



Case Study 15

HR/OD Intervention Focus: Capacity-building in Local Government

Implementing and Applying Learning Principles

Dino Ponsaran, assistant division chief of the Department of the Interior and Local Government's (DILG) Local Governance Capacity Development Program (LGCDP) Region VI, has been with the department for nine years. Selected as a recipient of Australia Awards

Scholarships (AAS) in 2013, he immediately realised upon his return that his department needed to do more to effectively deliver its mandate.

Tasked to supervise and give training and seminars to help local government units (LGUs) become more self-reliant, Ponsaran explains that the LGDCP's thrust is also to ultimately see improvement in the basic services delivered to constituents. However, looking back at what they provided before, he realised that their program lacked follow-through. "We just gave information and then left the local government units at that. We failed to help them apply what they learned," he laments.

The opportunity to take further studies through AAS gave him a fresh perspective. In fact, the scholarship was a welcome surprise for him as he never considered himself scholar material. Opting for a Masters in Public Policy at the Australian National University in Canberra, he intended to acquire a wider perspective on the dynamics of Western policymaking and how these could be translated to the local setting. He thought this would be particularly helpful as his work essentially involves helping LGUs formulate relevant policies.

His initial Re-entry Action Plan (REAP), an integral part of the scholarship which ensured that learnings would be utilised to address LGDCP's organisational gaps, involved a closer look at the impact of business permits and licenses resulting from his department's thrust to push local economic development. With a focus on generating local employment, one of its objectives was to build business-friendly and competitive LGUs so that people, especially the poor, can find employment and the means to fend for themselves.

Revising the REAP

Upon his return however, Dino felt it necessary to revise his REAP, which he was able to do with the help of his REAP supervisor who conceptualised the process and output. He shifted to something immediately doable and achievable: the codification of local investment and incentive codes. “It is realistic and achievable because we can easily mainstream it to our operational plans and budget. Basically, the expected output is to enable local government units to codify their local investments and incentive codes,” he explains.

By going this route, Ponsaran believes that the original plan to create a more business-friendly LGU would have also been achieved. He expounds, “For an LGU to be considered business-friendly and competitive, one of the indicators is for that local government to have an investment and incentive code. Hence, the original goal is achieved after all, [although] via a different route.”

While work constraints were inevitable, he began implementing his revised REAP with the approval of his regional director about seven months after he returned to the Philippines. Further explaining the delay in his REAP implementation, Dino reveals, “It involves a lot of adjustments. On top of that, there are also the demands of my office – the bulk of the work I had to do.” He found it challenging to implement his REAP given his busy schedule.

He concedes, though, that the biggest challenge now is getting buy-in from local chief executives (town mayors) outside of the tourist development areas since codification is not a priority for most of them. By the end of this year or early next, he is hoping to get at least two Memoranda of Agreement (MOA) signed. “I am banking on the endorsement of my superiors,”

he says. He shares that he had already sought said endorsement to local chief executives from his very supportive regional director prior to implementing his revised REAP.

Ponsaran's division chief, who was herself an AAS scholar, has been equally supportive, “She knows exactly the difficulty of implementing a REAP. So every time I ask for a little time off, like for example, to write some revisions or consult others about my REAP, she allows me,” he shares.

Ponsaran is also confident that the effectiveness of his advocacy will see his REAP through. “I know it's just a matter of explaining to them (the LGUs) the benefits of having this code. I also intend to ask LGUs who already have it about the impact and the good things they have experienced from implementing their local investment and incentive codes. They would be an inspiration to other LGUs.”

Generating local employment through investments

Dino clarifies that his role is basically to guide and provide technical assistance to local functionaries in formulating and codifying their ordinances. This involves helping them as they go through their policy information processes, so codes can be drafted and adopted by their local sanggunian or local government council. Going back to the core objective of his REAP, he further elaborates, “By helping an LGU draft its investment and incentive codes, I am helping it create a business-friendly environment. That makes it easy for local and foreign investors to invest in the locality. And when you have lots of investments coming in, that means job opportunities. And when job opportunities are abundant, then people, especially the poor and

the vulnerable who don't have that access to resources, will have the opportunity to support themselves."

Although two mandatory codes need to be formulated in order to create a business-friendly environment – the local investment and incentive code, and the revenue code – Dino has chosen to focus on the former as he feels this needs more attention. "I chose to help LGUs codify their local investment and incentive codes because in Region VI, only 54 of the 117 municipalities have done codification. And I chose to help LGUs outside the tourism development areas because these LGUs do not have the support or the resources to do this," he narrates.

He admits that codifying is a laborious process which involves consultations with stakeholders, a careful study of national policies on trade and investments with a view to localise them, and considerable technical writing. "In the case of local investment and incentive codes, you have to consider different stakeholders like the businessmen, both local and foreign investors, and other people like the legislators and residents of the area. You have to look into the different opportunities, the economic potentials of the localities involved, and find ways and means to maximise these potentials and make the most of it, so that the people in the area are benefited by the business opportunities. You also have to match the codes to the priorities or thrusts of the local chief executive," he explains.

Ponsaran believes the AAS scholarship has helped him become a more effective government worker and codification advocate. His professors were emphatic about applying principles, so he soon noticed that the capacity-building interventions he was giving to local government units were "mere information-giving" and "did not go deep enough." He credits his scholarship

for helping him realise that "what is important is for the principles and ideas to be put into practice." Now, every time he is given the opportunity to work with other LGUs, he tries to "see to it that at the end of an intervention or capacity-building activity, people who acquire skills are equipped with the know-how on what to do when they go back to their own respective local government units."

"I have set my deliverables for this year and I hope to be able to fully implement my REAP before the end of 2015," he shares. Though Ponsaran has had a belated start, he remains resolute that the work will be accomplished, which means not only transferring the know-how in terms of codification but also ensuring that the LGUs apply this knowledge, and that they apply it well.

Dino Ponsaran finished his Master in Public Policy from the Australian National University in 2014. His REAP focused on the codification of local investment and incentive codes.