “Nene” Pimentel, Jr., principal author of *Republic Act 7160* or the *Local Government Code of 1991* (LGC, or the Code), said in an interview with one of the authors:

The heart of the Local Government Code was already beating when the 1987 Constitution was written. The Code is a manifestation of how we envisioned our democracy when we reclaimed it from the dictatorship... The people must always be on top of the situation to monitor what is being done and to express their views regarding the

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way the government is being run in the localities... Local governance does not depend on the governors alone. The people must do their share. [emphasis added] (Personal communication, October 18, 2017)

It is a hopeful note, as the Code builds on the idea that democracy rests on genuine involvement of citizens in the work of governance. Local government units (LGUs) are created to decentralize and devolve service delivery functions for efficiency and, in principle, effective response to local needs. In the process of exercising local autonomy, LGUs should account for citizen inputs in local planning and budgeting, directly involving citizen groups in both executive (planning) and legislative (budget allocation) decisions.

The theory of change embedded in the LGC resonates agency-structure frameworks, particularly the Giddens perspective of the *duality of structures* (Mouzelis, 1995; Sewell, 1992). The notion is particularly empowering when applied to governance frameworks: that while the structure (systems and institutions) provide for the context of understanding, meaning, and action for the agents (entities capable of action, like persons or groups), the agents have the capacity to shape and affect the structures in return.

In this sense, LGUs provide for the context for citizen participation—particularly through the platforms of the local development councils (LDCs, or the Council) and local special bodies (LSBs). Meanwhile, citizens that engage in these platforms are able to shape the LDC and, ultimately, the LGU systems and processes themselves.

Within the scope of the LGC, perhaps the most essential of all these citizen participation platforms are the LDCs because they exist in every level of the LGUs. The LGC (1991) stipulates:

Section 106. *Local Development Councils.* -

- (a) Each local government unit shall have a comprehensive multi-sectoral development plan to be initiated by its development council and approved by its sanggunian. For this purpose, the development council at the provincial, city, municipal, or barangay level, shall assist the corresponding sanggunian in setting the direction of economic and social development and coordinating development efforts within its territorial jurisdiction.

Section 109. *Functions of Local Development Councils.* -

- (a) The provincial, city, and municipal development councils shall exercise the following functions:
- (1) Formulate long-term, medium-term, and annual socioeconomic development plans and policies;
 - (2) Formulate the medium-term and annual public investment programs;

- (3) Appraise and prioritize socioeconomic development programs and projects;
 - (4) Formulate local investment incentives to promote the inflow and direction of private investment capital;
 - (5) Coordinate, monitor, and evaluate the implementation of development programs and projects; and
 - (6) Perform such other functions as may be provided by law or component authority.
- (b) The barangay development council shall exercise the following functions:
- (1) Mobilize people's participation in local development efforts;
 - (2) Prepare barangay development plans based on local requirements;
 - (3) Monitor and evaluate the implementation of national or local programs and projects; and
 - (4) Perform such other functions as may be provided by law or competent authority.

The journey of citizen participation over the past 26 years of the LGC is a sprint towards the end. For the longest time, the statutory local planning and budgeting under the LDC has not been effectively implemented (World Bank, 2017). But in the last decade, significant programs and innovations have emerged that compel the rethinking of citizen participatory platforms—specifically the LDCs—and their significance in the LGUs' performance.

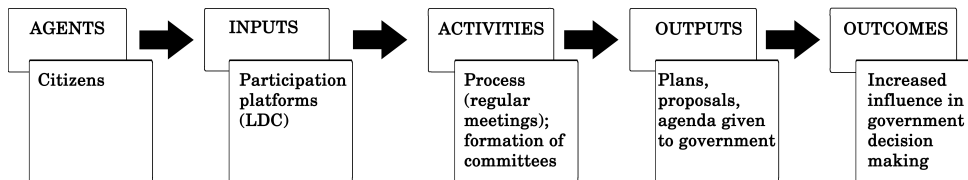
This article is divided into three parts. First, it will problematize how the spirit of citizen participation espoused in the Code is limited by the insufficiency of standards for LDC functionality, the vagueness of roles and insufficient capacities to guide the conceptualization and actions of both government and citizens. Second, the article will take stock of citizen participation initiatives from government and non-government organizations (NGOs) and their implications on pushing for higher levels of citizen participation. Lastly, it will discuss prospects for deepening citizen participation in local governments through policy and programs.

This article can be a relevant reference in academic literature on how citizen participation in local governance is conceptualized, operationalized, and measured in policy. It may also offer practitioners some insights on how the various efforts from government and civil society are coming together to find ways for genuine citizen influence in governance to uphold the spirit of the Local Government Code.

Local Development Councils: In the Code versus in Practice

Citizen participation is broadly defined as a process that provides private individuals an opportunity to influence public decisions (Michels, 2011; University of Oregon, 2003). There are three key concepts in such understanding: individuals or citizens, opportunity (such as platforms and activities), and influence in public decisions. These terms can be thought of as matching a standard logical framework and the broad translations from the LDC provisions, shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Logical Framework Representation of the Gap in Citizen Participation in the LDC (Authors' representation)



The article argues that the LDC, and all the LGU performance metrics it influenced through the years, have been limited to the administrative area, i.e., activities and outputs, of problematizing citizen participation in local governance. Administrative platforms and activities, no matter how public or regular, are not very good at giving citizens direct influence, even if they can be used as forums for preliminary information sharing (Ebdon & Franklin, 2006, p. 440). This suggests a disjoint between the spirit of the Code versus how the LDC's implementation has been conceptualized and overseen through the years.

Two critical points also arise. First, the Code and the subsequent translations of its provisions into administrative performance assessments of the LGUs have provided little to no evidence to correlate the functionality of the LDCs into meaningful participation of citizens, given the lack of appropriate indicators. Second, the roles of citizen representatives in the LDC remain vague, on top of the insufficiencies in capacities of these representatives that are addressed on a per-program approach.

LDC Functionality as Administrative Compliance

In all local government levels—province, city, municipality, and barangays—the LDCs must be comprised by NGOs at no less than 25% of the LDC composition (*LGC*, Section 107). This was promising, especially because there are elements of self-governance as per the prescribed process of the NGO representative selection:

Section 108. *Representation of Non-governmental Organizations.* - Within a period of sixty (60) days from the start of organization of local development councils, *the non-government organizations shall choose from among themselves their representatives to said councils. The local sanggunian concerned shall accredit* non-government organizations subject to such criteria as may be provided by law. [emphasis added]

Upon constitution, the Code also provides for the administrative expectations on the LDCs:

- The LDCs must meet at least once every six months or as often as necessary (Section 110).
- The LDCs must have an executive committee, and may have sectoral or functional committees for representation and support in the conduct of its functions (Section 111, 112).
- The LDCs must be assisted by a secretariat for technical support, documentation, and preparation of other reports necessary (Section 113).
- The LDCs must submit their proposed plans to the local *sanggunian* (legislative council) and/or regional development councils (Section 114).
- The LDCs must receive information on financial resources and budgetary allocations relevant to their localities from the Department of Budget and Management (Section 115).

Because of the sheer number of LGUs in the country (81 provinces, 145 cities, 1,489 municipalities, and 42,029 barangays; each having its own LDC), it has been a challenge for national government agencies, particularly the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), to monitor LDCs. However, oversight on LDC implementation was first accounted for in the earlier iteration of the Local Government Performance Management System (LGPMS), which started in the 2000s. In the earlier version of LGPMS, indicators on participation were put together to reflect the administrative conduct of the LDCs. For instance, among the indicators shared by DILG in 2012 were the following:

- “Are the NGOs, people’s organizations (POs), and/or private sector represented in the local development council?” (Answer options: yes, no, partial)
- “Was your LGU able to set up a feedback mechanism to generate citizens’ views on the reach and quality of your LGU’s services?” (Answer options: yes, no)
- “Are NGOs, POs, or the private sector involved in the implementation of the LGU development projects (especially those that are funded out of the 20% component¹ of the internal revenue allotment [IRA]²)?” (Answer options: yes, no; with follow through questions on the extent of involvement of the sectors)

When the LGPMS was complimented by, then later updated into, the Seal of Good Housekeeping (SGH)³, which was then expanded into the Seal of Good Local Governance (SGLG) in 2014⁴, the performance measurements of the LGUs included “LDC functionality” under the “financing development” category. However, LDC functionality was still measured based on administrative conduct of activities and does not seem to underscore quality and roles of civil society in the local government planning and budgeting.

Another interesting note is that LDC functionality has not been a consistent core component in the performance indicators of the LGUs under the iterations of SGH/GFH to SGLG as per the progression of guidelines issued by the DILG from SGH’s enactment in 2010 to present. In 2010, the SGH was initially launched to focus on sound financial management, measured solely through the absence of an adverse or a disclaimer Commission on Audit (COA) opinion on local financial transactions, and transparency and accountability, measured through the observance of the full disclosure policy (FDP). The SGH was formalized in 2012 to introduce three categories, namely, bronze, silver, and gold, with gold including “functionality of LDC” as one of its criteria. However, the inclusion of LDC functionality was later removed in the revised assessment framework upon the launch of the expanded SGLG in 2014 to 2016. It was only in 2017 when it was included again as an indicator under the “financing development” category.

These changes in the inclusion of LDC functionality in the performance measures of the LGUs show that it had not been a core criterion in determining what makes an LGU well-performing. This is not to say that DILG and its partners have turned a blind eye on citizen participation, because the assessment program has been progressive in

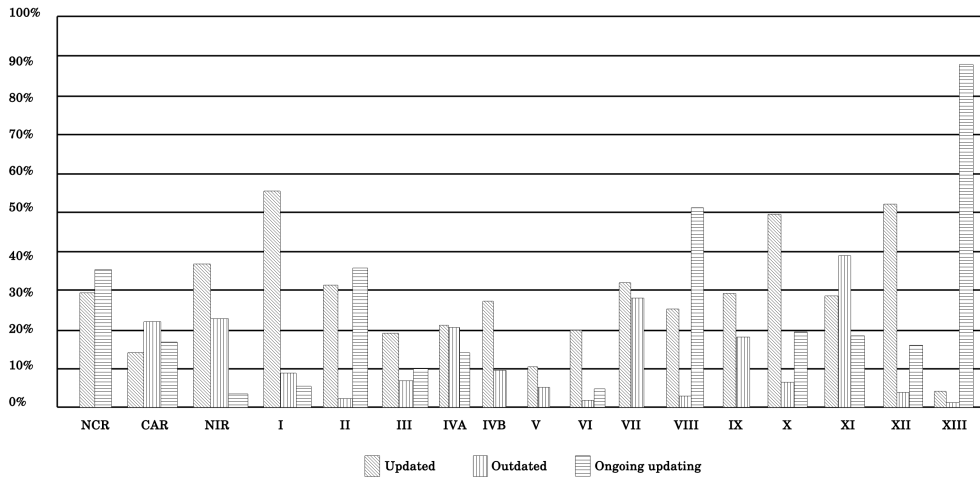
terms of aligning its parameters with national agenda and needs. The frequent revision of its guidelines from 2010 to 2017 can be seen as an effort to improve on assessment areas consistent to the needs of local stakeholders. In addition, the iterations in the SGLG-LDC functionality inclusion occurred against the backdrop of the Bottom-up Budgeting program (BuB, which ran from 2013-2016 under the Aquino administration). The BuB was the cornerstone program for citizen participation in planning and budgeting processes, wherein local government and local civil society organizations co-chaired a decision-making platform, called the local poverty reduction action teams (LPRATs). As a priority program, attention of national government agencies and LGUs were focused on BuB. Nevertheless, the assessment program is a platform that could have emphasized LDC functionality as a fundamental indicator in gauging citizen participation in local governance and development.

In terms of the limitedness of LDC functionality indicators, it can be said that, even if the 2017 SGLG results⁵ showed that 80% of LGUs (provinces, cities, municipalities) passed the LDC functionality component, the results do not say whether citizens were influencing government decisions through the participatory platform. What the number simply means is that 80% of provinces, cities, and municipalities are compliant in convening their respective LDCs, which have their committees and secretariats, at least 25% CSO representation, and which meet at least once every six months.

Furthermore, Section 109 of the Code provides for function of the LDC to “formulate long-term, medium-term, and annual socioeconomic *development plans* and policies [emphasis added],” and the citizen representatives should be a part of this process. As per DILG’s 2017 assessment of the existence of comprehensive development plans (CDPs)⁶, the performance of municipal LGUs was less than satisfactory: only 864 municipalities (52.88%) had a CDP, while 770 municipalities (47.12%) did not. These meant that just around half of municipal LDCs—even if we assume that they comply with the LDC citizen participation requirements—were able to deliver the development plan that was expected of them. The breakdown of CDP existence per region is shown in Figures 2 and 3.

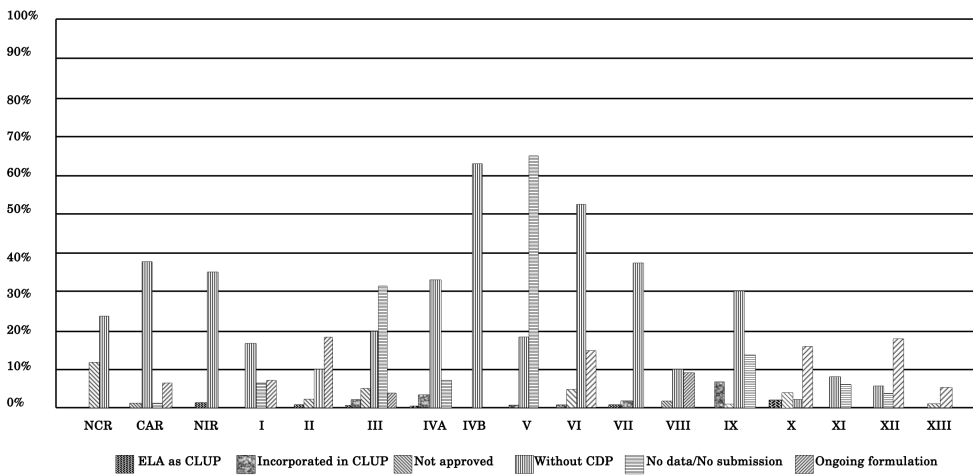
Is the LDC working as a platform for citizen participation? There is no way to know because the LDCs have never been sufficiently conceptualized, problematized, and measured in terms of citizen participation outcomes. However, this is not to say that this limitation is not problematized by government and NGOs alike. The succeeding section delves into this more concretely.

Figure 2. Percentage of Municipalities with Comprehensive Development Plans per Region, as of 2nd Quarter 2017



Source: DILG (n.d.)

Figure 3. Percentage of Municipalities without Comprehensive Development Plans per Region, as of 2nd Quarter 2017



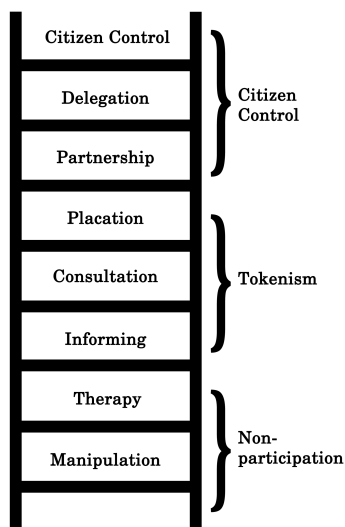
Source: DILG (n.d.)

Problematizing Gaps in Citizen Participation in the LDCs: Roles and Capacities

In this subsection, it is argued that, because the standard of LDC functionality in the Code and in subsequent performance measurements are based on administrative implementation, the roles of citizens (and their representatives) in the LDC remain vague. This is on top of the insufficiencies in capacities in community-based civil society representatives that are, to date, being addressed on a per-program approach. In the sections of the Code quoted earlier, the provisions make huge assumptions when it argues that the presence of citizen representatives in the LDC necessarily translates to influence in local government decisions. This section argues that, while presence is a vital step in encouraging citizen influence, the implementation and oversight of the LDCs over the past years have not sufficiently addressed the variables of role clarity and citizen capacity to make the LDC-as-platform reach the outcomes desired.

How are higher levels of citizen participation conceptualized? Contemporary sources cite a certain framework, the *ladder of citizen participation*, by Sherry Arnstein (1969, as cited in Dobson, n.d.), which is shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation



Source: Dobson (n.d.)

In this representation, Arnstein (1969, as cited in Dobson, n.d.) argues that:

- For Levels 1-2, there is no participation of citizens, and the only aim is to cure or educate.
- Levels 3 to 5 are tokenistic participation. Level 3 (Informing) is the first step to legitimate participation, but there is only one way in the flow of information (from government to citizens). Level 4 (Consultation) is also legitimate, but usually is a window dressing ritual. Level 5 (Placation) is the scenario wherein there is “co-option of hand-picked ‘worthies’ onto committees. It allows citizens to advise or plan *ad infinitum* but retains for power holders the right to judge the legitimacy or feasibility of the advice” (Dobson, n.d., para. 6).
- The highest levels, Levels 6 to 8, are when Arnstein argues that there are degrees of citizen control. Level 6 (Partnership) is when power is redistributed through negotiation between citizens and power holders, usually through shared decision-making platforms (e.g., joint committees). Level 7 (Delegation) is when citizens hold clear majority of seats in committees with delegated powers to make decisions. Level 8 (Citizen Control), the highest level, is when the entire set of functions of planning, policymaking, and managing programs are done by citizens, with no intermediary between them and the source of funds.

From these definitions alone, it can be argued that the existing indicators of LDC functionality have set the implementation guidelines at the mid-ladder tokenistic levels with Level 6 (Partnership) at most, if negotiation truly happens within the platform. What may be closest to a prescriptive policy on citizens’ LDC participation is DILG Memorandum Circular 2009-109, which guides the functionality of LDCs at the barangay level only. The administrative requirements for convening them are still the primary set of indicators, but are supplemented by guidelines such as:

- Policies and plans
 - Policies and plans on mobilization of people’s participation
 - Preparation of barangay development plan
 - Monitoring and evaluation of national and local programs/projects
- Accomplishments
 - Mobilization of people’s participation (presence of *bayanihan*; attendance in barangay assemblies and compliance with other issuances calling for direct participation)

- Preparation of barangay development plan (BDP) (public consultation; presence of barangay socioeconomic profile; prioritization of plans and projects of other barangay-based institutions (BBIs) to the BDP; approved BDP integrated into city/municipal development plan)
- Monitoring and evaluation
 - Accomplished monitoring and evaluation forms and contractors' or implementers' progress report
 - Assigned committee/personnel to monitor and evaluate national and local programs/projects, and ocular inspection conducted
 - Projects carried out as planned
 - Funds utilized in accordance with approved budget with supporting documents
 - Interview application in evaluation for feedback
 - Results of evaluation are deliberated

Here, there is a sense of what roles the barangay LDCs (i.e., barangay development councils) can perform to bring in greater presence of citizens in the production of plans and reporting of performance of the barangay governments. However, as far as the authors' sources from DILG are concerned, there is no existing data to show that the barangay development councils are functioning according to these provisions in the memorandum circular.

What can be improved then? What would it take for citizen participation in the LDCs to be more meaningful? We can refer back to Arnstein's framework, match the gaps in role clarity and the capacity of citizens, and summarize the issues into Table 1.

Note that the observations presented in Table 1 are based on the authors' years of experience in advocating for local governance reforms, numerous dialogues with LGUs and civil society organizations from 2011 to present, and continuous insight-mining and planning sessions with units of DILG. The data presented include anecdotes of success stories of CSOs/NGOs that have overcome these challenges in their localities. However, the data from these anecdotes is not consolidated to fully capture the whole state of affairs in LDCs. Instead, Table 1 describes recurring observations and feedback gathered in the years of the authors' work with local governments, specifically in developing the LGU Roadmap to Genuine Local Autonomy of the Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines (ULAP)⁷. It also derives insights from partnerships and programs such as the Philippine Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (PH-EITI) (PH-EITI, n.d.-a, p. 23; PH-EITI, n.d.-b, pp. 288-291);

Philippine Open Government Partnership (OGP) (Mangahas, n.d., p. 23; ULAP, 2016b, pp. 4-9); developing technology-based innovation platforms supporting bottom-up budgeting projects (ULAP, 2016a, p. 2); and local evidence-informed policymaking (EIPM) (Candelaria, 2013); among others.

Table 1. Gaps in Role Clarity and Capacity of Citizens to Achieve Higher Levels of Participation in Local Development Councils, based on Arnstein's Ladder Framework⁸

<i>Arnstein's Ladder Levels</i>	<i>Gaps in Role Clarity and Citizen Capacity</i>
Level 3: Informing	Access to information: There is limited source of data for the citizens to respond, engage in dialogue, or question information because data is: (a) scarce at a disaggregated level of municipalities and cities, more so of barangays, and; (b) mostly provided by the local governments or local offices of national government agencies, which do not empower citizens to validate or triangulate the information. This means that the information that government provides is almost always the only data available, because the rigor of data gathering and disaggregation does not yet exist in Philippine practice.
Level 4: Consultation	Insufficient capacity for evidence-informed policymaking⁹: Citizens, especially marginalized and vulnerable groups, lack the capacity to gather, process, and make arguments out of evidence to back up their anecdotes when being consulted. This affects their ability to strengthen their agenda and assert greater negotiation capacity when faced with power holders such as mayors and LGU department heads. This has been an observation among infomediaries and capacity-building organizations that have worked with CSOs, especially during the time of the BuB implementation. Unclear government response protocols: Even if citizens are able to provide their feedback in joint platforms, it is not clear in the procedures of the LDC (and local government decision making in general) how citizens can monitor progress of their suggestions. Hence, local governments may end up consulting for consultation's sake ¹⁰ .
Level 5: Placation	Discretion of LGU officials in CSO/NGO accreditation: The entrenched culture of power accumulation and patronage has long characterized local governance in the Philippines, manifesting in the discretionary powers that local officials employ in their decision making (Yilmaz & Venugopal, 2013). Often reported as anecdotes are instances of the LDCs being co-opted as a means of affirming the power-hold of elected officials on democratic platforms. While Section 108 of the Code provides for an accreditation process of NGOs by the local legislative council (sanggunian), there is no available consolidated list of all accredited NGOs to vet and verify the quality of representativeness and/or independence of the NGOs from the ruling politicians. Recurring feedback from CSOs indicate that the sanggunian only accredits NGOs that are allied with the administration or are established supporters of the elected government officials. Furthermore, to date, no clear protocols exist to provide options for grievance and redress for NGOs whose applications for accreditation are denied.

Table 1, continued

<i>Arnstein's Ladder Levels</i>	<i>Gaps in Role Clarity and Citizen Capacity</i>
Level 6: Partnership	<p>Limited capacity of CSOs/NGOs to sustainably finance operational expenses and/or counterparts: Another recurring feedback from LGUs and CSO consortia/program implementers is that community-based NGOs require financial support to regularly attend meetings and perform other representative functions. This triggers broader discussions on the extent to which the government should support the operational expenses of NGOs, or if government should even extend support in the first place.</p> <p>The ideological question becomes practical. Public funding for representation of CSOs may encourage dependency of these organizations on the government or elected officials. However, civil society advocates assert that government financial support is reasonable given the economic limitations of community-based NGOs, which mainly represent vulnerable and marginalized groups especially in rural areas. No clear policy is guiding this issue to date.</p> <p>Limited capacity to traverse symbolic violence in power, class, and cultural relations: Pierre Bourdieu describes symbolic violence as a “gentle, invisible, and pervasive violence exercised through cognition and misrecognition, knowledge and sentiment, often with the unwitting consent or complicity of the dominated” (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2018, “Definition”). This means that power relations are pre-embedded into the consciousness of the agents. Applied to the context at hand, the existence of LDCs as a platform for CSO representatives may not automatically mitigate the feeling/perception experienced by untrained citizens that they are inferior to their elected officials. Often, there is feedback that citizens still struggle to find their voice when faced by these local politicians.</p> <p>There is no partnership if one party feels naturally inferior to another party. In these cases, which are usually reflected in the feedback received from some CSO groups, government officials’ exercise of power is seen as an assertion of their social role over marginalized sectoral representatives.</p>
Level 7: Delegation	<p>Unclear roles to delegate to CSOs/NGOs: Within the provisions of the Code, the LDC is tasked to contribute to plans and agenda to be submitted to the sanggunian. The Code and any other subsequent policies do not provide for concrete roles that CSOs need to perform in the LDC. The unit of analysis of the policies is the LDC per se, which assumes that the 25% civil society representation should be enough to maneuver through the politics of decision making within the participation platform. Given the experience in the LDCs, this is an unlikely assumption.</p> <p>Additional note: Level 7 (Delegation) describes citizens as holding “majority of seats in committees” (Dobson, n.d.). However, this is not applicable to the LDCs. While the Code considers the 25% representation of NGOs a minimum—which means that LGUs can accredit more CSOs at their discretion—there is no policy anchor or program incentive to encourage LGUs to elevate NGO participation above this baseline.</p> <p>However, there are some encouraging stories, such as the “People’s Council” of the late Naga City Mayor (and former DILG Secretary) Jesse Robredo (2000), wherein he expanded CSO and NGO representation in the local special bodies.</p>
Level 8: Citizen Control	<p>As far as guiding policies on the LDC are concerned, the scenario described in this level rarely happens in the current context. This is guided by the limitations set by the Code prescribing the 75% government and 25% non-government composition of the LDC as an operational framework for government-citizen collaboration in local governance. While CSOs participate in the LDC and may qualify to receive direct financial support from government funds under the Code (Section 36, “Assistance to People’s and Non-governmental Organizations”), only few check and balance mechanisms guide the funding of projects implemented by CSOs. Caution may need to be exercised in light of recent corruption-related scandals involving bogus NGOs.¹¹</p>

The challenges identified in Table 1 have been discussed numerous times among DILG, local governance reform advocates, and CSO networks in the past decade, and documented in various technical and CSO reports. Through the years, lessons were learned from innovations and experimental models of citizen participation that have been implemented. These lessons will be discussed in the second part of this article.

The preceding discussion points to the need to re-problematize how LDCs are conceptualized, overseen, and measured. Comparing against the standards of highest level of citizen participation, characterized by citizen control of certain components of decision making and funds, provides a springboard to discuss possible amendments to the LDC provisions in the Code. The Code guides the minimum expectations for local stakeholders and allows them to reframe their actions within the platforms. It can be argued that measuring LDC functionality using indicators reflecting higher levels of citizen participation better captures the spirit of representation and inclusion in the LDCs.

Government and Non-Government Programs on Citizen Participation and Lessons from Implementation

Given the limitations set by the Code in operationalizing citizen participation in LDCs, government units and NGOs have experimented with citizen participation models. This section takes stock of some of these initiatives in the past years, and the key lessons learned in their implementation. These lessons show that models and successful programs abound for local governments to draw insights from to reconceptualize the roles and expectations that citizens can play for more meaningful participation in the LDCs.

The Code provides for what the LDC should accomplish as a whole (Sections 106 and 109). Among these are: to produce a “comprehensive multisectoral development plan” proposal to be submitted to the sanggunian; formulate investment plans and programs; appraise and prioritize socioeconomic development programs; formulate local investment incentives; and coordinate, monitor, and evaluate the implementation of programs.

In other words, the citizens through the LDCs are asked to take part in fulfilling both the executive and legislative functions of the LGUs. The executive functions entail initiation of development planning and proposals, while the legislative functions involve the budgeting process. The LDCs also have project cycle-based roles, including the monitoring and evaluation of the programs. However, as mentioned earlier, the Code

was not clear in identifying the roles CSOs and POs play within the scope of their membership in the LDCs. The roles and expectations are merely assumed. But as this has not been sufficiently problematized, the best recourse moving forward is to draw from models emergent from the practices of government units and NGOs.

Table 2 lists programs that have made explicit the roles of citizens in local governance processes. While this is not a comprehensive list, especially those that are CSO-initiated, it nonetheless provides for the roles and responsibilities of CSOs/NGOs that are currently being considered for expansion and mainstreaming in policies and programs. The table shows that most initiatives have worked on the role of citizens in the monitoring, evaluation, and audit of government programs/projects. This observation suggests two things.

First, what is considered most viable participation of citizens is still to watch the actions of government. This is true to the spirit and history of civil society in the Philippines, especially with the critical role that it played to topple down the Marcos dictatorship, to serve as functional alternative for service delivery to marginalized sectors, and to uphold democratic processes thereafter (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2013). The default mode of civil society is to guard public interests and service delivery against possible corrupt practices in government. Given how corruption persists in the Philippines (Transparency International, 2017), higher levels of citizen participation need to be conceived and operationalized as a means to prevent or curb corruption. Citizen participation, in practice, remains to be an anti-corruption strategy.

Second, it is perhaps more viable to conceptualize citizen participation in monitoring, evaluation, and audit because negotiating as equals and partners of local governments may result in more, and even deeper, socioeconomic and cultural reforms. Earlier, we discussed that deep-seated inequalities perpetuate symbolic violence or, in the case of LDCs, dominance of the privileged over the marginalized. As such, the negotiation space leans towards the assertion of control and reaffirmation of power of government officials. Reforming the negotiation space at the local level can be attributed to civil society's persistence and dedication, but influencing variables in the larger politico-administrative context need to be addressed. Among other factors are: the persistence of elite capture (particularly by local political dynasties) of resources (political, economic, even armed) that are linked to poverty prevalence (Mendoza, Beja, Venida, & Yap, 2013), and the socioeconomic marginalization of the publics that NGOs represent, e.g., farmers, fishermen, women, and children, considered the poorest sectors according to Philippine Statistics Authority (2017).

Table 2. Stocktaking of Government and Non-Government Programs with Explicit Citizen Participation Roles in Local Decision Making (Authors' Consolidation)

Program and Initiator	Roles and/or Responsibilities of CSOs/NGOs	Executive Functions	Legislative Functions	Project Cycle-Based Roles			
				Planning	Procurement	Implementation	Monitoring, Evaluation, Audit
Bottom-up Budgeting (BuB) (DBM, DILG, DSWD, NAPC, 2016) *Implementing agencies: DILG, DBM, among others per project; from 2013-2016, with project completion activities 2017 to date	CSOs and local leaders take part in the preparation of local poverty reduction action plans (LPRAPs) to identify priority projects to be funded by national government.	X		X			
	CSO members of the LPRAT, through their elected representatives, are authorized to endorse local priority projects to the chief local executive. These are for review and/or adoption of the sanggunian.		X				
	CSO members of the LPRAT monitor the implementation of BuB projects.						X
Citizen Participatory Audit (CPA) *Initiated by the Affiliated Network for Social Accountability - East Asia and the Pacific (ANSA-EAP)	Citizens (e.g., civil society, academic groups, community members and private sector) work together with the COA to audit the processes of public service delivery and government programs (ANSA-EAP, 2014).						X
Government Watch (G-watch) *Initiated by G-Watch project, Ateneo School of Government	The program develops and capacitates citizen-monitors to monitor government activities and outcomes, specifically in the areas of education (textbook count), infrastructure (school building and public works projects) and social services (disaster relief), among others (Aceron, Villanueva, Leonillo, & Tugawin, 2010).						X
Community Scorecard *Initiated by ANSA-EAP	Under the Enhancing Transparency Impact (ETI) project, citizens and community leaders are capacitated to conduct participatory performance monitoring through scorecards, a social accountability tool that allows assessment of programs and services of the government (ANSA-EAP, 2013).						X

Table 2, continued

Program and Initiator	Roles and/or Responsibilities of CSOs/NGOs	Executive Functions	Legislative Functions	Project Cycle-Based Roles			
				Planning	Procurement	Implementation	Monitoring, Evaluation, Audit
Community Monitoring Tools *Initiated by Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Governance (CCAGG)	The program engages community-based volunteers to monitor government infrastructure projects such as roads, bridges, water systems, irrigation systems and buildings in the province of Abra, Philippines (International Budget Partnership, n.d.).						X
Seal of Good Local Governance (SGLG) *Implementing agency: DILG	CSOs and private sector representatives are invited to sit as members of regional assessment teams (DILG, 2017b). The SGLG engages CSOs and private sector representatives in the validation process through its validation teams and national quality committee (DILG, 2017b).					X	
Full Disclosure Policy (FDP) *Implementing agency: DILG	The FDP portal enables the public to view, download, and print quarterly and annual LGU financial documents to monitor and understand the LGUs' budget and expenditures (DILG, n.d.).						X
Assistance to Disadvantaged Municipalities (ADM): 2018 pipelined community-based monitoring guidelines¹²	A duly accredited CSO representative co-signs the municipality's list of priority projects under the ADM Program (DILG, 2017a).	X		X			
	A duly accredited CSO representative is invited as an observer in the bids and awards committee (BAC), which undertakes all procurement activities for the projects (DILG, 2017a).				X		

These factors may induce perceived inferiority among marginalized groups, eventually disempowering them in the negotiation and decision-making processes in local governments.

This is not to say that these problems are unsolvable. Some case studies show how communities may break away from traditional power relations in local politics (Esguerra & Villanueva, 2009). Problematizing the roles of citizens and outcomes from citizen participation involves accounting for the qualitative variables affecting the negotiation space. Through this, citizens can be empowered as true coequals and partners of their local governments.

Returning to the stocktaking exercise, the programs have their own sets of capacity-building components and other forms of support extended to participating CSOs. Each program, especially the CSO-initiated ones, has experimented differently on how the results of the monitoring, evaluation, and audit reports of citizens can be accounted for and incorporated in the planning and policymaking of local governments.¹³

This remains a challenge in making local governments more responsive to citizen feedback. At the same time, the approaches used in these programs affirm that citizen participation can be conceived, implemented, and measured using more meaningful indicators of influence and roles, other than just presence in committees and councils.

It is worth noting that only the now-defunct BuB program, by virtue of government funds¹⁴ and number of years implemented, significantly ventured into expanding the role of CSOs in the planning process, wherein the civil society representatives stood coequal with the local chief executive (governor or mayor) in heading the LPRATs. This had real implications on BuB implementation, because an LGU's proposed project list would be considered void without the signature and approval of the CSO representative.

However, BuB was discontinued upon change of national administration in 2016. The Assistance to Disadvantaged Municipalities (ADM) of the Duterte administration, at least in its first design, should not be construed as replacement of BuB. In its first iteration, ADM is a "financial subsidy to municipalities for the implementation of their priority programs and projects" (DILG, 2017a). One feature of BuB that was missing in the ADM was the platform of the LPRAT that co-created the project plans and proposals. The ADM relied only on the project list submission of the municipalities of their priority programs and projects. What remained from the LPRATs' practice is the required signature of a

CSO representative in the proposed list of projects, assuming that the requested projects underwent joint review and planning at the local level.

The DILG and its partners acknowledge that joint planning and review of priority projects of the LGU with CSOs is a huge assumption to make due to the same reasons earlier explained in the context of the LDC. In response to this, the DILG is currently exploring two directions: first, reviewing the LDC functionality to strengthen citizen participation; and, second, reincorporating elements of community-based monitoring into the design of ADM. These will be further discussed in the succeeding section.

Based on what has been discussed in this section, it is evident in the stocktaking of initiatives that, even if the Code provided for minimal administrative baselines to guide citizen participation, local governance stakeholders have been trying to find ways to define the roles and responsibilities of CSOs in making citizen participation more meaningful. From these experiences, the prospects of future reforms in citizen participation in local governance could be made clearer.

Prospects for Deepening Citizen Participation in Local Governance through Policy and Programs

So far, the article has discussed that the Code and other policies have conceptualized citizen participation using a limited lens. Elevating citizen participation beyond administrative, platform-focused standards allows local stakeholders to substantially influence government decision making. Moreover, lessons can be drawn from models and experiments to clarify citizens' roles in the process, and to build on their capacities to perform these roles successfully.

What then are the prospects for deepening and improving citizen participation in local governance? Reshifting of the gaze of DILG's policies and programs towards problematizing LDC functionality is a "step in the right direction" (World Bank, 2017). Based on the conversations with DILG officials, the agency is planning to link LDC functionality to ADM and SGLG.

The BuB program was recognized internationally (Gutierrez, 2014), and it was found to strengthen citizen participation (Manasan, Adaro, & Tolin, 2017). However, it was implemented at the level of LPRATs, a participatory platform separate from the LDC, which is the main statutory platform.

Nonetheless, even if BuB and ADM are two different policy designs, the insights from the implementation of the BuB program have helped DILG and its partners from development organizations and civil society groups in moving forward with local governance reforms at the program level.

Since ADM is a financial subsidy, and allocations are decided from the list of proposed priority projects from the LGUs, the opportunity for intervention to affirm the space for citizen participation is the LDC. From conversations with DILG, it is apparent that the program direction is to focus the ADM criteria on three key indicators: (a) good financial housekeeping (GFH) compliance, (b) CDP development, and (c) LDC functionality, which are all, except for CDP development, included in the SGLG criteria. However, in learning the lessons from earlier programs, LDC functionality should not be limited to administrative and activity compliance of the LGUs. Indicators operationalizing meaningful citizen participation can be explored. For instance, percentage of citizen proposals adopted by the LGU as priority projects may be used as an indicator.

Moreover, based on the authors' continuing work with the DILG, its Project Management Office is consolidating the lessons learned in community-based monitoring in BuB, CPA, and CCAGG to integrate citizen participation in ADM. Should this materialize, civil society groups will be more deeply involved in the executive (planning), legislative (budgeting), and monitoring, evaluation, and audit of projects.

However, all these energies for reform are hinged on the existence of ADM as a national program. As noted, even with the successes of the BuB, the Duterte administration dropped the program (*ABS-CBN News*, 2016) and reformulated its own, the ADM, as a financial subsidy to LGUs. Moreover, the 2017 allocation for ADM of Php19.3 billion (DBM & DILG, 2016) was reduced to Php11.71 billion in the General Appropriations Act of 2018.

In principle and in practice, budget allocation is reflective of government agenda. If the significant reduction of the ADM budget allocation is any indication, DILG and its national and local stakeholders need to assess carefully how to pursue local governance reforms if the ADM budget will continue to be reduced in the following years.

Moreover, ADM is only for municipalities. There is a separate program for provinces, the Conditional Matching Grant Program (CMGP) for provincial road rehabilitation (DILG & DBM, 2017), and for cities, the Assistance to Cities. CMGP is tied to governance and technical capacities of the LGUs, while the Assistance to Cities has yet to be fully

implemented in 2018. Citizen participation in these two other programs are not yet clearly operationalized; if at all, they will be different from how ADM is being linked to LDC functionality. However, what DILG has is the SGLG, which is considered the highest performance-based award that LGUs can receive in the Philippines to date. SGLG may be leveraged to trigger behavioral and performance changes in LGUs, as it is coupled with incentives and eligibilities for other national government financial support programs.

The capacities of civil society to negotiate and continue working for their agenda and advocacies need to be reassessed and supported through both government policy and CSO-led initiatives. In the previous section, the gaps that hinder meaningful engagements between CSOs and local governments in decision making were discussed. These gaps can be addressed by improving citizens' access to information (i.e., beyond FDP), building their capacity to engage in evidence-based policymaking, providing funds for their operations to regularly attend and engage in administrative meetings and activities, and strengthening their negotiating capacity. These all need significant investments in time, technical inputs, and resources.

Since there is no data on which assessment of CSO participation in LDC can be grounded, we turn again to BuB, since its impact on citizen participation is relatively well-documented. A study by Philippine Institute for Development Studies (Manasan, 2016) showed that the BuB model added value to CSO empowerment and increased demand for government accountability, to LGU-CSO relations, and to inter-CSO relations. However, with the LPRATs and the BuB program out of the picture, there is a gap in LGU-CSO engagement that is left to DILG's pipelined strategies to fill under ADM. The possibilities of strengthening capacities for citizen participation—no matter how promising and exciting—have not been operationalized to date. This may adversely affect community-based CSOs that were trained and somewhat involved in the negotiation with local governments.

However, perhaps there lies the deeper problem—that BuB was government-initiated. The conditions for empowering CSOs in the LPRATs as a negotiation space, including the project funds that incentivized compliance to the participatory planning and budgeting process, were created by national government and handed down to local stakeholders for implementation.

Hence, when BuB was discontinued by the national government under the succeeding administration, there was little to nothing that CSOs

could do but to appeal through their national representatives (*Rappler.com*, 2016). The appeals were disregarded and the BuB LPRATs were dissolved.

This is not to say that BuB is a better policy than ADM because the promising provisions for citizen participation in ADM are yet to be seen. But, as what a CSO national representative said in a 2017 interview, “[t]he CSOs were babied [by government] during BuB. Their requests were handed to them easily. [As a result], they’ve gone soft. They need to rediscover how it is to claim their own space” (Personal communication, 22 November 2017). This is more than a policy and programmatic question, and delves more into the future of civil society and democratic spaces.

Hence, CSO networks and coalitions in the country need greater support and capacity building. CSO groups and coalitions at the national level are continuing their own programs regardless of the government policy changes, but also in the same direction that the DILG is taking. The challenge for CSOs and advocates of citizen participation lies in learning from the lessons of their capacity-building initiatives.

Concluding Notes

This article reviewed citizen participation in local governance within the context of the local development councils. The Code has prescribed citizen participation at a limited level of inclusion in the platform of the LDC. The Code and the LGU performance measurements the law has set for citizen participation failed to clarify the roles and capacities needed by community-based civil society groups for more meaningful participation in the LDCs.

Moving forward, there is ample experience to draw lessons from, based on the programs and initiatives of both the DILG and CSOs. DILG is on track in leveraging on ADM and SGLG to enhance the understanding and indicators of LDC functionality, but these are all yet to be implemented. CSO networks and coalitions need stronger, more strategic approaches to reposition themselves in new forms of negotiation with government, given the changing political landscape in the current administration.

The trajectory of the reforms pipelined for LDCs may change at any point in the implementation of ADM and SGLG. However, as a concluding note, it is hoped the insights put forward in this article contribute in the effort to better prioritize the citizen participation component of the

proposed amendments to the Local Government Code. While decentralization and devolution discourses are usually spoken in the language of distribution of powers and funds between the national government and LGUs, there is a dimension of powers and funds redistribution that involve a third but essential stakeholder—the civil society in the local communities.

In particular, this article may help provide the following directions for amendments: (a) expanding the percentage of citizen representation in the LDCs; (b) concretizing the roles that CSOs play within the scope of their involvement in the LDCs, by way of policies honored and supported by LGUs; (c) conceptualizing a sustainable platform to support funding and capacity building for CSOs; and (d) developing appropriate indicators that better reflect citizen participation through the LDCs. Further exploration of these directions merit continuing study, regardless if the political support for amending the Code gains ground or not.

Endnotes

¹ Section 287 of the LGC provides for the allocation of 20% of the internal revenue allotment (IRA) of local government units (LGUs) for development projects. This is referred to as 20% development fund.

² The IRA pertains to the 40% share of LGUs in the national revenue taxes based on the collection of the third fiscal year preceding the current fiscal year, as provided for in Section 284 of the LGC.

³ The SGH is a performance-based rewards program that assesses the LGUs on their attainment of minimum governance standards. This was launched in 2010 by the DILG under the late Jesse Robredo. LGUs that receive the Seal are provided with a performance-based grant under the Performance Challenge Fund. Also, passing the Good Housekeeping (later called the Good Financial Housekeeping or GFH) renders LGUs eligible for additional grants and financial subsidies under other national government programs.

⁴ The SGLG is the scale-up iteration of SGH in 2014. The SGLG expands its core assessment areas from good financial housekeeping to include social protection and disaster preparedness. It also requires LGUs to pass at least one of its essential assessment areas: business friendliness and competitiveness, peace and order, or environmental management.

⁵ From a Powerpoint presentation shared by DILG on the 2017 Assessment Results for the Regional Management, dated 13 December 2017.

⁶ The CDP is the “action plan utilized by every local administration to develop and implement priority sectoral and cross-sectoral programs and projects in the proper locations to put flesh on the skeleton as it were, gradually and incrementally, until the desired shape or form of development is eventually attained over the long term” (DILG, 2009).

⁷ ULAP is the umbrella organization of all local government leagues and federations, and local elective and appointive officials in the Philippines, and is the platform for consolidation of local government agenda in national policy development and implementation discussions. The

authors worked in the ULAP in various executive and technical positions from 2011 to 2017. This experience allowed the authors to be heavily involved in policy and program discussions, from where the insights in Table 1 are derived.

⁸ The table starts at Level 3 because as the framework indicates, Levels 1-2 do not show citizen participation.

⁹ Evidence-informed policymaking (EIPM) is a process wherein policymakers (or decisionmakers in general) use best available evidence to make policy decisions. It is slightly different from *evidence-based* policymaking since the latter concept assumes that policy is decided on evidence alone, which does not account for political, sociocultural nuances that may exist in the context of decision making. Refer to Newman, Capillo, Famurewa, Nath, & Siyanbola (2013).

¹⁰ This is a stark contrast to open legislation innovations that are gaining ground in other countries under the Open Government Partnership initiative. Open legislation is being practiced in the United Kingdom, Greece, Japan, Denmark, Switzerland, Samoa, Kenya, among others (Open Government Partnership, 2012).

¹¹ In 2013, entrepreneur Janet Lim Napoles allegedly masterminded the transfer of Priority Development Assistance Fund (PDAF) of lawmakers to bogus NGOs, in a suspected scam involving the use of pork barrel funds (*Rappler.com*, 2017). This issue has not been resolved to date. This significantly affected mechanisms for reviewing and accrediting NGOs, even if funds for their projects and daily operations are not PDAF-sourced.

¹² From community-based monitoring guidelines and tools shared by DILG Project Monitoring Team.

¹³ The use of citizen reports in government planning and decision making is called by many names in the emerging literature on public projects—“uptake” of government, “vertical integration,” and “mainstreaming.” These practices assume that citizen participation is successful when government units take citizen feedback into account, partner with citizens in the decision making and subsequent implementation of programs, and apply the lessons learned in a broader scale of local governance work.

¹⁴ As reference, allocated budget of BuB completed projects from 2014-2016 amounts to Php16.96 billion (Orient Integrated Development Consultants, 2017).

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