



Fighting poverty: Lessons learned from community-based monitoring system implementation highlights of case studies

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Abstract

The paper discusses the processes in the mobilization for and implementation of the community-based information system in selected case study sites in the Philippines. The study dwells on the importance of having a set of indicators in conducting local level planning process using indicators to determine what problem areas can be prioritised, and focused targeting of persons and areas with the most problem. The indicator system provides objective basis for decision-making and brings confidence to the community in local governance. Some areas for improvement in implementing the system are discussed in the paper.

Key words: community-based monitoring system; local governance; participatory governance; poverty alleviation.

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Focus of the study

The study focuses on three case study sites to demonstrate the mobilization for and implementation of the Community-based Monitoring System (CBMS). CBMS entails installation of a set of indicators to determine quality of life advocated to be applied at the barangay level and other local government units, by the Micro Impacts of Macroeconomic Adjustment Policies Project (MIMAP) of the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) funded by the International Development Research Centre of Canada which commenced in 1992.

The study hopes to draw theoretical perspectives for governance of poverty alleviation and draw lessons for policymakers and implementers at the national and local levels with respect to the improvement of mechanisms in order to address poverty.

The three case study sites are: Palawan and its two municipalities (San Vicente and Brooke's Point) and a case barangay per municipality, New Agutaya and Oring-Oring, respectively; Pasay City and its two case barangays—179 and 184; and, two municipalities of Camarines Norte—Labo and Sta. Elena, and a barangay to represent each municipality, namely Barangay Tulay na Lupa and Barangay Poblacion, respectively.

Brief history of CBMS

The study sites represent the initiative of various levels of local government to install the CBMS. One is by a province (Palawan); the second, by a city (Pasay); and the third, by two municipalities in the province of Camarines Norte.

In Palawan, the Governor posed the challenge to set up a system in order to systematically assess the progress of quality of life in the province that motivated a Project Evaluation Officer to seek for an efficient technology to make this assessment, and finding this in CBMS.

For the municipality of Labo, the Planning Officer attended a forum on Local Government Initiatives for Poverty Reduction in August 2002 and was motivated to advocate the methodology in his locality, after having witnessed the presentation of CBMS in Palawan. In turn, the municipality of Sta. Elena was steered by the initiative of Labo to set up CBMS in the area. After Labo and Sta. Elena, five other municipalities were also able to implement CBMS in Camarines Norte in 2003. However, implementation in 2005 was a collaborative effort of the province. Also, the other five municipalities (totaling twelve in all) implemented CBMS in 2005.

In the case of Pasay City, it was through the advocacy of the wife of the City Cooperatives Officer who got to know about CBMS and inspired the City Planning and Development Coordinator (CPDC) to install the methodology. The CPDC had earlier been concerned about the adoption of a system for assessing progress in the locality for its development efforts and immediately considered the CBMS technology.

Palawan was the first to have implemented CBMS among the case local government units, thus having the most number of cycles of CBMS conducted—2000, 2002 and 2005. The survey was undertaken practically every two years, with the exception of 2005 since the election year was in 2004 and the Governor deemed it wise to hold it in the subsequent year.

In the case of Labo, one cycle of CBMS had been completed in 2003. Another round of data collection was done in 2006, but the validation process had not been completed. In Sta. Elena,



one cycle of data collection was completed a few months after data collection was started in Labo. The experience with the installation of MBN in Sta. Elena facilitated the conduct of data collection of CBMS indicators in the municipality.

In Pasay City, this was started in 2004 but was only completed in 2005 (for the entire city). In the case of the case Barangay 179, the whole cycle was completed in three months.

Scope of coverage

Nearly all municipalities (21) implemented CBMS in Palawan, except for two distant municipalities that have sparse population. The scope of coverage of the municipalities included in the CBMS system is all barangays, although in some municipalities, sample surveys were undertaken in the second cycle of CBMS because of limited resources. In Pasay City, all barangays were attempted to be covered by the survey. In the case of Camarines Norte, the two municipalities which initiated the implementation of CBMS targeted all their barangays in the survey in 2003. The initiative to implement CBMS in the province in 2005 was inspired by the initiative of Labo and Sta. Elena.

Coordinative structure

In order to oversee the implementation of CBMS in each locality, coordinative structures had been set up in each level. The most active structures in each of the study sites covered are the planning and development offices. In the province of Palawan, it is the CBMS Study Group composed mainly of the staff of the Research and Evaluation Division of the Provincial Planning and Development Office, numbering 13 in all. They impart the essence and approach of CBMS in the lower levels, and conduct monitoring and evaluation of how the local level CBMS system fares. The case of Palawan is atypical since the provincial government deploys its own staff to witness critical periods in the implementation of CBMS—data collection, processing, validation and consolidation of data. Since CBMS had been institutionalized in the province, the coordinative function is now the responsibility of the CBMS Study Group.

Likewise, in the two case municipalities in Palawan, the most active persons are two technical staff from the respective Municipal Planning and Development Offices. In San Vicente, the governing body is the Municipal Census Committee that does not only include the Municipal Planning and Development Coordinator (MPDC) but also the Municipal Social Welfare and Development Officer and the Civil Registrar. In Brooke's Point, the Mayor sits in the Technical Working Group (TWG), apart from the MPDC, together with the kagawads and the barangay captains. The one directly responsible in seeing through the operationalization of CBMS are the technical staff of the MPDC.

In Pasay City, all the heads of the different offices sit in the TWG which is headed by the CPDC. The municipality of Labo has 11 members sitting in the TWG all affiliated with the office of the MPDC. Comparatively, Sta. Elena has three technical staff of the MPDC who see through the implementation of CBMS.

Among the different barangays covered in the study, it is Barangay Tulay na Lupa that has a very creative structure since the municipality mandated each purok to be constituted for CBMS to be headed by the Purok Chairman, other purok officers, and other community leaders in the purok. In Barangay New Agutaya, the CBMS TWG created in 2005, is the former Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services (CIDSS) TWG that functioned when CIDSS was



operational. Hence, active members included not only the Barangay Captain, BHWs, and day care workers (DCCs), barangay agriculture, environment and nutrition scholars (BEANS), but also the community leaders represented in community welfare structures such as youth, women, cooperative, senior citizens and self-employment welfare association, among others. A TWG was not set up in Barangay 179 but the City TWG directed the implementation of the survey. In Barangay 184, the active members are the Barangay Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer and all the other officials. In the other barangays, the active members are the enumerators among whom a CBMS Focal Person is identified.

Commitment of the local chief executives

The most prevalent practice to set in place the CBMS is the endorsement of the approach by the local chief executives. CBMS had been institutionalized in most of the localities through the issuance of executive directives recognizing the CBMS as a tool to assess the quality of life in the respective local government units. For instance, in the province of Palawan, this was issued no less than by the Governor and the counterparts in the municipal study sites. In San Vicente, an executive order was issued by its Mayor and directed barangays to give a contribution of P5,000 each to reproduce the instruments for data collection. Some case barangays even fostered this commitment by signing a Memorandum of Agreement with their mayors to implement CBMS, such as the case in Pasay City. However, sanggunian officials were not rated as well since some of them were noted to be quite lukewarm in allocating funds for the implementation of CBMS and in apportioning the budget for projects in response to CBMS.

Preparation for CBMS

The conduct of training for CBMS was undertaken with the assistance of the CBMS Network Coordinating Team from Manila. There was a more wide scale implementation of capacity building activities in Palawan because of the commitment of the provincial government for its implementation. Trainers from the province were capacitated and in turn echoed the basic approaches and strategies for implementing CBMS. It took about three months (from January to March 2000) to cover the advocacy targeting 21 municipalities, starting with the local chief executives, and the implementers. Further, intermittent advocacies took place with the modification of indicators and systems. For instance, new computer programs such as the Census and Survey Program and the Natural Resources and Database which were instituted much later, facilitated data processing and digitalizing maps.

In Labo of Camarines Norte, orientation on CBMS was conducted on 28 January 2003 that already included the component barangays and paved the way for the Mayor to institutionalize the process, commencing on March 18, 2003 with the issuance of an executive order. Orientation was undertaken with the assistance of the CBMS Network Coordinating Team from Manila. The Team was again invited by the Governor of Camarines Norte to advocate for CBMS for all the mayors when it was decided to hold it nationwide. The CBMS Network Coordinating Team started implementation by way of training on data collection in August 2005. In the case of Pasay City, training was only conducted for three days in 2004 and with the direct assistance from the CBMS Network Coordinating Team of Manila.

Key persons involved in data collection

Initial years of implementation of CBMS in Palawan tapped students to gather information from the community, under the direct supervision of the municipality. This was demonstrated in the



case study barangay of Oring-orng. It appears that the volunteers (BHWs, BEANS, and kagawad) who were tapped in the third cycle of the CBMS data appreciated the data more when they were involved in data collection. They had less appreciation of the data when these were imparted to them with students collecting information for the community.

In Barangay New Agutaya in Palawan, the experience was different because MBN data collection was already undertaken by the community volunteers, composed of BHWS and DCCs, supervised by social welfare workers. This practice was continued on in the implementation of CBMS. In the case of the municipality of Sta. Elena, the experience in the implementation of MBN as a Social Reform Agenda area, also witnessed the support of community volunteers in the data collection of CBMS which commenced in 2003.

Like Brooke's Point in Palawan and its corresponding case barangay, the Pasay City barangays focused on in the study, harnessed students. Furthermore in Pasay, those who applied among the residents interested to implement the survey, which were at least high school graduates, were also considered. In Barangay 179, three kagawads were also active in data collection, apart from the students.

In Camarines Norte, enumerators in the case barangays were mainly the community volunteers such as BHWs, DCCs and BNSs. In Barangay Tulay na Lupa, a barangay kagawad was designated to oversee the work of the enumerators. In Sta. Elena, the social welfare workers assisted in overseeing the work of the volunteers being a former Social Reform Agenda area.

Data processing

In some localities, this was devolved to the lowest level of the barangay like in Camarines Norte (Barangay Poblacion and Tulay na Lupa) and in Palawan (NewAgutaya). Talled data were thereafter submitted to the municipality for collation and aggregation, although aggregation was done in manual mode yet, in the first cycle of CBMS because of the lack of computers in the earlier years of implementation of MBN and CBMS.

Computerization

Since Palawan was the first to adopt the NRDB having a foreign advocate start the implementation of the technology in a CBMS area in the province, it has the longest experience in its application, filtering down to other levels of the local government. However, in the case of the San Vicente Municipality, the key informants expressed difficulty in sustaining the use of the computers because of the inadequacy of the computer that was only recently donated from another project. Brooke's Point has more edge in terms of advancing its usage having a better set of computers available and having more predictable electrical supply in the municipality, although occasionally bogged down by power interruption too. Pasay City has started processing data using the computers in its first cycle of CBMS applying both tools (CSPRO and NRDB) recommended by the CBMS Network Coordinating Team.

Validation process

Validation process is a step to assess the veracity of the information consolidated regarding CBMS in the community. Among the case study sites, the most innovation in conducting the

validation process was witnessed in the province of Palawan. It has adopted four models to present the information aggregated per barangay and then presented in the municipality. The first model was through the presentation of tables indicating the performance of a given barangay on the indicators assessed. In the initial cycles, this meant the use of Manila papers because of the absence of advanced technology in the earlier cycles. The second model was to present the data on poverty and supplemented by root cause analysis of the problematic indicators that spurred the identification of relevant programs to respond to those unmet needs which had been prioritised. The third model was the presentation of digitized maps to enable the participants to visualize the location of selected indicators that were considered to be the most problematic. The most recent approach was the Technology of Participation implemented in San Vicente and led stakeholders to assess the top three indicators with poor and good performance; compared top performing and poor performing puroks and barangays per indicator; presented barangays with increasing and decreasing trends in performance; asked participants to give reasons for the nature of performance; and then finally, identified the “felt needs” the barangay representatives hope to address.

Participants in the validation process normally included the barangay captains, the focal persons of the different barangays for CBMS and other stakeholders invited to witness and react to the process. For instance, in San Vicente, teachers and other local technical staff had been invited to respond to the data that were presented, and also participated in giving reasons for increasing and declining performances of selected indicators. Pasay City has yet to implement the validation process in most barangays although this had been completed in Barangay 179 and became the springboard for recommending projects for the unmet needs. In Barangay 184, some initiatives to implement projects had been undertaken even if the validation process had not been completed.

Length of time to implement CBMS

It took the longest time for Pasay City to implement CBMS since it has a large population size being an urban area. The city completed data collection and consolidation in nearly a year (December 2004 to November 2005). The validation process has yet to be completed. Palawan and the two municipalities of Camarines Norte took about a year to complete the entire process, from data collection to validation with three to four months of training and data collection and eight months for consolidation and validation.

Role of civil society groups

The most visible interface of civil society groups had been witnessed in Barangay New Agutaya and in Barangay Poblacion in Sta. Elena. In Barangay New Agutaya, they were involved in formulating project proposals to obtain financial support from the national government in order to finance projects in response to basic needs that they have helped in identifying. In Barangay Poblacion, the active groups are the women, cooperatives, tricycle operators and business groups. Many civil society groups participated in the implementation of projects in Barangay 179 such as St. Vincent Foundation which set up a scholarship program, and Caritas which donated school supplies. This has eased up the burden of development on the part of the local government.

Governance innovation

In Palawan, what could be considered an innovative initiative is the introduction of Participatory Impact Assessment. Palawan was also inspired to divide the province into zones for planning purposes (earlier six, now eight), highlighting the peculiar economic, physical and cultural



characteristics of a group of municipalities. In Sta Elena, mandating the preparation of spot map and master list of households per purok is a helpful strategy that facilitated the identification of the households by the enumerators. In two barangays in Pasay City, the localities were subdivided into blocks for ease in administration of the instruments by the enumerators and supervision. In Barangay 184, stickers were also put on the households that have already been surveyed to avoid administering the instrument for the second time.

Data dissemination

In order to disseminate information about the adoption of the CBMS technology in each local government unit, there were efforts to disseminate the utilization of the approach in each level of local government. The most common approach is the conduct of meetings to diffuse the information, often conducted in a local development council meeting.

A prominent initiative was the formulation of a *Human Development Report* by Palawan, which was published in 2000, immediately after the CBMS data were collected. The data were also used and publicized in the *Socioeconomic Profiles* of other LGUs. In some localities, the use of digitized maps was inspiring to the barangays who saw the technology for the first time and had appreciation of the problems they are encountering. Radio has also been resorted to as an alternative in order to broadcast developments in some localities (Poblacion) and local publications.

A locality which started with the Minimum Basic Needs (MBN) indicators information system also adopted more community-based meetings and technologies such as the conduct of community assemblies to discuss the results of the survey and the installation of purok spot maps. In the province of Palawan and the two case municipalities, sharing of information with researchers, private sector and civil society groups has been done. Because of the long experience of Palawan in the implementation of CBMS, it has been instrumental in imparting and disseminating the contributions of CBMS to other publics in different fora.

Contributions of CBMS

CBMS undoubtedly contributed to the improvement of governance of poverty alleviation in the different local government units considered in the different case studies. First, the basis of the formulation of plans hinged on the indicators that were not met and aided in identifying projects or interventions that could be adopted in order to respond to the unmet needs. Second, in the planning process, CBMS steered the identification of areas or individuals that were prioritised in the delivery of the projects or goods in order to uplift the condition of areas and families that had marginal status. Third, in the planning process, case study sites had been aided in the identification of unmet needs that had to be prioritised, since resources were not adequate to respond to all needs. Fourth, in the planning stage, other plans expected to be accomplished by local government units were aided, such as the preparation of land use plans. Fifth, in barangays which had been adequately prepared for participatory governance among community members, more community involvement was witnessed in the preparation of community development plans. Sixth, in the monitoring/evaluation stage of management, decision-makers had been assisted in their reflection of the reasons why some indicators improved while others deteriorated. Seventh, CBMS had been a credible instrument to generate resources since rational data were provided to signify what indicators need to be extended support. Seventh, the fact that the indicators of CBMS were multidimensional, the use of the technology spurred various technical staff to respond to the problems in a convergent way.

A contribution of CBMS to those involved in the community was the feeling of “affiliation” and “ownership” of the information that they helped in generating. Furthermore, the visibility of the data in the community steered the members to do something about their condition, and not only to wait for government to respond to their needs. Another consequence of CBMS is the savings in resources for gathering information. The availability of data on various sectors helped the different technical people in conducting separate data gathering activities. Furthermore, the availability of data had been helpful for some local government units to earn recognition—Child-Friendly Barangay for Barangay Tulay na Lupa from the municipality of Labo and the province of Camarines Norte and Best Barangay for Poblacion awarded by the province and the region.

Facilitating factors

There is consensus in considering the key role of the local chief executive as instrumental in the implementation of CBMS. Furthermore, the commitment of the local technical staff has also served as inspiration to other stakeholders in the application of the approach. Support of civil society groups like non-government organisations have been mentioned for enabling the community members identify and “own” the process in selecting projects to respond to the unmet needs. Then there is community cooperation as a plus factor.

Impeding factors

Lack of funds was one of the issues raised in the implementation of CBMS. Funds to undertake projects to respond to problems are considered critical in building the confidence of the people on CBMS. Collection of data was not enough to solve unmet problems but the allocation of funds for projects to solve unmet needs. More computers are needed in some of the localities and unwillingness of some barangay captains to set up CBMS. Lack of confidence to implement the data collection and consolidation processes and lack of personnel to implement the technology

Impact of CBMS

On the whole, the impact of CBMS on the community can only be witnessed in Palawan because it is the only one with three cycles of CBMS and allows for comparison during the baseline year and in the recent data gathered. Seven indicators in CBMS have consistently improved for Palawan over time. In the case of the municipalities and the barangays in the case study sites of Palawan, there were improvements on the indicators targeted in the planning process. However, it is possible that the dire need for resources prevented them to demonstrate overall improvement since many of the indicators had not been targeted. Impact of CBMS in governance can be seen in areas where the full cycle had been in place as data had been used for decision-making, indicating rationality in their approach in prioritizing programs and projects.

Conclusion

The role of CBMS is remarkable for those that included the technology in decision-making, as identification of projects and target beneficiaries were based on objective criteria and dissipated the potential for focusing on the basis of personal inclination by local officials. Reliance on CBMS has made a substantial impact on some localities which have used the data for prioritization, particularly for Palawan and the other local government units focused on in the province. Indicators which had been targeted improved in terms of condition in the population,



although the lack of resources for some localities led to poor performance for some indicators which had not been targeted.

The common denominator in the successful implementation of the CBMS is the commitment of the local chief executive in the implementation of the process, the dedication of the technical staff, as well as the cooperation of the community. A feeling of “ownership” of the process is noticeable in localities which took part in data generation and data consolidation. This facilitated the utilization of the information in targeting and planning. Furthermore, noticeable is the remarkable involvement of community leaders in CIDSS area such New Agutaya.

There are still areas for improvement in the implementation of CBMS in some of these localities that could enhance the implementation of CBMS, if addressed. Differences in the implementation of CBMS in urban and rural areas were witnessed. Pasay City has a bigger population compared with municipalities and therefore takes a longer time to complete the cycle. Furthermore, urban people have more resistance to participate in the data collection process, particularly on the part of middle and upper income families.

Recommendations

For the CBMS Network:

1. Need to clarify indicators on makeshift housing which have caused confusion in some localities.
2. Need to ensure that the indicators be presented consistently—either in positive or negative way, for ease in interpretation and for summary profile of a locality to be made.
3. Need to supplement CBMS with participatory technology or demonstrate how it works by showcasing local government units which adopted the approach. The advocacy for CBMS can be strengthened by infusing the capability building activities with participatory governance.
4. Improved technical preparation data consolidation, data analysis and the use of the computers for CBMS implementation, giving more consideration to the profile of the participants.
5. Seeking out sources of support to improve the computer hardware available in the community. Training on resource generation be provided to CBMS implementers. More advocacy with the national government and foreign funding institutions to consider CBMS model as an approach by providing fund support to local government proposals that use CBMS.
6. Need to map out differential advocacy for local government units that have to deal with urban middle and upper class households and localities which have community residents with low education who are slow in appreciating the importance of CBMS and understanding the information being gathered.
7. More time is needed by community volunteers to appreciate and internalize the CBMS process but it is recommended that they be the ones tapped since they are more knowledgeable of the community, unlike students who may not see the direct implication of the data they collect.
8. More advocacy may be conducted to academic and training institutions undertaking orientations on poverty alleviation to consider the indicator system as a tool for decision-



making. Showcasing CBMS in their training and academic programs can be made, to reinforce the potential of the technology to their participants.

9. Sustained linkage with the Department of the Interior and Local Government to harmonize methodology and platforms advocated for community-based information system with that of CBMS. While the DILG is currently taking the lead in conducting training for LGUs using CBMS in some localities, the results of these can be documented and demonstrated to other LGUs for them to replicate.
10. Assess strengths and weaknesses of CBMS and DILG managed systems for installing the Core Local Poverty Indicator Monitoring System. Defining their convergence points and differences can aid decision-making in the interface of the two methodologies.
11. Utilization of technologies in distance learning for localities that have not been reached. Instructional materials in CD form and self-instructional manuals can be formulated. Linking up with educational institutions applying distance learning technology can facilitate the preparation of materials and the certification process to acknowledge the local officials which had been able to complete requirements to prove their competencies. Teleconferencing can be installed to link up technical experts from Manila and those from local government units to lessen the cost in mentoring.

At the local level:

1. There could be more advocacy on the part of focal persons in CBMS to link up with the sanggunian to ensure their financial support for the installation of the system and the prioritization of needs that have to be addressed.
2. Initiative on the part of the local government unit to generate resources to support the programs they have identified responsive to CBMS data can be encouraged by focal persons.

At the national level:

1. Revisitation on how the cut-off mark for the poverty threshold is set. From the Palawan experience, it was suggested that the other sources for sustenance that can be non-economic in nature be considered in defining the poverty threshold. For them, it is not enough to consider income alone for they feel there are sources of food which are not bought that are able to sustain their daily needs and therefore could make them improve incidence above the poverty threshold. While consideration of non-bought food is factored in the estimation of the poverty line, this is done at the regional level.
2. Recognition and consideration of local government proposals that utilize community information system, like CBMS, to be assured that the bases for making decisions draw from and reflect the community needs. In turn, award-giving bodies (i.e., *Galing Pook*) can consider as a criterion of good performance, localities that are able to provide information about their quality of life using community information system.

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The author served as the Project Leader for this research and integrated the findings of the different case studies, published in the aforementioned book, namely:

1. Victoria A. Bautista and Lilibeth J. Juan, Palawan: The first to Implement CBMS.
2. Ma. Ana T. Quimbo and Joane V. Serrano, Municipal CBMS Initiatives in Camraines Norte
3. Paz H.Diaz and Rhea Marie M. Carino, Pasay City: Eager to Learn from CBMS