

Region 8 shows how learning from peer LGUs can fast track business registration improvement

by Janelle Dumalaon

“Resources and technical capacities!” Herville Pajaron and Federico Lago of Leyte, respectively the Department Head for Sustainable Development in the Municipality of Palompon, and the Municipal Planning and Development Coordinator for the Municipality of Palo, agree on constraints to development in their areas. Having dedicated the bulk of their careers to service to their municipalities, both are familiar with the field realities of working in local government. To further add to their similarities, both have witnessed their local government units face the same challenge, and both are able to say with pride that they were part of the solution.

Says Herville, *“the complicated business registration system in our municipality was the source of many complaints from many business owners. Others skipped the process altogether. For us in the local government, that represented a major problem since it meant less revenue, and therefore less funds for us in dues and taxes that would have gone into development of our area. I felt apprehensive at the thought of our municipality having to introduce reform through trial and error, alone and without any support. Providentially, we were invited to attend an orientation for streamlining the business permits and licensing system. Soon after we conducted a study visit to Ormoc City in Leyte Province to see how we could learn from them and how they could guide us in implementing the model.”*

Much like Herville, Federico also feels the same appreciation with regard to what has since changed in their areas, once conditions had been set-up in such a way that allowed them to build on each other’s successes. He says, *“previous recommendations to improve our system seemed to us like mere prescription. We were only told what to do, and there were no provisions to guide us through the implementation.”*

“The mentoring process from Ormoc and the other successfully streamlined areas really prevented us from encountering the same pitfalls and not inventing everything from scratch. Being able to depend on existing technical capacities, and not needing to severely tax our resources makes us really thankful for this peer-to-peer learning process.”

Having benefited from the culture of learning that was started by Ormoc, both representatives are able to view with satisfaction the results of improved business conditions and increased revenue for their local governments. “In Palo, we had set Php 2.5 million as a target for business fee collection for 2008. By the end of the year, we were close to 3 million, says Federico with pride. Herville also notes, “if earlier Palompon was 91% dependent on the budget allotted to us by the national budget, now the rate is only at 77%. The difference is made up of local income”.



LRED Café in Palompon, Leyte.

Mr Herville Pajaron and his Café-mates shared their inputs on how to do LED in Palompon, using their own resources. Streamlining of BPLS of Palompon is one of the quick wins of this workshop.

Regional Officer-in-Charge Ed Belas observes, *“in essence, peer-to-peer learning is about people. It’s about mayors sharing their knowledge, provincial directors learning from each other, it’s about local chambers passing on information to other local chambers. Encouragement and influence come from the counterparts in other local government units who were once faced with the issues they are currently facing.”*

Clearly, it is indeed about hardworking local government officers such as Herville and Federico who have greatly gained from the experience that helped them perform their jobs of catering to their constituents more efficiently. Furthermore, their doors have since then been open to others who were once in their former position needing new knowledge and mentorship. Through such facilitators of the process, the learning culture is then preserved, enriched, spread throughout the Eastern Visayas, and even beyond.

In 2005, the GTZ, through the SMEDSEP Program, piloted the model to streamline the system of business permits and license registration and renewals in Bacolod City, Negros Occidental and in Ormoc City, Leyte. The positive results from implementing this model in these areas became the basis for which Ormoc became the first local government unit in its region to facilitate the peer-to-peer learning process. This had the objective of spreading the model to other cities and municipalities in Eastern Visayas.

Peer-to-Peer learning is a capacity development approach involving knowledge transfer among counterparts of the same professional sector. Being mentored by one's colleagues through first hand demonstrations make concepts, procedures and processes easier to understand and replicate. It is based on the principle that demonstration, technical exchanges and study visits with mentoring from peers allow for better application of new capacities. The replication of proven approaches in other areas is a predictor of sustainability, as it allows for a non-resource intensive way of addressing the same issues without having to make the same mistakes.

In the case of Eastern Visayas, peer-to-peer learning has allowed the adoption of the streamlining model to extend beyond Ormoc and be implemented in the areas of Palo, Isabel, Palompon and Burauen in Leyte, as well as in Guian, Calbiga, Catarman, and Catbalogan in Samar. Naval in Biliran has also benefited from this process. As these municipalities did not all implement the model simultaneously, the ones who did so earlier were able to serve as sites for study visits for the ones who followed, and were thus also able to carry on the peer-to-peer learning process.

The need to streamline the business permits and licensing system in a given area is usually determined during the rapid economic appraisal. All relevant stakeholders within the local government unit identify the burning issues of the day. The processes in the existing system are then charted, including all players and all problems. A benchmarking visit to Ormoc is then conducted. This is meant to allow (1) observation of the model in action, (2) interaction with implementers and stakeholders, departments or groups involved and partner organizations collaborating in the implementation, (3) a survey of relevant facilities and equipment and finally (4) demonstration of visible

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results or benefits of the model. A crucial element in the study visit is the focus of the demonstration on how policies should be enforced in favour of the clients, which in this case are the micro, small and medium enterprises. After benchmarking in Ormoc, potential replicators visit the other streamlined LGUS who have availed themselves of the peer-to-peer learning opportunity such as Burauen, Palo and Palompon.

The next step following the study visits is an Action-Planning Workshop attended by the mayor, local representatives of national government agencies, licensing officers, the private sector, as well as the resource persons. Here, the main question to answer is operationalization, i.e. "how to streamline?" This workshop used to only be facilitated by resource persons from Ormoc, but the success in other municipalities means the capacity to send their own experts to these areas in order to facilitate the discussion and share their implementation experiences. The output is a concrete action plan validated among stakeholders that takes into account the concerns, solutions, targets, prioritizations, next steps, steps requiring legislation, and other such considerations.

To date, the abovementioned municipalities are not only able to pass on the approach to other local government units within the region, but also receive study visitors from Mindanao and Central Visayas. The initial intervention of the GTZ by introducing the model has resulted to improvement of the local business and investment climate in a way that demonstrates quick and visible success made sustainable by the peer-to-peer learning approach.

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