

Balay Mindanaw Foundation (BMFI) – Philippines

The Balay Mindanaw Foundation (BMFI) is a civil society organization based in the island region of Mindanao, Philippines, where 8 of the 10 poorest municipalities in the country can be found. BMFI was established in 1996 to promote people's participation in local governance at the barangay (village) level and uses the Millennium Development Goals as a framework for achieving progress in the Philippines. In Mindanao BMFI uses regional Sustainable Integrated Area Development (SIAD) plans – and takes advantage of opportunities created by changes in the Local Government Code – to support and engage with communities. BMFI helps create the space for communities to work together with their Local Government Units in the key processes of local development planning and monitoring and evaluation of local development initiatives. The ultimate goal is to ensure that citizens are consulted on and able to participate in policy decision making and implementation.

Monitoring the Implementation of the Recently Approved Full Disclosure Policy

Following the “People Power Revolution of 1986,” the Philippine government passed the Republic Act 7160, which is more popularly referred to as the Local Government Code (LGC) of 1991. This groundbreaking piece of legislation established the framework for political decentralization and the devolution of power to local level governments in the Philippines. The law provided Local Government Units (LGUs) – provinces, municipalities, cities, and barangays (villages) –with both greater autonomy and responsibility. LGUs were given taxation authority, but were also required to draft and enact annual budgets and deliver basic social services. Most significant to the strengthening of democracy in the Philippines, the LGC provided the legal framework for citizen participation in local-level decision-making processes and established clear provisions for mounting citizens' initiatives on legislation and the recall of elected officials.

BMFI and other civil society groups in the Philippines have for many years taken advantage of the opportunities provided by the LGC by supporting community-level work focused on monitoring the implementation of key social policies and programs, and establishing partnerships with LGUs to promote greater citizen participation in decision-making processes. Despite recent successes, many barriers to increased citizen participation remain. Due in large part to the insufficient and often unintelligible information that is shared by many local

Philippines
Open Budget Index 2010
 Overall Score: 55
 Government provides some information to the public on how it manages public resources

Availability of budget documents critical for effective public input:	
Pre-Budget Statement	No
Executive's Budget Proposal	Yes
Citizens Budget	No
Enacted Budget	Yes
In-Year Reports	Yes
Mid-Year Review	No
Year-End Report	Yes
Audit Report	Yes
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governments, citizens continue to be challenged by the budget formulation and implementation process.

This situation has improved since the election of Benigno “Noy Noy” Aquino III, who came to power in 2010. Aquino announced that his government would actively promote transparency and citizen participation in the different processes at all levels of government. Following the President’s lead, the Department of Interior and Local Government issued a memorandum obliging all LGUs to make public budget-related information, including that on revenues, bids, contracts, and audits. This memorandum is more popularly referred to as the “Full Disclosure Policy.” The Full Disclosure Policy has opened unprecedented windows of opportunity for citizens to access budget-related information at the local government level.

BMFI has taken full advantage of the Aquino Administration’s new policy landscape through an innovative project called Budget Tracking for Transparent Accountable Governance (BTTAG). BTTAG is being implemented in collaboration with the Mindanao Coalition of Development NGO Networks, the Asia Foundation, and the Department of Interior and Local Government. The primary purpose of the BTTAG project is to more systematically promote citizen engagement in the budget formulation, implementation, and monitoring process at the local level in 17 cities and three provinces throughout Mindanao.

To facilitate the participatory aspects of the project, the BTTAG works to strengthen the capacity of key stakeholders – civil society and community groups, local government officials, and national government agencies tasked with

supporting decentralization reforms in the country. The BTTAG has proven to be a groundbreaking initiative because of its emphasis and focus on the budget cycle at the local level, and because of the way it forms partnerships with civil society to help strengthen engagement with local governments.

Through the BTTAG project, BMFI and its partners have been provided with a platform to better understand and assess the degree to which LGUs release budget-related information to the public in compliance with the Full Disclosure Policy. BMFI hopes to continue BTTAG to increase transparency at the local level in the Philippines, and to expand knowledge around and discussion of the Full Disclosure Policy as a tool for ordinary citizens and civil society groups to use budget information to reach better outcomes in their communities.

BMFI’s Participation in the Partnership Initiative

With the support of the Partnership Initiative, BMFI will work to produce documented evidence on the actual state of citizen engagement in local budgeting processes in several LGUs of Mindanao. This work will be based on input from the ongoing BTTAG project, which capitalizes on the recent enactment of the Full Disclosure Policy for local governments in the Philippines. LGU partners of BMFI, as well as citizens and other civil society groups, will also benefit from the capacity-building activities BMFI plans to conduct, which are aimed at strengthening people’s ability to influence the government’s use and management of public funds.

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The IBP’s Partnership Initiative is a collaborative effort that seeks to enhance the impact of civil society budget work in selected countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The initiative strives to contribute to the development of sustainable institutions; to increase public access to timely, reliable, and useful information; to enhance the effective participation of civil society in policy and budget processes; and to establish a platform of good practices on which future generations of civil society can build.