



## **Tracking Textbooks for Transparency** *Improving Accountability in Education in the Philippines*

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\*This paper was prepared by Aries A. Arugay, and was a part of International IDEA's Democracy and Development programme work in 2011. This document was selected as a contribution to stimulate debate on and increase knowledge about the impact of democratic accountability on services.

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## **Summary**

How can accountability deficits be addressed in innovative ways in the face of weak and ineffective formal state institutions? This paper analyses the role of civil society organizations in improving accountability by increasing transparency in service delivery. By focusing on the distribution of textbooks and other educational materials in the Philippines, it examines how this civil society-led initiative caused service providers (government and private contractors) to be more transparent in their transactions with one another. By mobilizing local communities, civil society organizations are able to encourage popular and stakeholder participation in the Philippines education sector. This paper argues that three factors were crucial for the success of this accountability arrangement: good state-civil society relations, political opportunity structures and the unity and density of civil society organizations. By way of conclusion, it sets out how improved transparency can lead not only to improved political accountability outcomes but to better development outcomes as well.

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## 1. Introduction

How can partnerships between public and private actors in the pursuit of accountability lead to better service delivery and development? What roles can civil society organizations play in supporting programmes that foster transparency and accountability in the face of weak political institutions? What factors can facilitate the formation and, more importantly, the institutionalization of accountability arrangements between relevant actors? This paper addresses these questions by focusing on the case of the Philippines, a country known to have a robust, dynamic and politically active civil society (Clarke 2000), but also an inefficient and ineffective state (Hutchcroft 1991). It is widely accepted that curbing corruption and other forms of particularistic behaviour is one of the most daunting challenges facing the Philippines in its pursuit of more democratic and accountable governance. The country's inability to create an accountability regime composed of legitimate, empowered and operational institutions, processes and mechanisms has resulted in a major accountability deficit that could have dire implications for the quality of its democracy.

In particular, inefficiency and corruption in its governance have had direct and lasting impacts on the delivery of public services, most notably education. In the Philippines, the provision of public education is a major social service that takes up a considerable part of the government's budget. Reports of corruption and abuse of power have long plagued this part of the bureaucracy in the Philippines, leading to the current sorry state of the country's education system (Chua 1999, Luz 2009). Moreover, the lack of human capital and capacity to monitor and oversee the delivery of goods, such as books, classroom materials, school buildings, and so on, and the implementation of services, such as teacher and education management, and so on, are thought to be among the major reasons why acts of corruption are common in the education sector (Bautista et al. 2009). Thus, the conditions in the education system to a great extent reflect the accountability gaps and deficits that have hampered service delivery and prevented the accomplishment of performance targets.

Despite having the longest history of democratic rule in Asia, the country's struggle for good governance has been hampered by decrepit and frail political institutions that have been captured by the dominant economic classes and the political elite. Elections are more about patronage politics and the circulation of political elites than replacing ineffective political leadership (Kerkvliet 1996). Most if not all the political parties are ephemeral and contingent on the ambitions of a few political notables who do not have differentiated policy positions or ideological stances on current political problems (Quimpo 2010). Extra-institutional modes of exacting accountability figure prominently in situations of intense political contention. For instance, the aborted impeachment of former president Joseph Estrada<sup>1</sup> on charges of corruption and abuse of power in 2001, due to the perceived manipulation of his political allies in the legislature, opened the floodgates of public outrage and protest, mobilized by civil society, and ultimately led to a crisis of legitimacy. Estrada's forced resignation from power displayed not only the lack of accountability among ineffective and captive institutions but also the power of civil society to fill this accountability deficit (Arugay 2005).<sup>2</sup>

There is increasing recognition in the scholarly literature of the role of civil society in fostering accountability, especially in developing countries (Fox 2000, Pope 1996). For example, there is emerging interest in studying the role of civil society in the developing world through the

concept of social accountability. According to its proponents, social accountability rests on the actions of an array of citizens' associations and movements as well as the media in monitoring the actions of public officials, exposing governmental wrongdoing and activating state agencies (Peruzzotti and Smulovitz 2005: 9). This paper discusses the innovative delivery modality formed between formal political actors and civil society organizations in the country's education sector known as the National Textbook Delivery Program (NTDP).

As a civil society-led initiative supported by state institutions, the NTDP has contributed to the accountability of the government in providing education by improving transparency in the delivery and distribution of textbooks and other educational materials. Civil society organizations acted as the link between political actors, in this case the bureaucracy, and its constituents—local communities and the citizenry. Considered to be mutually constitutive, accountability and transparency are critical principles, central to the good governance paradigm (Joshi 2008). Schedler defines accountability as 'the ability of institutions or mechanisms to ensure that officials are answerable for their behaviour and are sanctioned for misbehaviour' (1999: 17). Thus, it involves two elements: *answerability*, which is being responsible for past decisions and/or actions; and *enforcement*, which is the availability and application of sanctions for illegal or inappropriate actions (Schedler 1999: 17). However, the former is considered a necessary precondition for the implementation of the latter. Accountability could not be exacted if its agents were not able to make the principals answerable for their decisions and actions. By providing reliable information on service delivery through the existence of mechanisms of transparency, the state is able to make itself accountable.

What can a story about a partnership between civil society organizations and state institutions aimed at ensuring transparency in the delivery of a simple yet basic and critical educational good—textbooks—tell us about accountability in the pursuit of development? On the one hand, this snapshot demonstrates the power of a civil society that seeks to hold power accountable in a country where good governance is the exception rather than the norm, and of receptive political leaders who are willing to implement a programme that could remedy the government's lack of monitoring mechanisms. On the other hand, what to others may seem to be a small matter has generated significant and even outstanding results that could be emulated by other state agencies in the delivery of other public services. These results include a reduction in costs and an improvement in the quality of textbooks, as well as an increase in the speed and efficiency of their delivery. Furthermore, the involvement of community organizations and even citizens coordinated by civil society organizations fostered a sense of civic engagement that is vital for active and engaged citizenship in a democracy.

This paper argues that three factors made this 'partnership for transparency' possible. First, there was a high level of trust and confidence between the new administration and civil society. The Administration of President Arroyo promised to implement good governance and institute political reforms that would improve democratic accountability, and this was embraced by civil society organizations nationwide. This could be captured by the passage of legislation enabling the participation of civil society actors in any public procurement of goods and services. Second, there were political opportunities for collaboration on a lingering problem—the lack of transparency in the procurement and delivery of books to public educational institutions. This 'meeting of minds' and mutuality of interests became a reality because of the presence of government officials within the Department of Education who had backgrounds in civil society organizations and knowledge of their potential to help generate democratic accountability.

Finally, a united and dense network of civil society organizations enabled the NTDP to be successfully implemented throughout the country.

An important caveat concerning the scope and reach of civil society involvement in service delivery is that by merely focusing on improving transparency, the civil society organizations that implemented the NTDP did not fully realize the potential of the initiative to generate more accountable political outcomes. This paper argues that there are two main reasons for this. The first is the resource constraints faced by the civil society organizations. Given limited amounts of human, financial and political capital, they had to make crucial decisions on the targets of their transparency campaign. The second is the limited number of public officials who could champion the cause of greater transparency in education. The presence of allies within the Department of Education as well as the prospects of the NTDP generating immediate, albeit limited, impacts made it more viable than launching a campaign in political parties, legislative oversight committees and other accountability mechanisms (e.g. the ombudsman), which might not be receptive to the programme. Their lack of interest in the cause of civil society organizations could be linked to their lack of knowledge on the issue as well as their preoccupation with other issues that they perceived to be more significant than the delivery of textbooks.

Section 2 provides background on the Philippines as a country with a vibrant civil society but a state notorious for rampant corruption and widespread abuse of power. Section 3 is an overview of the state of education in the Philippines and traces how the procurement of books became the catalyst for the innovative delivery modality between the Department of Education and civil society organizations. Using data from this research, key informant interviews and secondary sources, section 4 discusses the formulation and implementation of the NTDP in 2003 and examines the factors that led to its success. It also examines the constraints, roadblocks and weaknesses that were used to inform its execution in 2004–2007. By way of conclusions, section 5 generates some lessons and future challenges for state and civil society actors in their efforts to ‘scale up’ the textbook initiative for improving accountability in the pursuit of development.

## **2. The Philippines: A strong civil society but a weak and corrupt state**

The Philippines has long been thought to have one of the most vibrant, robust, dynamic and participatory civil societies in the world (Clarke 2000). Several cases have proved its efficacy in providing policy inputs (Magadia 2003), delivering social services, pursuing socio-economic development and generating accountability. This becomes increasingly significant because the Philippines has a weak state (Hutchcroft 1991) that could be overwhelmed by the intensity of demands from civil society. This active civil society in its contemporary form can be traced back to its pivotal role in the campaign against the authoritarian government of the then president Marcos (1965–86), in particular during the martial law era. Given this role, it was obvious that it would participate in shaping much of the ‘restored democracy’ after 1986 (Racelis 2000). As one of the primary actors responsible for the transition from authoritarian rule, it cannot sit back, relax and leave the task to government to address the inadequacies and limitations of the current democratic polity (Velasco 2004). It could be said that civil society has more than adequately contributed its share in advocating for democratic reforms in governance (Wui and Lopez 1998, Caagusan 2005) whether successfully or otherwise.

To some extent, civil society's role in promoting democratization could be differentiated along two ideal types (Eaton 2003).<sup>3</sup> On the one hand, there is the protest mode, with which most civil society actors are most familiar. The tactics of 'expose and oppose' were exemplified in the so-called parliament of the streets during the authoritarian period. This comprises activities such as coalition-building, collective mobilization, mass actions, media campaigns and community organizing, among others. As a mode of (dis)engagement, this is often a weapon of last resort, particularly if normal or available venues have been exhausted or confidence and political trust in the government has evaporated. Moreover, this contentious approach is often utilized when civil society perceives that the democratic gains that it vehemently fought for are being jeopardized by state actors.

This precedent had tremendous repercussions for the nature of civil society that developed in post-Marcos politics. It would not be the last time that groups were able to successfully demand accountability from the state. The anti-Estrada campaign, which culminated in the so-called People Power II Revolt, is a genuine testament to the efficacy and strength of collective mobilization in the Philippines. The range and intensity of contention spearheaded by the country's civil society had not been witnessed since the struggle against the Marcos regime in the 1980s. In conjunction with other strategies of social accountability in different periods of the campaign, civil society groups were able to expose the president's political scandals, maintain these issues on the public agenda, acquire media attention and national visibility, activate and exercise oversight over political institutions and legal processes, and invite public support and participation (Arugay 2004).

In everyday politics, civil society organizations are involved in policy processes, as provided for in the 1987 Constitution as well as other legislation. Spaces for cooperation with political institutions are legally institutionalized. This mode enables them to forge strategic partnerships to 'collaborate and cooperate' with the state as well as other sectors in society on the creation of new structures, mechanisms, institutions and policies that can improve the quality of democratic governance, among other things. This requires civil society actors to devote their technical competence, experience, insights and skills in order to come up with viable alternatives and lasting solutions to lingering problems and challenges. In reality, some political leaders are more accommodating to civil society organizations than others. Although civil society is formally acknowledged as critical to good governance, some political leaders take this more seriously than others (Eaton 2003).

The ability of politicians to overwhelm formal institutions and procedures is a characteristic of politics in the Philippines. This is particularly true in the area of political accountability. Despite its comprehensive, complex and sophisticated set of institutions, the state remains

**Box 1. The Philippines Ombudsman and Hong Kong's Independent Commission against Corruption: A Comparison**

Despite being labelled one of the strongest ombudsman that exists in the world today, the country's official watchdog against corruption is afflicted with serious resource limitations that hinder the effective dispensation of its powers. Best practices on anti-corruption efforts across the world, particularly the model provided by Hong Kong's ICAC, reinforce the fact that in order to function properly, an ombudsman requires sufficient resources—human, financial and technical—at its disposal. The following figures illustrate the discrepancies between the two anti-corruption institutions:

	<b>Philippines (OMB)</b>	<b>Hong Kong (ICAC)</b>
Population	82 million	6 million
No. of government officials	1.5 million	174,175
No. of personnel	1141	1326
No. of field investigators (FI)	88	837
Ratio of FI to government officials	1:17,405	1:208
Allocated budget (2004) [USD]	9 million	90 million

*Source:* Marcelo (2005) and [www.ombudsman.gov.ph](http://www.ombudsman.gov.ph)



prey to abusive and corrupt political leaders. While the Office of the Ombudsman enjoys a broad range of powers—enough to make a significant mark in the fight against corruption and abuse of public office—assessments conclude that it leaves much to be desired in terms of its performance.<sup>4</sup> In common with other institutions, it has credibility and capacity deficits. The latter are palpable if the Philippines ombudsman is compared to Hong Kong's Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC), which has an annual budget that is ten times greater. Moreover, its manpower is also insufficient, since the ratio between field investigators and public servants is an absurd 1:17000 (see Box 1). Despite these difficulties, it is fair to say that the ombudsman had some notable achievements in 2001–2005. Not only did he lead the reform of the institution, he was also key in increasing the conviction rate of corrupt officials from a deplorable 6 per cent to 20 per cent during his tenure.

The inability of the government to police its own ranks has fed into public opinion and created a widespread perception that corruption is endemic. Indicators from both domestic and foreign surveys on the ability of the government to impose accountability have not been positive. Studies have concluded that the country is poorly ranked on its ability to impose the rule of law and curb corruption. For example, while the general trend of its scores with regard to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) has improved, Gonzales and Mendoza state that they have 'remained well below the global average grade of five' (2003: 93).<sup>5</sup> Moreover, it is noteworthy that the same international NGO has placed former presidents Marcos (2nd) and Estrada (10th) among the top ten corrupt global leaders of all time, the most any country could have. Combined, the former presidents are alleged to have embezzled up to USD 10.08 billion from government funds (Transparency International 2004).

**Table 1.** Transparency International CPI Scores, the Philippines 1998–2009

<b>Year</b>	<b>CPI Score</b>	<b>World Rank</b>	<b>Total No. Countries</b>
1995	2.8	36	41
1996	2.7	44	54
1997	3.1	40	52
1998	3.3	55	85
1999	3.6	54	99
2000	2.8	69	90
2001	2.9	65	91
2002	2.6	77	102
2003	2.5	92	133
2004	2.6	102	145
2005	2.5	117	158
2006	2.5	121	163
2007	2.5	131	179
2008	2.3	141	180
2009	2.4	139	180

Several further observations can be made from Table 1. The first is the downward trend of the CPI scores. This is discussed further below, but there was a significant decline in the CPI score of the Philippines from 3.6 in 1999 to 2.8 in 2000. This is the period when allegations of corruption against former president Estrada surfaced. It can also be observed that the country was in the bottom 20 per cent of all countries surveyed. In 2002, the Philippines was placed as the third-most corrupt democratic state in Asia after Bangladesh and Indonesia. A major source of corruption in the country could be found in the area of public procurement. Huge sums of money were allegedly embezzled by government officials from the topmost tiers of the government bureaucracy to its lowest levels. Scholars have analysed this practice using the framework of ‘rent-seeking’ (Mendoza 2003, de Dios and Ferrer 2001).

Local public opinion also showed that the inability of the government to pursue corrupt officials was creating a culture of impunity. In the 1998 and 1999, Social Weather Stations (SWS) surveys revealed that 21 per cent of the respondents had been asked for bribes in government transactions. A majority (51 per cent) believed that it was futile to complain and a quarter (25 per cent) either did not know where to report this or feared retaliation. This perception is also evident in the views of the country’s business community. Since 2000, SWS has carried out an annual *Survey of Enterprises on Corruption*, which seeks a sense of the opinions and perceptions of the private sector. Its fifth survey, in 2005, found that 66 per cent of the respondents perceived a very high and non-diminishing degree of corruption in the public sector, a similar proportion to previous polls. This prevailing belief is substantiated by almost 54 per cent of the enterprise managers asserting that they had knowledge of corrupt business transactions with government. A more startling statistic is that seven out of ten of the respondents had had direct experience of corruption (SWS 2005).

To some extent, the country's failure to realize its development goals could be linked to its poor levels of accountability in governance. There is an estimate that up to USD 48 billion has been lost to corruption in the past two decades alone, a figure that is nearly equal to the country's foreign debt. The Commission on Audit (COA), the country's financial oversight body, has calculated that the annual cost of corruption is around USD 44.5 million—or up to 20 per cent of the annual national budget (Coronel 2000, Quah 2003). It is easy to imagine how many Filipinos would have benefited from government infrastructure projects or social services if that amount of money had not seen its way into the pockets of government officials.

Political parties have not figured prominently in the pursuit of accountability in governance, due to a confluence of factors. The structural limitations of presidentialism (Linz and Valenzuela 1994) and an electoral system that generates multiparty competition partly prevent the formation of ideologically distinct parties that can monitor each other's performance. They have remained elitist in membership with no mass base and come out from obscurity only during the period of elections (Lande 1965, Montinola 1999, Rocamora 2002). This implies that legislative oversight, a critical mechanism of horizontal accountability (O'Donnell 1999), is problematic since politicians cannot be consistently expected to hold incumbents to account for possible wrongdoing. It is in the light of these accountability deficits that social accountability emanating from the country's civil society became an attractive alternative. However, it must be said that this is a limited form of accountability because its sanctions do not normally result in the punishment of public officials, either by their removal from office or prosecution for corruption. In some cases, civil society initiatives have resulted in the activation of accountability institutions for prosecution. However, as far as the application of sanctions is concerned, the discussion above on the low success rate of the ombudsman demonstrates that civil society actions are insufficient. For any accountability mechanism to be effective, the participation of formal political institutions is needed (Arugay 2005).

### **3. The state of education in the Philippines and the imperatives for accountability reform**

There are many reasons why education in the Philippines is an excellent case for studying the impact of corruption on development and the inadequacies and weaknesses of institutions and mechanisms of democratic accountability. One of the major reasons is the apparent priority given by the national government to education as a vital social service. This could be attributed to the provisions in the 1987 Constitution, which make quality primary education a basic right of every Filipino. Moreover, it has ensured that the government 'shall assign the highest budgetary priority to education' (article XIV, section 5.1). This means that the Department of Education is the largest agency in the national government in terms of personnel and budget allocation. In 2005, public funding for education comprised 15 per cent of the national budget (or 3 per cent of the country's gross domestic product). This amounted to more than USD 208 million for that year or almost USD 600,000 per day. Recent statistics show that the Department of Education manages 37,607 schools and employs 353,280 teachers in charge of more than 12.5 million students. According to official government statistics, the teacher to student ratio has averaged 1:24 since 1995. These figures mean that as far as the 'supply side' of corruption is concerned, there is a lot of money to be found in public education as it is 'oozing with money' (Chua 1999: 6). Also included in the education coffers are supplementary sources such as foreign grants, loans and discretionary (i.e. 'pork barrel') funds from legislators and local chief executives. These

resources and tremendous levels of human capital do not necessarily translate into the provision of quality education (Bautista et al. 2009). While some argue that spending on education in the country remains low (Luz 2009), there is no doubt that inefficiencies as well as corrupt behaviour among officials have contributed considerably to the deplorable state of education. Best practice on service delivery advises governments to do more with less (Goetz and Gaventa 2001). In this case, the provision of this social service has been less with so much more.

Education in the Philippines mirrors the sorry state of the country's bureaucracy, but some go further in saying that it represents various practices of corruption and the abuse of power as well as the prevailing accountability deficits that hamper effective service delivery (Chua 1999). According to a report by the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism (PCIJ), corruption exists in multiple kinds and across all levels in the Department of Education (as it did in its predecessor, the Department of Education, Culture and Sports).<sup>6</sup> Written more than 10 years ago, this investigative study remains true to existing conditions and has been used by civil society organizations as their rationale for interventions for more democratic accountability and their engagement with the Department of Education and other government agencies. This was reinforced by public surveys conducted in 2001, which identified the agency as one of the five most corrupt agencies in the government (Balboa and Medalla 2006), something that previous heads of the institution have alluded to (Chua 1999: 3).

This perception is reinforced by a history of corruption scandals and a plethora of anecdotal evidence. Allegations of corruption have plagued education in the Philippines since the time of Marcos. These scandals have ranged from misappropriated funds to collusion with private suppliers, 'ghost' deliveries and abuses of discretion. Moreover, Chua found that malfeasance exists in all levels of the Department of Education, from the senior leadership to the rank and file even in far-flung provinces of the country (1999: 4–5). Thus, it is not an exaggeration that corruption seems to be systemic as it has persisted through time and has penetrated the institutions of public education nationwide.

The availability of resources for corruption is a necessary but insufficient condition to account for the sorry state of Philippines education. It is also necessary to look at the 'demand side'—the motivations of public officials in the education sector for this kind of behaviour. On the one hand, low salaries, shared by almost all members of the country's bureaucracy, could be one of the causes. The quality of teaching has been low because the government has not been able to recruit high quality teachers and education managers to join the agency. However, a more convincing explanation seems to be the lack of transparency and accountability, which reflects the overall condition of public service in the Philippines.

Chua argued that because of its sheer size, the Department of Education does not have the necessary manpower and resources to monitor and oversee all of its employees, programmes, transactions and other dealings. In an archipelago of more than 7000 islands, the logistics of delivering education present tremendous challenges. It is therefore understandable why the government has not invested in monitoring and other accountability mechanisms despite their purported impact on efficiency and overall effectiveness. In addition, officials incriminated in corruption scandals have been neither investigated nor prosecuted by the government's anti-corruption institutions (1999: 7–8). Another contributory factor is the observed 'culture of obeisance' that exists within the Department of Education hierarchy. According to a background paper for the 2009 Philippine Human Development Report, teachers and heads of schools will

not act without orders from higher ranking officials. When orders are sent, they are blindly followed by the rank and file as disobedience leads to certain formal and informal punishments, the worse of which is the termination of employment (Bautista et al 2009: 33).

One component of education delivery that has a very close relationship with corruption is the procurement of necessary goods and supplies. Although this is only 3 per cent of the annual education budget, or approximately USD 70 million, it still constitutes a considerable amount of money (Leung 2005). This is an area where several kinds of malfeasance have been witnessed such as bribery, kickbacks, overpricing, unaccounted spending and ‘under-deliveries’. The impact of these grey practices cannot be overestimated. Pay-offs can reduce the quantity and quality of educational supplies significantly, affecting the ability of the Department of Education to attain its performance targets. As Chua wrote:

The 1998 DECS budget is [USD 2] billion ... The United States invests [USD 4,435.75] on every pupil per year while the world, on average, spends [USD 933.50]. The Philippines spends [USD 91] on an elementary pupil and [USD 75.45] on a high school student—and much of it is wasted on kickbacks (1999: 9).

Research has also revealed that the devolution of certain powers and functions to local government units (LGUs) had the unintended consequence of increasing the locations for corruption. According to Stammer, the 1991 Local Government Code empowered LGUs to help in the construction of school buildings and other facilities. In order to fund these tasks, LGUs are allowed to use the funds from their share of the property taxes they collect. This becomes another source of bribes. Rich cities and municipalities have access to around USD 11 million every year. Pay-offs, known as the ‘cost of doing business’, can reach up to 20–30 per cent of the actual contract sum (2007: 15).

In the ‘basket’ of educational goods, the textbook represents a vital educational resource the procurement of which has been problematic for several years. It is usually a symbol of the ability of a country to deliver this social service. For example, the Department of Education procured around 37 million textbooks and teachers’ manuals at a cost of USD 24 billion in 2003 (Leung 2005). In the local survey that placed the Department of Education as one of the most corrupt government agencies, respondents said that the overpricing of textbooks was the most prevalent corrupt practice in the agency (Stamer 2007). In 1998, data showed that six students were sharing one textbook on average. This became a powerful representation of the failure of the government to fulfil its constitutional duty to provide accessible education for all. More inefficiencies and anomalies in textbook procurement and delivery came to light in succeeding years. According to a 2001 study, 40 per cent of textbook deliveries could not be accounted for. Moreover, suppliers delivered at a time of their convenience and not according to the needs of the schools. There was also improper documentation of the deliveries and an absence of feedback mechanisms on whether the right kind, number and quality of textbooks were being received. Finally, about 21 per cent of the textbooks procured by the Department of Education were not delivered to the schools that needed them (Aceron 2009). These indicators became the catalyst for action among the country’s civil society organizations, which believed that it was time to put a stop to the prevailing ‘culture of wheeling and dealing’.

Chua found that pay-offs to government officials took 20 to 65 per cent of the budget allotted for textbooks, which is normally given to the Department of Education regional directors.

However, the agency defended itself by blaming cash flow problems, delays in the release of the appropriated funds, budgetary politics and the privatization of textbook production. The latter was due to a law enacted in 1995 that abolished the government monopoly on textbooks and mandated the Department of Education to procure them from private sector companies (1999: 18). In 1999, the media exposed a new textbook corruption scandal involving an agent of several textbook publishers and officials of the Department of Budget and Management—the agency tasked with planning and releasing appropriated funds to government offices. The agent was caught giving Department of Budget and Management officials a box containing more than USD 110,000 in bribes so that money allotted for the purchase of textbooks could be released without going to the necessary pre-auditing protocol.

These exposés demonstrated the lack of accountability in the country's education sector. They also showed the limitations of the 'new public management' reforms implemented by past governments (Hood 1991). By contracting out the publication and distribution of textbooks to private companies, the state had intended that the logic of market competition would produce better educational materials at a lower cost as well as an efficient distribution mechanism. However, by not being sensitive to the underpinning political conditions, the market-oriented changes only provided more incentives for the abuse of power. Private companies have more resources to satisfy the supply side of corruption. In other words, not only the coffers multiplied—the bribes also increased massively. Nor did the decentralization movement that resulted in the devolution of powers to LGUs help to improve accountability, as corruption was no longer monopolized by the national government, but shared down to the lowest unit of governance. In this regard, institutional change not only did not deliver on its intended consequences—it generated unintentional effects that made the situation worse.

There were legislative investigations at the height of the scandals exposed by the media (Chua 1999), but a lack of political will and capacity to prosecute and punish errant officials have been the story not only in the country's education sector but also in several other areas of governance (Coronel 2000). It would take a few more years, a new president and administration, the right political context and sufficient political will for accountability reform for these problems to be addressed. Section 4 discusses how the textbook count programme was initiated and implemented by an alliance of state and civil society actors as a case study of efforts to improve accountability among public officials by increasing transparency.

#### **4. The textbook count story: Improving accountability through transparency**

The context of poor service delivery in relation to educational goods, that is, textbooks, which was attributed mainly to a lack of accountability, was the impetus for the textbook count—an initiative between the Department of Education and a consortium of civil society organizations led by Government Watch (G-Watch), conceived in October 2002. Formed by the Ateneo School of Government (ASoG),<sup>7</sup> G-Watch is an independent monitoring project that undertakes research and advocacy on themes related to governance and public management, in particular the contract implementation side of government procurement. In the light of the problems facing textbook procurement, senior officials at the Department of Education initiated the NTDP in order to improve transparency and accountability. For it to be successful, they needed the assistance of G-Watch and its network of civil society organizations around the country.

Leung argues that the timing of the programme was perfect. Not only were there political conditions for accountability reform, but the Department of Education was at that time implementing the single largest procurement in its history. In 2003, 37 million textbooks were expected to be delivered to thousands of delivery points nationwide. The agency had neither the resources nor the manpower to monitor the entire bidding, production and delivery process. Civil society organizations were therefore expected to be the Department of Education's—and therefore the government's and society's—eyes and ears as they observed and ensured the transparency of the bidding process, inspected the quantity and quality of the textbooks being produced, and monitored that the right number of books were delivered at the right time (2005: 2).

It is appropriate to ask why G-Watch was chosen among the large number of civil society organizations in the Philippines, and why it accepted the invitation from the Department of Education to be part of the innovative accountability arrangement. One reason was the mutual trust that existed between Department of Education officials, most notably the secretary and undersecretary, and civil society organizations. These officials came from civil society and were widely acknowledged to have competence and integrity. In addition, the Department of Education officials recognized that G-Watch had an excellent record in anti-corruption work and, more importantly, were seen in the eyes of the public as fair and impartial (Leung 2005). The broader picture, however, seems to be that such political opportunities were made available to civil society organizations because they had long been advocating for greater transparency and accountability in governance. What changed was the receptiveness of the Department of Education as an institution of the state to address its accountability deficits and realize that it had become an obstruction to the effective delivery of education in the country.

These political opportunities were linked to the context of political change the country was experiencing in 2001. Arroyo, the successor to Estrada, promised reforms that would address corruption.<sup>8</sup> While it is true that nobody explicitly stands against an anti-corruption platform, the difference lies in the reform orientation of a new government with significant backing from civil society. The movement that catapulted Arroyo to power was fuelled by civil society organizations which sought a new government that was more open to accountability reforms and good governance. By becoming a major stakeholder in the new administration, civil society organizations had a rare political opportunity to engage with the state and work to improve democratic accountability. In the scholarly literature on contentious politics (Tarrow 1994), the replacement of a perceived corrupt and abusive political leadership can be construed as a positive change in the alignment of the political elite in the Philippine state. Furthermore, the Department of Education officials who approached G-Watch were seen as allies in the campaign against corruption in the education sector.

Prudential reasons also heavily influenced the decision of civil society organizations to participate in helping an ill-equipped and resource challenged Department of Education. It was obvious to G-Watch that a more accountable public education system accorded with its aims as an organization formed by an educational institution. Pushing for reform of the delivery of public education was close to its mission and objectives. It also acknowledged that even though the whole of society was to be the beneficiary of its advocacy, it shared a similar constituency with the Department of Education—the millions of young Filipino students who are entitled to receive a basic education as provided for in 1987 Constitution. Finally, it saw that engaging with

the executive agency of the government in charge of implementing policies related to education was the most direct and effective way of progressing its transparency and accountability advocacy. It was aware of existing conditions in the political system, in which elections, political parties, legislative committees and other institutions often failed to hold political power to account. Instead of pushing for retrospective accountability by filing cases, and pressuring officials to investigate corruption allegations, G-Watch decided to be more proactive by helping the Department of Education and its service providers to be answerable for their actions in connection with the production and distribution of textbooks.

A government that was open to reforming accountability mechanisms also became the impetus behind the passage of a critical piece of legislation aimed at making public procurement a more transparent process. The Government Procurement Reform Act was quickly passed by the Philippines Congress only months after the change in political leadership. What is noteworthy is the fact that this law was pushed by Procurement Watch Inc. (PWI), an anti-corruption NGO with similar objectives to G-Watch. It helped members of Congress to draft the bill, lobbied for its passage, campaigned in the media and assisted in the crafting of the law's rules of implementation and regulations.<sup>9</sup> PWI also provided training for members of civil society organizations on how to participate in public procurement processes, that is, how to conduct monitoring and inspection effectively (Marcelo 2005). G-Watch and other civil society organizations involved in the NTDP were beneficiaries of this training.

G-Watch's credibility among the NGO community was crucial since it was asked to form and coordinate the consortium of civil society organizations that would conduct the textbook count. It did not have the financial and human capital for such a massive undertaking, but the Department of Education was hopeful that it could tap into its existing networks and solicit the help of civil society organizations, especially those which worked in far-flung areas of the country. The risk the Department of Education took in making G-Watch its civil society arm paid off. Due to its aggressive coalition-building efforts, several highly reputable civil society organizations agreed to cooperate and participate in the NTDP. Particularly noteworthy were two umbrella organizations: the National Movement for Free Elections (Namfrel) and the Caucus of Development NGO Networks (Code-NGO). Namfrel suited the needs of the count given its vast experience in electoral monitoring and extensive spread of volunteers nationwide.<sup>10</sup> Thus, Namfrel accounted for most of the manpower for the delivery phase, with volunteers doing the monitoring work at the educational district level all over the country. Church-based organizations and social action centres organized in the Catholic parishes and dioceses across the country also lent support. They are significant partners because they are present in almost every unit of local governance in the Philippines. Initial or 'seed' financial support was provided by the Asia Foundation, a funding agency of the US Agency of International Development (USAID), which saw the innovative nature and the potential of the initiative (Aceron 2009, Leung 2005, Luz 2004).

As a mechanism for transparency, the NTDP's main goal was to address a gap in the textbook bidding, production and distribution processes. It aimed to introduce more transparent transaction procedures between the Department of Education as the main client and the private publishing companies as contractors in order to produce textbooks and deliver them to public schools around the country. In addition, their presence helped prevent possible backroom negotiations between the Department of Education and the publishing companies. On the one hand, they were assisting the Department of Education by deterring the publishers from



soliciting illegal arrangements with individual officials, which had been the previous state of play. On the other hand, their presence led to increased confidence in the bidding process as the publishers realized that the presence of monitors provided a level playing field for all bidders. Thus, more transparency in the process catered to the particular interests of both the Department of Education and the private companies.

The actual textbook count began at the second stage. The NTDP was mandated to inspect the production of the textbooks to ensure that the publishers followed the terms of their contract with the Department of Education. As the ‘eyes of the government’, the civil society organizations were able to monitor whether the books were of the right quantity and quality before they were distributed nationwide. At this stage, transparency gave way to improving accountability since G-Watch could submit a report to the Department of Education indicating that the textbooks were not of the right quantity or quality. If this happened, the Department of Education had the power to compel a contractor to abide by its contract by either producing the right number of textbooks or replacing substandard ones.

Finally, the NTDP as a transparency mechanism was also involved in the distribution of textbooks to public educational institutions. This is where G-Watch’s partners in civil society came in. Those civil society organizations with local reach helped to ensure that the rights books in the right number were delivered at the right schools at the agreed time. The Department of Education did not have the resources to inspect the delivery of textbooks at the school level, and had previously relied on school principals and regional officials. Monitoring actual delivery forced the publishing companies to be efficient since failure might result in a loss of business the following year. Any anomalies in the delivery were immediately reported to G-Watch as the national coordinator, which then transmitted the details to the Department of Education. The participation of locally based civil society organizations also invited community participation in the transparency mechanism, adding to the pressure for the Department of Education and the publishing companies to get their act together as more than one set of eyes were scrutinizing their performance.

**Table 2.** Outcomes of the NTDP, 2003–2007

<b>Year</b>	<b>No. of Textbooks (in millions)</b>	<b>Amount (in USD )</b>	<b>No. of Delivery Points</b>	<b>No. of CSO Partners</b>
2003	37	29.5 million	5,500	8
2004	13.6	15 million	7,656	18
2005	1.27	1.4 million	4,844	34
2006–2007	11.96	12.3 million	2,359	39

*Source:* G-Watch Reports, 2004–2007

*The 2003 NTDP: Outcomes, problems and challenges*

The first NTDP was conducted from June to September 2003. It cannot be overstated that this accountability arrangement was being carried out for the first time in the Department of Education’s history. The first NTDP was ambitious in the objectives that it set itself. In spite of the fact that it was a pioneering effort, the outcomes were encouraging. With very few civil society organization partners, the NTDP was able to satisfactorily monitor the bidding process for and production of almost USD 30 million worth of textbooks as well as their delivery to

5500 points in 60 provinces in the country. According to official Department of Education reports, the average cost of a textbook was reduced by 39 per cent, from USD 2.02 to USD 0.80, by the more transparent procurement procedures. In addition, the time spent in the entire process was cut by half from the original 24-month cycle. The report also states that 100,000 textbooks were rejected by civil society monitors because of their poor quality.

However, the biggest achievement of the first NTDP was the introduction of a new accountability arrangement—a change that was painful for several actors used to the status quo. More than the actual numbers, evidence of the success of 2003 NTDP could be found in something unquantifiable—a change in the orientation of the delivery of textbooks as an educational public good (Leung 2005). Pushing members of the Department of Education bureaucracy, such as regional directors, district supervisors and school superintendents, as well as private sector actors, such as publishing companies, to adopt an accountability-oriented paradigm for effective textbook delivery was the greatest achievement of the first NTDP. Two important factors were needed to achieve this. First, there were effective and efficient lines of communication between all relevant actors to ensure that rapid adjustments could be made and delivery schedules were synchronized. Everyone knew which textbooks were available for bidding and when, and later where they were going to be produced and delivered. Frequent communication also prevented possible conflicts or antagonistic relationships from developing. The second factor was information. The Department of Education practiced due diligence in ensuring that Memorandum 162, which contained instructions about the NTDP, was effectively forwarded to all officials. Information also came in the form of the list of textbooks that was made available to schools and civil society organization monitors. They knew that textbooks were being delivered at a specific point in time, and also the kind and amount they were about to receive.

However, there were also problems and challenges. There was some resistance, particularly among suppliers, to the ability of civil society organization monitors to inspect the quality of textbooks being produced. In addition, some suppliers initially refused to agree a delivery schedule as this was dependent on the availability of distributors. These issues were eventually resolved through the intervention of Department of Education officials, who insisted that as customers they had the power to set reasonable terms and conditions. There was also some resistance from Department of Education personnel who perceived that civil society organization monitors were monitoring them as well as the delivery of textbooks. Again, senior Department of Education officials, particularly the undersecretary, Juan Miguel Luz, were responsible for maintaining good relations between civil society organizations and other constituencies (Leung 2005: 9).

#### *NTDP 2004–2007: More innovation and towards institutionalization*

Drawing on experience from the first NTDP, the Department of Education and G-Watch were quick to assess and make the necessary adjustments for its implementation in succeeding years. News about the initiative reached the mainstream media and the attention of other civil society organizations, funding organizations and others—dramatically increasing awareness.

At the start of 2004, the second year of the project, G-Watch sought the inclusion of more organizations. Namfrel was now concentrating its attention on the preparations for the upcoming elections. However, G-Watch discovered a gold mine for a myriad of reasons by tapping into the Boy Scouts of the Philippines (BSP) and the Girl Scouts of the Philippines

(GSP), asking them to take the lead in volunteer mobilization for the count of actual deliveries (Marcelo 2005). First, there are BSP and GSP chapters in virtually every school in the country, thereby resolving the manpower deficit in the programme. Second, both have impressive organizational and territorial structures<sup>11</sup> that enabled the project to coordinate all the activities and report successful deliveries or possible anomalies with relative ease. Third, there is a unique symbolism in having young children monitor the execution of a government project, because it both creates a deterrent effect and inculcates a sense of civic consciousness and social responsibility among the children.

Together with other civil society actors, each monitoring team must issue an Inspection and Acceptance Receipt as proof of the delivery of the textbooks at the proper time and in good condition. This mandatory document also contains observations on the exercise. Feedback mechanisms were also put in place during and at the end of every programme year of the initiative. Consultative workshops were conducted mid-stream, and post-evaluation was carried out at the completion of the programme. All participants had an opportunity to raise issues, identify problems and make proposals. G-Watch held these dialogues and acted as a conduit between Department of Education officials and its personnel, the textbook suppliers and distributors, and other civil society organizations.

Reports from the NTDP show that a number of improvements were made after the implementation of the first programme in 2003. In 2004, for example, textbooks of varying types rejected because of poor quality ranged from 6–74 items. This is a radical change from the 100,000 rejected copies in the previous year. The 2004 NTDP had fewer textbooks and therefore deliveries because of the lower demand for textbooks from the Department of Education. This was a positive development because it meant that the quality had significantly improved so that the Department of Education needed to procure fewer textbooks. In addition, mis-deliveries had reduced from 21 per cent in 2003 to just 0.25 per cent in 2004.

The success of the first two years of the NTDP empowered G-Watch to push for the institutionalization of the role of civil society in the textbook count initiative. This was realized when the Department of Education and a consortium of 34 civil society organizations signed a ‘Commitment of Support and Cooperation’. A more extensive network of civil society organization monitors is now composed of anti-corruption and good governance advocacy groups, education-oriented alliances, faith-based (Christian and Muslim) organizations, and student and youth sector groups. One major difference in NTDP 2005 was the participation of a private sector, commercial company, Coca-Cola Bottlers, Inc., which volunteered to provide resources and manpower. Its extensive trucking network helped in the distribution of textbooks in 8401 elementary schools in far-flung villages across the country (Parafina 2006).<sup>12</sup>

Outcomes continued to be positive and indicators to move in the right direction. The average cost of each textbook was reduced to 40 per cent of the previous amount (see below). Inspections by civil society organization monitors in the textbook production process have also increased the quality of textbooks. Just five per cent of all production was recommended for repair or replacement in 2005. The consortium of civil society organizations was able to be present at 71 per cent of all deliveries. According to the official report of G-Watch (Parafina 2006), ‘savings’ from corruption amounted to USD 1.84 million, broken down as follows:

- *Bidding*: USD 1.5 million saved (the average cost of a textbook before implementation of the NTDP was USD 2.04 and the cost was reduced by 40 per cent);
- *Production*: USD 67,000 saved (the prevalence of defective textbooks was also attributed to corruption, so the amount saved on the repair of textbooks found defective at the time of inspection may be considered as ‘saved’ from corruption).
- *Delivery to districts*: USD 400,000 saved (based on 40 per cent of textbooks being unaccounted for during G-Watch’s monitoring in 2001); and
- *Onward Distribution*: USD 51,000 (based on the 21 per cent failure rate identified by G-Watch monitoring in 2003).

The final NTDP, in 2006–2007, resulted in more positive results and the further institutionalization of civil society organization involvement in textbook monitoring. The Secretary at the Department of Education issued Order No. 59, ‘Institutionalizing NGO and Private Sector Participation in the Department’s Procurement Process’. This time, textbooks worth USD 12.28 million were monitored through the bidding, production, delivery and distribution processes at 2359 points nationwide. The consortium of civil society organizations had grown to 39 members. Cooperation with the private sector continued. By its fourth year of implementation, civil society organization monitors had mastered their responsibilities and this reduced the demand for training provided by G-Watch.

The NTDP became a major innovation that helped the Department of Education secure more public funding for education. According to its annual report, it has been able to convince the legislature to approve its institutional budget because of the implementation of this transparency mechanism. Members of Congress saw the benefits of having textbooks delivered on time and even committed some of their ‘pork barrel’ funds for public education.

A major challenge that is faced by most civil society organizations in the Philippines is securing continuing funding for the programme. USAID provided the initial support for NTDP, but G-Watch had to diversify its sources of funding as the scope of the programme increased in succeeding years. Successful implementation in its first year and its cordial relations with the state helped G-Watch to approach other funding organizations, in particular the Partnership for Transparency Fund—an international NGO set up specifically to help civil society organizations that are undertaking sustainable anti-corruption work. However, G-Watch recognizes that it should not rely on foreign funding but instead lay the groundwork for the institutionalization of the textbook count. It will continue to monitor the bidding and production processes, but it is a long-term goal of the NTDP that the locally based civil society organizations will handle the distribution phase with only minimal management by G-Watch. Its vision is that these organizations will report directly to the Department of Education on the distribution of textbooks in their respective communities. A step in this direction is inviting more local involvement in the transparency mechanism. Using the local school board as a permanent monitor of the delivery of educational goods and services is one of the institutional mechanisms that G-Watch is looking at.<sup>13</sup> This means that this civil society initiative has made a contribution to improving accountability in the future by reactivating existing formal mechanisms.

Another initiative to institutionalize this innovative service modality is the *Textbook Walk*, which mobilizes the participation of locally based civil society organizations and citizen volunteers in the distribution of textbooks in the schools of villages all around the country. This community-

based approach to monitoring service delivery is founded on the need to encourage civic engagement in accountability mechanisms by local citizens. G-Watch is attempting to make the initiative sustainable, as local civil society organizations and volunteers will eventually pick up and conduct the monitoring with only minimal management or supervision from the centre.

The basic idea is to invite the entire community to participate in the monitoring of textbooks when they are delivered to a given school. A group of people representing the Department of Education, the local village government, students, church organizations, and so on, is to organize an event on the date of the textbook delivery. An announcement will be made throughout the entire village asking everyone to get involved in the process. Such an event could even have a festive and celebratory mood, resembling a community party or a festival, to which Filipinos have become accustomed. After a pilot in four communities, G-Watch implemented the Textbook Walk in 12 districts across the country. G-Watch and other civil society organizations conducted training for the event organizers and prepared popular educational materials to inform everyone of the textbook monitoring process. The results were promising and people in the communities were eager to participate. As G-Watch states: 'People in the community have been so eager to live up to their role in ensuring efficient delivery of government services. Textbook Walk has provided them with the perfect venue to participate meaningfully in activities that provide solutions to the predicaments of education service delivery' (2007: 27). G-Watch hopes that more involvement by communities and other civil society organizations will locally entrench the innovative service modality they introduced.

## **5. Conclusions**

This paper has shown that the road to improving accountability is a difficult one, especially if political conditions are unfavourable and institutions of government are highly resistant to subscribing to the principles of good governance. The accountability deficits in Philippine governance expose the paradox of a vibrant, politically active and robust civil society pressuring within a state that is perceived as corrupt, ineffective and weak (Hutchcroft and Rocamora 2003). However, there are opportunities that could considerably alter this state of affairs. Recently, this was seen in a change in political leadership that generated confidence between state and civil society actors to carry out an agenda aimed at increasing transparency in the delivery of social services. This paper examines a highly specific case—the production and distribution of textbooks—but several lessons can be learned that could guide future state-civil society partnerships aimed at improving accountability in the Philippines and elsewhere.

This paper discussed the role of civil society organizations in fostering accountability in service delivery by participating in mechanisms that increase transparency. By serving as a social watchdog in the textbook process, G-Watch was able to serve as an impartial monitor to ensure that the right quantity and quality of textbooks were being made and ultimately delivered to millions of Filipino students—often those belonging to the lower social classes as they were the ones whose parents could not afford to send them to private educational establishments. The knowledge among both Department of Education officials and private publishing companies that a third party was monitoring the process and intended to report any anomalies deterred them from practices that had been considered 'standard operating procedure' in the past. By being present at all the steps of the textbook process, civil society organizations filled a 'transparency gap' within public service delivery, since they made sure that information was

readily available and transmitted to the Department of Education, the private publishing companies and the local civil society organizations mobilized to count the textbooks at delivery points nationwide. The Inspection and Acceptance Receipt issued by local civil society organizations became the critical document that private contractors and Department of Education officials must secure in order to show that the textbooks that were delivered had arrived on schedule and were the right kind, number and quality.

This paper argues that such an innovative service modality would not have happened if three interrelated factors had not been present: good state-civil society relations, political opportunity in the form of allies within the Department of Education, and a unity and extensive reach among civil society organizations in the country. The smooth relations between the government and the country's civil society were a product of the recent leadership change. The rise of a new president who was determined to fight corruption and instil good governance was a welcome sign to civil society that the government was serious in fighting corruption and providing a public service. As a counterfactual, such mutual confidence would not have happened under the previous administration, led by a president who had been involved in several corruption scandals and was later convicted of plunder. The shift from suspicion to trust between the state and civil society is a function of credible political leadership at the top.

The appointment of civil society leaders to government posts was also a critical factor. During that time the Department of Education was led by officials who not only followed the marching orders of the chief executive to promote good governance, but were also very open to collaborating with civil society to improve service delivery. These officials acknowledged that the Department of Education did not have the resources and manpower to monitor the textbook process and therefore needed the help of civil society. This meeting of minds forged the relationship needed for an innovative service modality. Mistrust of civil society involvement was apparent from the private publishing companies, but this can be explained by a lack of awareness of the role of civil society organizations in the NTDP. This was not limited to monitoring the performance of any single actor, be it be a Department of Education official or a textbook contractor. The role of civil society organizations was to monitor the process itself and could therefore raise red flags if it was deemed fit whenever something wrong happened—regardless of who committed the act.

Finally, the mission of monitoring the delivery of textbooks across thousands of communities in a country of more than 7000 islands is a challenging task that requires an extensive network of members. The Department of Education officials saw civil society as a credible partner that could deliver the necessary results, since G-Watch was able to show them the density of its network. G-Watch tapped into its existing networks and effectively relied on existing structures—such as Namfrel and the scout association. The latter was significant since it not only allowed the participation of the primary recipients of the textbooks, but also had a lot of symbolism in their mobilization as effective monitors of the distribution of textbooks. This gave the NTDP a lot of media exposure and high recognition at the local and international levels. G-Watch would not have been able to perform the textbook count if it had lacked sufficient social capital with other civil society organizations. This also helped it to secure financial support from international aid agencies.

It is possible to argue that the NTDP was not really a mechanism for accountability since there were no 'hard sanctions' to implement on officials or other actors who failed to perform. The

case of the textbook count shows that the journey towards accountable governance is a difficult and protracted process that should be approached with gradualism. One critical step, on which the NTDP was based, is improving transparency in public procedures. It could be argued that if civil society organizations had displayed a more antagonistic mood in demanding transparency and accountability, the results that this paper has demonstrated might not have been achieved. In a more hostile environment, civil society would have hurled accusations of corruption and misconduct and the state would have remained apathetic to such accusations. However, the approach of G-Watch and its partners was more engaged, constructive and collaborative, emphasizing the mutuality of interests between the Department of Education, the private sector publishers and civil society. It must be emphasized that not all organizations in Philippine civil society, particularly the more left-leaning or militant ones, would have taken the same approach.

In the end, the case of the NTDP shows that increasing transparency is a step in the right direction towards more accountable delivery of public education. This paper has examined the ways in which G-Watch was able to monitor how Department of Education officials and their private contractors conducted business. The presence of a third party in the form of a social watchdog made the bidding process credible, the production process more effective and the delivery of textbooks more efficient. In the end, the Department of Education benefited by saving public funds, the private contracts were assured of an honest bidding process and the students were given the right number and kind of textbooks at the scheduled time. Thus, the NTDP became the institutional manifestation of a 'credible commitment' which prevented actors in this process from engaging in self-seeking and particularistic behaviour that could have led to suboptimal outcomes (North 1990).

In sum, the most significant impact of civil society initiatives for more accountable governance lies in building, improving and strengthening formal political institutions. While the NTDP may have addressed a critical transparency gap, it will become more sustainable if existing political institutions perform their mandated functions. This implies that civil society organizations' efforts must be oriented towards institutional reform and deepening. This also means that a similar push must be undertaken by the Philippine state as well as its political parties, which are important institutions of political accountability. This could take a long time, but civil society organizations need to be oriented towards having a longer time horizon in their campaigns for greater transparency and accountability—and this means engaging with existing political parties.

However, it must be stressed that the three interrelated factors have a contingent character and remain fluid. The latter part of the Arroyo government (2004–2010) ceased to enjoy the confidence of civil society amid accusations of corruption and even of electoral fraud. This undermined its legitimacy in the eyes of civil society and jeopardized its political reform efforts. This resulted in the resignation of several cabinet officials, mostly those drawn from civil society, including Florencio Abad who served as the Department of Education secretary in 2005. In the end, the government of president Arroyo lost its credibility in fighting corruption. This does not mean, however, that these factors cannot be found again in present conditions. The promise of democracy is the turnover of government to a new political leadership. The 2010 elections in the Philippines may repair state-civil society relations and energize civil society to engage with the state on improving democratic accountability.

## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> In 2007, Estrada was convicted of plunder by the country's anti-graft court. He was granted a presidential pardon by the then president, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.
- <sup>2</sup> Civil society is defined as 'an intermediate associational realm between state and family populated by organizations which are separate from the state, enjoy autonomy in relation to the state and are formed voluntarily by members of society to protect or extend their interests or values' (White 2004: 10).
- <sup>3</sup> It must be emphasized that these two modes are not mutually exclusive in practice. Civil society organizations in the Philippines have shown that they can easily switch between protest and participation and at times combine them, depending on the nature and dynamics of the issue.
- <sup>4</sup> Complicating the problems of the OMB is the public perception that it is not to be trusted as an institution to curb corruption. A former ombudsman faced impeachment when a complaint was filed that accused him of bribery and the mishandling of the plunder case against former president Estrada. It is not helpful that the institution that is supposed to exact accountability from government is itself accused several times of the very acts that it is supposed to eradicate.
- <sup>5</sup> Transparency International's CPI has a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the best possible score. The score is derived from aggregating different international and local surveys of members of international businesses and organizations on their perceptions of corruption in a particular country (Transparency International 2009).
- <sup>6</sup> The Department of Education, Culture and Sports was officially renamed and reorganized by virtue of 'The Governance for Basic Education Act' in 2001. One major change is that the Department of Education is in charge of primary and secondary education and the Commission on Higher Education was given the mandate to oversee the country's tertiary education system.
- <sup>7</sup> The ASoG is an education and training unit under the Ateneo de Manila University, a Jesuit-run, Catholic private university in the country.
- <sup>8</sup> This excerpt from her 2001 Inaugural Speech indicates this resolve: 'We must improve moral standards in government and society, in order to provide a strong foundation for good governance...Finally, I believe in leadership by example. We should promote solid traits such as the work ethic and a dignified lifestyle, matching action to rhetoric; performance rather than grandstanding.' See <http://www.opnet.ops.gov.ph/speech-2001jan20.htm>.
- <sup>9</sup> According to Ramkumar and Krafchik (2005), this was a landmark for Philippine civil society as it was the first time in the history of the country that a civil society organization had successfully contributed to the passage of a law on a subject that required a high degree of technical expertise not traditionally associated with its existing engagements with the state. For a more detailed discussion on the passage of this law see Stammer (2007).
- <sup>10</sup> For background on Namfrel see Hedman (2006). Code-NGO is the biggest network of development NGOs in the country. It was a major actor in the successful anti-Estrada campaign and the early years of the Arroyo administration (2001–2004).
- <sup>11</sup> The BSP and GSP combined run 200 branches in different provinces of the country (Marcelo 2005).
- <sup>12</sup> Some expressed dissatisfaction with the participation of a multinational company in the NTDP. They argued that this 'commercialized' the initiative by allowing corporate interests to play a role in the programme (Ramota 2005).
- <sup>13</sup> According to the Local Government Code (LGC), every local government unit is mandated to convene a local school board which is empowered to decide on matters related to education delivery within its jurisdiction. A member of any NGO or civil society organization can be represented on the board (Capuno 2009).



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