



The politics of engagement: gains and challenges of the NGO coalition in Cebu City

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In 2000, the author contributed a paper entitled "Civil society participation in city governance in Cebu City" to *Environment and Urbanization* Vol 12, No 1. This was a summary of one of nine case studies prepared as part of a research project on urban governance, poverty and partnership, funded by the UK Department for International Development's ESCOR programme. The case studies were commissioned by the International Development Department of the School of Public Policy, University of Birmingham. This Cebu City update focuses specifically on NGO participation in political processes and includes the developments in this area

SUMMARY: *This paper describes the efforts of the NGO coalition, Kaabag, to push forward the concerns of the urban poor in the local governance processes of Cebu City in the Philippines. In the 12 years since it was established, Kaabag has engaged and collaborated with city government on a range of issues, including housing, livelihoods, governance, children and women. The paper outlines the strategies, issues and progress in each of these areas, detailing the contribution of specific NGOs. It offers an analysis of the outcomes of this engagement, and concludes with a discussion of the challenges and lessons learned over the decade.*

I. INTRODUCTION

SOON AFTER THE 1986 People Power Revolution that toppled the Marcos regime, the Corazon Aquino government started restoring democratic institutions and processes in the country. The new Philippine Constitution recognizes the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based or people's organizations (POs) in nation-building, and their participation at all levels of social, political and economic decision-making. The 1991 Local Government Code laid the foundation for local autonomy and provided the enabling mechanisms for popular participation in governance.⁽¹⁾ The winds of change reconfigured state-civil society dynamics at the national and local levels.

The first local election held in 1988 occasioned the forging of a strategic alliance between the cause-oriented and urban poor groups and the political neophyte Tomas Osmeña of the Bando Osmeña-Pundok Kauswagan Party. He and his ticket, including the vice-mayorality candidate Alvin Garcia, attended all the rallies organized by urban poor groups and signalled their support for the seven-point People's Alternative.⁽²⁾ As promised, when Osmeña became mayor, he created the City Commission for the Urban Poor (CCUP),⁽³⁾ making Cebu City one of the first local government units (LGUs) in the country to have such an office; also, a few NGO leaders and development workers were recruited to join the city frontline offices.⁽⁴⁾ These developments sent a positive signal to the NGO community, which decided to come together in order to maximize the opportunities offered by such a propitious political climate. Twelve Cebu City-based NGOs⁽⁵⁾ founded the Kaabag sa Sugbo in 1992 to make their coalition an influential force in governance and, after a decade of engagement with the city government, Kaabag NGO members now occupy 40 per cent of all the seats in the city development council.

This paper is an assessment of the gains and challenges arising from Kaabag member NGOs' participation in political processes to push forward urban poor concerns in city governance. It traces the development and effect of the key issues of NGO engagement. The paper situates Kaabag's participation in local governance in the context of the NGO paradigm shift vis-à-vis the city authorities. It then discusses the issues and strategies of engagement during Osmeña's first two terms (1988–1995),⁽⁶⁾ through the Garcia administration (1994–2001) and Osmeña's comeback (2001–2004). The outcome or impact of this engagement is analyzed in terms of policy legislation or reform, decisions, actions, programmes initiated, budget allocation, or changes in city government orientation, attitude or thinking towards governance. The last section summarizes the findings and implications.

II. PARADIGM SHIFT

DURING THE MARTIAL law ferment of the Marcos years, protest politics was the modus operandi of the day among NGOs and community-based organizations. Although an open line of communication between urban poor groups and city hall was established following the creation of the CCUP, many specific issues had yet to be ironed out. Urban poor groups such as sidewalk vendors, informal settlers and trisikad(7) drivers were always ready for a head-on encounter with city government to oppose any policy that threatened their security of tenure or livelihood security.

Over time, the NGOs and their partner POs, who were organized, facilitated and capacitated by the former, realized that their hard-line stance was not producing the desired results. Rethinking led to a change of paradigm in dealing with the authorities. They shifted their strategy from "expose-oppose" to "expose-oppose-propose". Confrontational politics gave way to the politics of engagement, characterized by dialogue, negotiation, compromise and a "win-win" resolution of conflict. Critical collaboration became the dictum, as NGOs continued to remind themselves that they had to remain vigilant and critical while they entered into collaboration or partnership with the government.

III. ISSUES, STRATEGIES, OUTCOME AND IMPACT

IN THE EARLY years of its existence, Kaabag did not have a development agenda of its own, and its advocacy was in response to the national and local issues of the day. It served as a forum for a rainbow of NGOs/POs to articulate their position on such public issues as oil price hikes, power shortages and constitutional change, and a range of development issues including the Local Government Code implementation, social housing, alternative politics, voters' education, labour sub-contracting and sustainable water supply. Internally, it lent its support to member NGOs, who bannered specific issues in accordance with the mandate of their respective organization and the needs of their constituencies. Kaabag's development agenda is based on sectoral needs and priorities that are defined in consultation with its members and the urban poor. Its governance thrust is designed to maximize the provisions of the Local Government Code for civil society participation. Engagement between Kaabag NGO members and city government centres on five key concerns: housing, livelihood, governance, children and women.

from 2001 to 2003. Thirty key informants (12 from government organizations, 15 from NGOs and three from people's organizations) were interviewed in 2003 as part of a data-gathering process, and the findings of the study were validated with the Kaabag NGO members on 13 November 2003.

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1. The Code provides the legal and institutional infrastructure for the participation of organized civil society groups in local governance and development activities. It mandates the representation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and people's organizations (POs) in local bodies – local development councils, the local health board, the local school board, the pre-qualification bids and awards committee and the people's law enforcement board. Furthermore, it provides mechanisms such as initiative and recall for promoting local accountability and responsiveness. Aside from the private sector, the complementary role of the NGOs/POs in government development efforts is also recognized by the Code. See Etemadi, Felisa U (2001), *Urban Governance, Partnership and Poverty: Towards Inclusive Urban Governance in Cebu*, Department for International Development, London, page 84.

2. Etemadi, Felisa U (2000), *Urban Governance, Partnership and Poverty in Cebu*, Department for International Development, London, pages 39–40.

3. The primary task of the CCUP was to coordinate the speedy implementation of government policies and programmes for the urban poor in the city. Among its

tasks was to evaluate past and ongoing shelter-related projects of the city government in squatter and resettlement areas, in consultation with beneficiaries, and to recommend appropriate actions to the city mayor.

4. The commission was chaired by Teresa Fernandez of Lihok-Pilipina, who served on a P1 (or token) annual salary.

5. Cebu Citizen Involvement and Maturation in People's Empowerment and Liberation Foundation, Inc (C-CIMPEL), Cebu Labour Education Advocacy and Research Center (CLEAR), Cebu Youth Center (CYC), Commission on Service (COS), Fellowship for Organizing Endeavors, Inc. (FORGE), KAKASAKA, Lihok-Pilipina, Pagtambayayong Foundation, Philippine Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Areas (PhilDHRRA), Ramon Aboitiz Foundation, Soil and Water Conservation Foundation (SWCF), and Visayas Cooperative Development Center (VICTO). Today, nine of the original members are still very active, as are the five new members (CPAG, EADSC, PBSP, SACMI and FreeLAVA). Seven other NGOs participate regularly in Kaabag activities.

6. A mayor's term of office is three years. The first local election was held in 1988 and Osmeña's first term ended in 1991. But the local election was moved to 1992 to synchronize with the 1992 national election, in order to save on government electoral expenditure.

7. A *triskad* is a pedal-operated tricycle, which includes a sidecar for passengers and for cargo.

8. The Community Mortgage Program (CMP)

IV. HOUSING

SECURITY OF LAND tenure is one of the main concerns of the city's urban poor. Even before the passage of the 1992 Urban Development and Housing Act (UDHA), which provided the impetus for the implementation of a social housing programme by all LGUs in the country, the CCUP initiated a land inventory, an identification of social housing sites and a registration of potential beneficiaries. In fact, the Pagtambayayong Foundation conceptualized the Community Mortgage Program (CMP),⁽⁸⁾ which was adopted as the national programme for social housing. Pagtambayayong has been the CMP-implementing partner of the city government, responsible for community mobilization, the supervision and monitoring of the CMP implementation, and loan collection, as well as technical assistance on site acquisition, road right-of-way negotiation, loan-processing and site development. In the mid-1990s, the city acted as the CMP originator to fast-track loan-processing.⁽⁹⁾ It has also facilitated the acquisition of on-site lots owned by the provincial and national government for social housing.

In 1997, the city declared social housing sites in 517 lots identified in 37 *barangays*. In 2000, the city entered into a memorandum of agreement with Pagtambayayong, and allocated a loan of P822,474 (US\$ 14,766) to Pagtambayayong and the Lorega Homeowner Association for the construction of starter houses⁽¹⁰⁾ for 150 fire victims in the area. From 1990 to November 2003, the city government spent P293,764,884 (US\$ 5,274,055) for lot acquisition for low-cost housing, benefiting 497 homeowners' associations and a total of 41,570 households.

The advocacy of the Fellowship for Organizing Endeavors (FORGE) focuses on fast tracking the delivery of basic services for on-site and off-site relocation, a moratorium on demolition without acceptable relocation and NGO/PO representation on the Local Housing Board.⁽¹¹⁾ The formation of Tawhanong Pagpuyo, a GO-NGO-PO tripartite body composed of FORGE, the Department for the Welfare of the Urban Poor (DWUP, formerly the CCUP) and another NGO, the Community Organizing in the Philippine Enterprises, facilitated the first formal coordination between national shelter agencies and the city government in 1999, and improved delivery of basic services in 13 *barangays*. Since 2001, two PO representatives and an NGO have been participating in the Local Housing Board, resulting in the prioritization of urban poor concerns. Aside from drafting a comprehensive shelter plan, the board serves as a clearing house to support and approve those DWUP actions pertinent to the urban poor's request for its services, such as expropriation, road right-of-way negotiation and conflict resolution among members of homeowners' associations.

As part of its campaign against demolition without relocation, FORGE spearheaded the Urban Poor Consultative Conference in 1999, which was attended by urban poor groups, government agencies and the city government, led by the mayor. Upon invitation, the media attended the forum on demolition, where the mayor and all city government units involved in demolition, including lawyers, judges and the police were present. FORGE's judicial advocacy intensified through a series of consultative conferences in which judges (led by the executive judge himself) from the regional and municipal trial courts participated, also national shelter agencies, the city mayor, DWUP, FORGE and the University of the Philippines Cebu College, which documented the proceedings for future follow-up. Cebu City is the only LGU in the Philippines that has an agreement between the DWUP and the judges stating that the latter would check with the

former on the readiness of a relocation site before issuing a demolition order. Previously, the mayor himself had appealed to the court in three or four cases for extensions (30–60 days), pending the availability and preparation of relocation sites. Starting in 1999, informal settlers scheduled for off-site relocation have been given the opportunity to choose from identified accessible sites within the city. The city even provides relocation for informal settlers who are evicted from private lots by court order.

FORGE is also instrumental in organizing and facilitating lot acquisition for the relocation of KAPASAR, a PO whose approximately 1,000 members live along the pavements of McArthur Highway in San Roque *barangay* and whose shanties are to be demolished upon the construction of the South Coastal road. As of writing, Pagtambayayong has constructed 13 starter homes⁽¹²⁾ in the Budlaan relocation site, and another NGO, World Vision, is providing funding assistance of P25,000 (US\$ 449) per household to KAPASAR members for wall construction.

Based on the KAPASAR experience, FORGE initiated a list of steps for processing off-site lot acquisition and site development. Subsequently, it produced a manual containing the policies and processes in the acquisition and disposition of resettlement sites, and these are being tested at DWUP and will be subject to review after six months of implementation. Previously, homeowners' associations experienced long delays as the necessary procedures and documents were neither documented nor disseminated.

V. LIVELIHOOD

THE MAJORITY OF the urban poor earn their income in the informal sector. Many engage in vending while others drive tricycles or *trisikads* for a living. FORGE is one of the NGOs that organizes these marginalized groups in their area of operation, lobby for their cause and mobilize other sectors, including the middle sector⁽¹³⁾ and the media, to support them.

City ordinances prohibit sidewalk vending, but the city has been implementing an unwritten policy of "maximum tolerance" since Osmeña's first term. Vendors comply with certain guidelines regarding vending hours, number, size and type of structures or stalls, and sanitation. These include prohibitions against obstructing traffic or using stalls as sleeping areas. The city leadership has come to accept the reality that this sector of the informal economy provides alternative livelihoods to the unskilled labour force and those who cannot be absorbed by formal employment. In times of economic downturn, the informal economy serves as the shock absorber. Allowing the sidewalk vendors to earn a decent living has implications for peace and order and lowers the incidence of theft, which affects the economy and investment climate so crucial to the economic growth of the second-largest city in the Philippines.

In response to the advocacy of Care Philippines and the Cebu City United Vendors Association (CCUVA), in 2000 the Garcia administration created a working committee to study the plight of street, sidewalk and public vendors. The mayor also signed a covenant with the vendors' federation, agreeing to a moratorium on demolition pending the passage of the ordinance a year later. The academic partner from the University of the Philippines Cebu College presented findings on the vendors' situation and their economic contribution, first to the working committee and then to the city council. Other NGOs and urban poor groups joined subsequent rallies to lobby for the approval of a resolution calling for the regulation of street

aims to secure land tenure for the landless poor by giving financial assistance for the purchase of land, so that residents of blighted/depressed areas or areas of priority development can organize to own the lot they occupy or the land where they can resettle.

9. Processing of loans from the National Home Mortgage Finance Corporation (NHMFC) takes months or years, while city-originated CMP takes about three months. However, the land title in NHMFC-funded CMP areas bears the name of the homeowner association (HOA) upon purchase, and can be confiscated after six months of non-payment. On the other hand, lots acquired through city loans are still in the name of the city. Homeowner associations in the latter pay a higher interest rate of 9 per cent, compared to the 6 per cent charged by the NHMFC, but they do not face the same sanction for default.

10. The starter houses consist of firewalls and a two-vault septic tank. Earlier, Pagtambayayong extended a P8,012,071 (US\$ 143,843) loan to the homeowner association.

11. The Housing Board is expected to provide clear policy directions and guidelines and develop and implement a housing plan for the city, with an emphasis on social housing as the primary strategy.

12. The starter home consists of six iron bar posts, galvanized iron sheets, concrete flooring and a "comfort room" connected to a communal septic tank.

13. The middle sector refers to the progressive individuals among professionals, academe and religious and other civil society organizations.

traders to ensure their workplace security. This was meant to replace an earlier ordinance that proscribed sidewalk vending, but the city council referred the resolution to its committee on markets for further study.

The policy of “maximum tolerance” still applies today, provided there are no complaints. But no ordinance has been passed as yet, despite the appointment of a city consultant on vendors. However, the consultation process prior to demolition, even on minor matters, is now institutionalized. Previously, the Squatter Prevention Encroachment Elimination Division (SPEED), acting on a public complaint could, even without a demolition order, demolish vendors’ stalls. Now, a demolition order is required, and it serves as notice to the vendor organization that a demolition is imminent, thus prompting leaders to begin the process of consultation with city government. The vendors anticipate a long struggle in order to ensure their workplace security, and so the crusade continues. In the consultation with the marginalized on the Cebu City Master Plan study, spearheaded by Kaabag in 2000, and in Kaabag’s strategic planning workshop in November 2003, recognition of the informal sector as part of the economy remains a key component of its advocacy agenda. Non-recognition allows city planners to justify the exclusion of this sub-sector in city planning.

The Sugbo soap project is the only livelihood project ever funded directly by the city. In 1992, the city government allocated about P3 million (US\$ 53,860) to VICTO, the fund conduit, and KAKASAKA, the project implementor, for the income-generating projects of urban poor groups, under the umbrella of UPLIFT. The project started out as a tripartite partnership between city–NGO–urban poor groups, with a certain degree of autonomy for the urban poor groups. However, the contract was officially terminated in 1999, four years after the project ceased operation.⁽¹⁴⁾ The soap project encountered financial problems relating to sales, marketing, collection, lack of internal control and squabbling among the beneficiaries. The project failed, but VICTO was able to salvage P900,000 from cash flows. The city has just entered into a memorandum of agreement with the Cebu People’s Multipurpose Cooperative to utilize the funds for livelihood projects (soap and iodized salt production). Proper screening of beneficiaries, closer supervision and better internal control systems are being instituted. Representatives from the urban poor and the private sector are part of the oversight committee.

VI. GOVERNANCE

GOVERNANCE IS THE centrepiece of Kaabag’s advocacy. The coalition is in the forefront, championing participatory governance through the implementation of the Local Government Code and the promotion of issue politics rather than the traditional politics of personalities and patronage. The lead NGO members reinforce Kaabag’s thrust by espousing their own specific sectoral agendas. As a coalition, Kaabag views participatory processes within the larger context of promoting and realizing people-oriented sustainable development. Empowering the marginalized to participate in political processes is part of the means of pursuing pro-poor development.

The Cebu Citizen Involvement and Maturation in People’s Empowerment and Liberation Foundation Inc (C–CIMPEL) has been serving as the citizens’ election watchdog in Cebu since 1992. Aside from quick count,⁽¹⁵⁾

14. Sumaoy, Jasmin G (1999), “NGO loses contract to produce soap”, *SumStar Daily*, October 15, page 15.

15. “Quick count”: during elections, NAMFREL, the national citizen’s arm duly accredited by the Commission on Election, conducts a parallel count with the assistance of local affiliates such as C-CIMPEL. C-CIMPEL, through its network of volunteers, fast tracks the collection of electoral returns from municipalities to facilitate the counting of ballots at NAMFREL local headquarters. The results are then forwarded to NAMFREL at the national level for consolidation.

it is active in poll watching, parish-based values education and voters' assistance at the precinct level. Elections in the city are generally peaceful, and voter turnout is relatively high with an average of more than 60 per cent. But elections remain dirty because vote buying is widely practised. To transform the political system, C-CIMPEL and other Kaabag NGOs commit to conducting political education, building the capacity for participation and campaigning for good governance, specifically relating to civic engagement, transparency, accountability and inclusiveness.

As the implementing arm of the Responsible Citizenship and Governance Programme of the Ramon Aboitiz Foundation Inc (RAFI),⁽¹⁶⁾ the Eduardo Aboitiz Development Studies Center (EADSC) shares RAFI's mission to encourage the dynamic interplay between government and non-government organizations, the business sector, private citizens and the communities in the process of social development. EADSC provides a democratic space for multi-sectoral groups to discuss the burning issues of the day and for the exchange of ideas, acts as a candidates' forum, and allows for best-practice sharing and the generation of a collective agenda and vision. Beyond its well-equipped, world-class plenary hall and conference rooms, often used by the NGO community, it also provides technical assistance to facilitate GO-NGO dialogue and consultation.

Although the Center for Participatory Governance (CPAG) is a young organization, it has made its mark in advancing governance issues, with the implementation of the Local Government Code, the party list⁽¹⁷⁾ elections, participatory planning and budgeting at the *barangay* level, local sectoral representation in the local development councils⁽¹⁸⁾ and genuine participation in the city development council (CDC). FORGE implements a similar participatory governance project in four urban *barangays* in the city, with a strong emphasis on organizing.

CPAG focuses its development efforts in the *barangay*, the basic planning unit, for that is where the real issues and problems are confronted by the people. Already implemented in *barangays* Ermita and Barrio Luz, participatory *barangay* development planning entails the following processes: social preparation, community orientation, data-gathering, data analysis and interpretation, problem prioritization, cross-sectoral validation, vision and mission setting, identification of indicators for development, and defining the strategy. Although the people in the two pilot *barangays* experience a euphoric sense of empowerment, they realize that the *barangay* development planning "...is just the beginning of the real work of democratic governance", as articulated by one *barangay* councillor. Planning has changed the perspectives of the councillors in Ermita, who realized that they had been too focused on income generation while neglecting other concerns such as youth and the environment. Barrio Luz has been able to access funds from Akbayan (an alternative citizen's party representing various sectors under the party list system), the private sector and the congressmen's pork barrel.⁽¹⁹⁾ Social development projects are lined up for implementation. The greater challenge lies in mobilizing and administering the resources, setting up participatory structures and processes, and monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the plan.

Officially, the CDC and the local special bodies (the local health board, local school board, pre-qualification, bids and awards committee, people's law enforcement board and the local housing board) are the platforms for NGO participation in local governance. To enter the political arena, the NGOs have to undergo accreditation by the city government. In April 1993, 28 NGOs were finally elected to the CDC, constituting one-quarter of the

16. Founded in 1967, RAFI has evolved from a charitable institution into one that espouses democracy-based and people-centred development. It has seven development programmes: microfinance, community development and empowerment, responsible citizenship and governance, cancer education and prevention, youth development, cultural heritage and preservation, and development philanthropy.

17. The "party list" system is the electoral mechanism for proportional representation in the House of Representatives of marginalized and under-represented sectors. The sectors are: urban poor, labour, peasant, indigenous cultural communities, elderly, handicapped, women, youth, overseas workers, fisherfolk, veterans and professionals. Twenty per cent of the seats in the House of Representatives are allocated to sectoral representatives; a qualified party gets a seat provided it garners 2 per cent of the votes in the party list system. It was implemented for the first time in the 1998 national election but the equivalent system has not yet been implemented in the local development councils.

18. The Local Government Code mandates that the city council should have three sectoral representatives from the marginalized: one from women, one from the agricultural or industrial sector and one from the other sectors (urban poor, disabled persons, indigenous cultural communities). But this provision has not yet been implemented.

19. A "pork barrel" is an appropriation from the national government to provide funds for local improvements, designed to ingratiate legislators with their constituents.

20. Etemadi, Felisa U (1997),

"Urban governance and poverty alleviation: the Cebu City experience", in Porio, Emma, *Urban Governance and Poverty Alleviation in Southeast Asia: Trends and Prospects*, Global Urban Research Initiative (GURI) in Southeast Asia, Manila, page 101.

21. Cebu City Geographic Information System Advisory Board, Zoning Board, Cebu City Women's and Family Commission, Cebu City Private Sector Organizations Evaluation and Monitoring Board, Cebu City Youth Development Commission and Cebu City Commission for the Protection and Welfare of Children.

22. The UBSP was the centrepiece of the government poverty alleviation/reduction programme. The Cebu City Inter-Agency Committee, composed of representatives from national government agencies, Cebu City offices and the NGOs, set the direction for this UNICEF-assisted project. Advocating for a comprehensive urban development policy to benefit the urban poor, the programme adopted an integrated approach toward urban poverty alleviation. It had ten programmes and services: health, nutrition, water and sanitation, education, women, street children, land tenure, livelihood, community building and research.

23. The Cebu City Task Force on Street Children offers centre-based, community-based and street-based programmes and services to children who are abandoned or neglected, or whose parents cannot provide for their basic needs, specifically education. The programmes include temporary shelter, education and training, value formation, sociocultural and recreational programmes as well as legal protection.

24. For instance, funding for the community scouts or the

membership as mandated by law. The NGOs were disappointed, however, with their token participation, as plans and programmes in the final stages of deliberation were said to have been presented merely for approval.⁽²⁰⁾ The *status quo* prevailed through the 1990s. NGO-private sector participation in city governance was more meaningful in non-mandated bodies such as technical working groups, commissions and committees.⁽²¹⁾ In project planning and implementation, the NGOs were very much involved in the Urban Basic Services Programme⁽²²⁾ and the Cebu City Task Force on Street Children.⁽²³⁾ Good working relationships and harmonious relationships built on personal contacts and friendship were limited to a few NGOs that were able to deliver output or services efficiently or effectively. While Osmeña initiated the practice of partnering or contracting the services of NGOs to fast track service delivery, he was apparently not willing to integrate them into the political system, especially in terms of decision-making.

Recognizing the need to strengthen GO-NGO relations, the next administration called for the creation of an NGO advisory council. The council was short-lived because the four NGOs, preoccupied with their own internal affairs, discontinued their discussions on the agenda to influence the mayor after only three meetings. But the annual GO-NGO forum was institutionalized, thus widening the NGO base political engagement. However, the NGOs/POs did not maximize on these fora to bargain for more concessions. With the down to earth leadership style of Garcia, they easily lost track of their demands during the first few consultations. Later, they improved their negotiation strategy by short-listing their demands and specifying the minimum acceptable response from the city government. The general points of agreement were then synthesized and documented for future reference. Although not all issues and gaps in social services delivery were addressed, the NGOs built up their confidence and learnt valuable lessons on political engagement from the series of consultations. In hindsight, the GO-NGO forum provided a training ground for the NGOs to prepare themselves for a greater role in the coming days.

The city government appropriated P600,000 (US\$ 10,772) to support the Kaabag initiative to monitor city performance. But the project did not materialize because the United Nations Economic and Social Commission of Asia and the Pacific, which was supposed to brief the NGOs on its framework and methodology, did not follow up, making it difficult for the NGOs to comply with the commission's requirements. Existing GO-NGO partnerships continued, although funding for a few programmes was decreased.⁽²⁴⁾ While seeking a second term in 1998, Garcia signed the Sugbuanong Baruganan (Common Agenda),⁽²⁵⁾ consolidated by the Kaabag from the urban poor sectoral outputs. In a subsequent mayoral forum with the marginalized sectors, organized by Kaabag, Garcia reiterated his support for the urban poor in general but conceded that it would be difficult to respond to all the platforms of the Common Agenda.⁽²⁶⁾ Because only a few NGOs and no POs were invited to participate in the public consultations conducted by Schema Konsult (the consulting firm contracted by the city to prepare the Cebu City Master Plan), the Kaabag sa Sugbo, the Urban Poor Colloquium and the Commission on Service initiated a five-day consultation in August 2000, attended by 184 organizations with 394 participants.⁽²⁷⁾ Garcia demonstrated his openness by instructing Schema Konsult to integrate the sectoral outputs of the "Great Jubilee 2000 Consultation for the Marginalized on the Cebu City Master Plan".⁽²⁸⁾ However, the finalization of the master plan was overtaken by the 2001 May election.

Towards the end of Garcia's term, the NGOs raised the issue of trans-

parency in the mayor's prioritization of projects for the local development plan. Decrying their participation as a "rubber stamp", some staged a walkout during the 2001 CDC meeting. At times, the NGOs distanced themselves from the CDC, but they remained active at the committee level both inside and outside the CDC. In fact, NGO-private sector participation intensified as they became more involved in non-mandated bodies.⁽²⁹⁾

The May 2001 election was a close contest between Garcia and Osmeña, who were former allies but who became bitter opponents. Both knew that the urban poor votes would be a potentially decisive factor, but the urban poor groups were divided. Garcia entered into a covenant with some vendors' groups (the CCUVA), as mentioned earlier. Days before the election, the CCUVA leadership and 63 vendors' groups supported Osmeña,⁽³⁰⁾ although some CCUVA members were on Garcia's side. Almost 400 urban poor groups pledged their support for Osmeña and his party, Bando Osmeña Pundok Kauswagan (BO-PK), when the former mayor signed a covenant for mutual support with the Confederation of Organized Residents and Urban Masses Inc and Dakbayanong Kabus Karon.⁽³¹⁾ In the final count, Osmeña won by a slim margin of 3,060 votes over Garcia (128,754 against 125,694).⁽³²⁾ Osmeña's victory can be accounted for by his head start in the implementation of the CMP – which benefited over 4,000 families in 40 communities⁽³³⁾ – his better access to urban poor groups through personal contacts and a well-oiled machine that reached out to the ward level, as well as his performance during his first two terms.

The appointment of a triumvirate of consultants on poverty alleviation, the urban poor and vendors is an indication that urban poor concerns are one of the thrusts of the returning Osmeña. In 2002, NGO membership of the CDC increased from 32⁽³⁴⁾ to 56,⁽³⁵⁾ beyond the 25 per cent minimum required by law. As explained by City Ordinance 1828 dated 6 March 2002, the increase was in line with "...the government thrust of getting the private sectors to be more involved in governmental programmes". The NGOs welcomed the opportunity, although they were aware that the move was politically motivated. Many of the 80 *barangay* captains who are also members of the CDC were absent from the 2002 CDC meeting because the majority belonged to the opposition party. In the 2002 *barangay* elections, however, leadership of the association of *barangay* captains changed and went to the administration-supported captain. The NGOs and *barangay* captains may have different interests and agendas but they sit together and co-chair the four sectoral committees of the CDC, namely, development administration, infrastructure, social development and economic development. A manual of operations based on that of the regional council is being drafted, to make NGO-private sector participation in the CDC more professional.

Departing from the usual practice of the local chief executive deciding which projects are to be implemented under the annual investment plan, Osmeña allotted P10 million and P9.6 million to NGO projects for 2002 and 2003, respectively. But the process of accessing funds has to be fast tracked. Evaluation criteria for project proposals have yet to be clearly defined and agreed upon. Written procedures for access to funds are being spelled out following a November 2003 consultation meeting between city officials and the NGO sectoral committee chairs. The NGO share of the annual investment plan is about 9 per cent of the total local development fund (which is 20 per cent of the total annual investment fund). The NGOs would like to increase the amount in the future, and also participate in prioritizing and deciding on the bulk of the development fund allocation for infrastructure projects in the *barangays*. But for now, they have to demonstrate their

activities related to diversion from the criminal justice system of the Children and Youth Relation Section of the Cebu City police was reduced by about 10 per cent, from P300,000 annually to P270,000 annually.

25. See reference 2, page 41.

26. See reference 2, page 41

27. See reference 1, page 139.

28. See reference 1, page 139.

29. The LGC uses the term "private sector" to refer to civil society groups (NGOs in particular), business and professional organizations, as well as community groups. The non-mandated bodies included: Cebu City Land Use Committee, Technical Working Committee to Study the Plight of Street and Sidewalk Vendors, Cebu City Social Housing Site Identification Committee, Land Valuation Committee, Traffic Management Committee, Cebu City Women and Family Commission, Local Housing Board, Cebu City Master Plan Study Committee, and Barangay Committee for the Protection and Welfare of Children.

30. Bando Osmeña Pundok Kauswagan (BO-PK) and the Cebu City United Vendors Association (CCUVA) Council of Street Traders (2001), *Kasabutan*, May 2.

31. Rodriguez, Charmaine Y (2001), "BO-PK richer by poor bloc's vote", *SunStar Daily*, May 3, page 6.

32. Osmeña was declared the winner by the Commission on Election despite the fact that 1,458 votes remained uncounted due to missing election returns. Osmeña's lead of 3,060 could no longer be offset by the 1,458 votes.

See Sumaoy, Jasmin (2001), "Tomas takes city; Pablo re-elected", *Sun Star Daily*, May 27, page 1

33. Osmeña, Tomas (2001), *Programa sa Housing*, May 28, leaflet published by Bando Osmeña.

34. In the NGO general assembly in September 2002, 24 NGOs were elected, constituting one-quarter of the total membership of the CDC as required by the LGC. But there was a tie in some votes. The assembly decided that instead of breaking the tie, those who garnered the same number of votes would all be considered. Thus the original number was increased to 32.

35. The CDC is composed of the mayor as chair, 80 *barangay* captains, 56 NGO representatives, a city councillor, the director of the Department of Interior and Local Government, and the head of the City Planning and Development Office as secretariat. The present size of 56 NGOs is not difficult to manage because four sectoral committees (development administration, infrastructure, social development and economic development) deliberate on sectoral concerns prior to the full council meeting. An executive committee represents and acts on behalf of the CDC when it is not in session. There are 13 social development NGOs and nine like-minded PS representatives among the 56 members, which means that the NGOs spearheaded by Kaabag can count on some 40 per cent support from the NGO/PS representatives.

36. Kaabag (2003), "Kaabag strategic planning workshop output," unpublished report, November 13.

37. See reference 17.

absorptive capacity and show that their projects can produce a "political dividend", in the words of the mayor. To avoid being drawn into partisan politics in the future, an NGO withdrew its proposal on *barangay* governance as part of its political education and value formation. While critics contend that the money still reeks of patronage politics, some NGOs counter that they are exercising their right. The Kaabag NGOs that access local development funds have decided to adopt accountability mechanisms to ensure transparency beyond the government balance sheet.⁽³⁶⁾

The NGOs/POs are still pushing for the implementation of the Cebu City Master Plan that they critiqued. But the incumbent mayor reasoned that a plan has to be dynamic and not necessarily on paper. Since the mayor is not keen on adopting the plan, the NGOs have to re-strategize. Instead of advocating official adoption of the master plan, they are in the process of making a checklist of existing activities and projects that have already addressed the priorities defined by their sectoral vision for the city, as well as defining the gaps. The assessment will then serve as the basis for prioritizing their project proposals for the annual investment plan in coming years.

There is still no indication that the city government is ready to accommodate sectoral representation on the city council. The politicians are not supportive because sectoral representatives are not elected by the city electorate. As one councillor bluntly put it: "Only those who are elected by the people have the right to govern." CPAG and Kaabag NGOs support the passage of a bill to implement the Local Government Code provision on sectoral representation in the local development councils.⁽³⁷⁾ It is now pending in the Philippine Congress.

VII. CHILDREN

ASIDE FROM THE Urban Basic Services Programme, the Cebu City Task Force on Street Children is another showcase of GO-NGO partnership in Cebu City. It is an umbrella of 23 NGOs in the city working in coordination with 13 national and local government agencies to implement programmes and services for the protection, survival, development and participation of children in extremely difficult circumstances. The task force itself provides centre-based, street-based and community-based programmes and services. The city provides an annual budget of about P3 million (US\$ 53,860) to the task force, which channels the funds to member NGOs to implement the activities of the working committees.

Two Kaabag member NGOs, the Share A Child Movement Inc (SACMI) and FreeLAVA, are also active members of the task force. SACMI extends educational assistance and library services to urban poor children, trains child rights advocates to promote children's rights among peers, and provides literacy classes as part of the rehabilitation of minors who are detained in the city jail. For many years, the attorney Esperanza Valenzona of SACMI, who chairs the legal committee of the task force, had strongly advocated the segregation of minors who are in custody. Over the years, the task force chair, Margot Osmeña, the first lady of the city, had mobilized resources for the construction of a separate detention centre, with counterpart funds of P3.5 million (US\$ 62,837) from the city government. The centre was finally completed in August 2002, with separate quarters for males and females. Earlier, the community scouts, along with the Cebu City Police Children and Youth Section, which is also a member of the task force, set up protocols with shopping malls and establishments for diversion from the

criminal justice system of minors caught shoplifting.

From legal assistance to children in conflict with the law in the city jail, Free Legal Assistance Volunteers Association Inc. (FreeLAVA) has expanded its operation to include the rehabilitation of these children for re-integration at a centre called Balay Pasilungan, back-to-school assistance and community-based diversion from the formal criminal justice system through the child justice committees organized in 12 pilot *barangays*. As a task force member, it is in charge of its advocacy activities, one of which is the passage of the city ordinance for the creation of the Cebu City Commission for the Welfare and Protection of Children (CCCWPC), and of *Barangay* Committees for the Protection of Children (BCPC) at the neighbourhood level. Being a regular member of CCCWPC, FreeLAVA works hand in hand with other government agencies in organizing and monitoring the BCPCs in the city's 80 *barangays*. FreeLAVA has accessed resources from CCCWPC to undertake its own projects in the communities, in line with the commission's objectives. The *Barangay* Legal Action Against Child Prostitution is one such project, implemented by FreeLAVA in cooperation with the PATH Foundation from 1999–2002. Since Cebu City is one of the project sites of the UNICEF Fifth Country Programme for Children (CPC), as it was in CPC III and IV, FreeLAVA also receives funds from the city government to support its activities in relation to HIV/AIDS education and prevention, children in prostitution and juvenile justice.

After Valenzona's long campaign against fees and charges collected from students in public primary and secondary schools, which were supposed to be free, the city government is finally taking a more active role in holding the Department of Education accountable for the use of funds collected from schoolchildren. It is brokering a system whereby the city would underwrite or subsidize public school expenses, so that parents' contributions can be refunded.

Cebu City has also formulated a local development plan for children (2000–2010), through the efforts of the task force in collaboration with the University of the Philippines Cebu College. It was the first LGU in the Philippines to convene an annual summit on children, now in its third year. However, the children's recommendations that came out of these summits need to be acted upon. The city council has also passed other child-friendly ordinances – one, for instance, mandates entities or individuals operating centres for children to seek favourable endorsement from the CCCWPC; another requires hotels, beer joints, discotheques, tourist resorts and similar places to post conspicuous warning signs regarding the offence of and penalty against child abuse and exploitation; yet another requires that establishments wishing to renew a business permit have to certify that they do not employ minors. The Cebu City Children's Code, promoting children's rights, was passed in 2002. With AUSAID funding, the city, together with the Department of Interior and Local Government, started the construction of a social development centre for children in Labangon. GO-NGO initiatives and joint undertakings contributed to making Cebu City a Child Friendly City in 2000.

VIII. WOMEN

LIHOK-PILIPINA IS one of the pioneering NGOs in the country to address the issue of domestic violence. Through its advocacy, media work, organization and training of community groups and formation of inter-agency

councils and committees, it has mainstreamed violence against women as an issue of governance. Its programme and services, particularly the formation of community watch groups known as Bantay Banay, have been replicated by other NGOs in other parts of the country. In December 1994, the city government passed a resolution allocating P1.6 million (US\$ 28,725) to the construction of a women's crisis centre, and this was completed in 1997. The centre offers temporary shelter, counselling and referrals to victims of domestic violence. In 1997 and 1998, the city continued its support by drawing on the countrywide development fund of congressman Raul del Mar, which released P300,000 (US\$ 5,386) for the programme for battered women.

Expanding from livelihood training and assistance to women to the Bantay Banay movement, Lihok takes the lead in advocating the implementation of the 5 per cent gender and development (GAD) budget as mandated by law. Over the years, Lihok has spearheaded NGO advocacy, which has resulted in the following policy legislation: the creation of a women's desk in Cebu City police stations; the formation of the Cebu City Women and Family Affairs Commission; and the passage of a gender and development code, along with various ordinances protecting women from violence and harassment.

Lihok is the driving force behind the Cebu City Women and Family Affairs Commission. This commission reviews existing legislation and government policies and programmes relating to the welfare of women. It develops and implements a comprehensive programme for women and facilitates the integration of disadvantaged women into mainstream society. Since 1996, the city has allocated P300,000 (US\$ 5,386) annually to commission expenses. It has also allocated funds for the celebration of women's month in the last five years. In 2000, the P8 million (US\$ 143,627) GAD budget allocated by the city was not released because a detailed work financial plan had not been completed. In 2002, the city released P1.22 million (US\$ 21,903) for gender sensitivity training of city hall officials, community associations, *barangay* and public school representatives and for the popularization of an anti-domestic violence ordinance. The P5 million (US\$ 89,767) allocated for 2003 is earmarked for various GAD activities proposed by women's groups, such as a legal assistance fund for victims, a programme for perpetrators of violence, education on sexual harassment, the formation of a committee to accept, hear and decide on sexual harassment complaints, a contest for gender-sensitive *barangays*, a multi-stakeholder strategy for child victims of abuse, productivity programmes for women, and a programme for elderly women and data-banking. City officials become more gender sensitive in their budget allocations, and the *barangays* have their focal people or teams in charge of preparing GAD plans and budgets coordinating with Bantay Banay and other community groups involved with issues of violence against women and other gender concerns.

Because of its support for Bantay Banay and women's programmes, Cebu City received the 2003 Galing Pook Award, a prestigious national award for best-practice innovations among LGUs in the country. Lihok is always ready with options and solutions whenever it approaches the city government to inform the leadership of problems or to ask for logistical support. Its ability to deliver output and generate impact boosts its credibility and, simultaneously, earns the respect of the government. Its continuing ability to create new approaches and expand its reach to all the *barangays* has generated continuous support from the city government over the years.

IX. LESSONS LEARNED

THROUGH THEIR POLITICAL engagement, Kaabag member NGOs have learned the following lessons:

- Initially, the NGOs straddled the extremes of non-participation and the temptation to take over the government's role. As they engage with the city government, they realize that the "expose-oppose-propose" strategy is more appropriate than the "expose-oppose" one. Once they value each other's role, collaboration begins.
- Having a good track record facilitates the building of trust and eventually leads to a long and meaningful partnership, particularly in social services delivery.
- In turn, partnership with the government boosts NGO credibility in project implementation. This is beneficial for the organization's future engagements, particularly with local or foreign funding institutions.
- Collaboration or partnership with the government results in project implementation based on the actual needs of the people and not on politicians' perceptions, because the NGOs conduct rapid appraisal and needs assessment with community participation.
- NGOs working closely with the government risk being "identified" with certain politicians. That is why they distance themselves from the city government during elections.
- There is also the danger that an NGO might become beholden to a particular official. Collaboration should be governed by guidelines that clearly define the roles and functions of each party, in order to avoid partisanship.
- The NGOs become more efficient and effective in project implementation because they enjoy the support of some government line agencies. However, an NGO should know where it stands and maintain its status. It should always be conscious that it is not part of the government.
- To make partnership work, NGOs have to be willing to take the initiative in joint undertakings, from drafting communications to, in some instances, bridge financing. Bureaucratic red tape still predominates in the government system. NGOs have to be patient and must painstakingly comply with quantities of paperwork before accessing city funds.
- Government responds faster if NGOs present not only issues but also solutions. NGOs should work with the government in parallel, not opposite, directions.
- Well-researched and do-able proposals are more likely to be accepted and approved by the government.
- Proposals or projects require the support of the chief executive. Once the mayor is engaged in the project, all other departments follow.
- It is easier to negotiate with the mayor if the group is organized and speaks with one voice. Networking and coalition-building are very important in unifying sectoral groups. The number of groups among the urban poor can make this a challenge but they are fast learning that the city government exploits divisiveness among them to its advantage. Still, they fall prey to this at times because of their disunity.
- There are a few reform-oriented and progressive individuals within city hall who are very receptive to the NGOs' ideas.
- It is part of the NGO tradition to criticize government lapses. However, criticism has to be specific and couched in diplomatic language. Government reacts negatively if NGOs air their criticism over the media without first initiating a dialogue.

- Criticisms beget positive response from the government when NGOs provide counter-proposals and become part of the solution to problems.
- Concentrating advocacy campaigns among the mayor's confidantes "softens the ground". By winning the hearts and minds of top officials through patience and diplomacy, NGO programmes become part of the government's priority areas.
- Continuous government funding support ensures the sustainability of NGO projects.

X. CONCLUSIONS

THE CITY GOVERNMENT, despite a change in political administration, responds to the sectoral concerns advocated by the NGOs as long as the NGOs follow through on these concerns.

The election period is an opportune time to push NGO/PO development priorities into political candidates' platforms, or to win concessions from them. Politicians commit themselves to the urban poor agenda for the purpose of vote-banking.

The city does not have a well-defined poverty-alleviation programme other than the Urban Basic Services Programme, which is no longer active as an inter-agency, GO-NGO task force. It was implemented as part of the UNICEF Third Country Programme for Children (CPC III) (1989-1993) and was extended until 1999. CPC V (1999-2003), however, prioritizes interventions for children in extremely difficult circumstances. But the individual NGO members continue to implement their respective objectives, which results in the convergence of services to the urban poor.

There has been no drastic change in city government policy in dealing with the NGOs and in responding to urban poor concerns. Of the sectoral concerns, the city leadership prioritizes social housing, in order to gain political mileage or to fulfil electoral promises to the urban poor, who consider housing a premium need. However, a comprehensive shelter plan has yet to be finalized. With regard to livelihoods, it would be difficult to pass an ordinance regulating the sidewalk vendors. Formal recognition of this sub-sector is withheld, for such a "concession" serves as a bargaining chip for political candidates during elections. On the other hand, the vendors' stalls are not subject to demolition because the politicians need the vendors' votes. The status quo of "maximum tolerance", with an emphasis on consultation prior to demolition, prevails. Addressing children's and women's concerns remains largely NGO driven and government funded. Osmeña and Garcia have differed in intensity in their sectoral responses and in their pet projects, which are sometimes affected by the wheels of political fortune to the disadvantage of the beneficiaries.

The lead Kaabag NGO programme/project implementors use multi-pronged strategies in their advocacy. These include lobbying, organizing, political education and awareness-raising, mass action, networking, coalition building, research and policy analysis, and court actions. They also engage in training, capability building and institutional strengthening.

GO-NGO collaboration and/or partnership in service delivery is not only sustained but expands into "new" horizons, particularly community-based projects such as *barangay* governance and diversion from the formal criminal justice system of children in conflict with the law. Sustained NGO advocacy and participation produces better results and promotes inclusive governance.

The declaration of a policy agenda for the urban poor, backed by policy legislation and with corresponding budgetary support for structures and processes, has earned Cebu City the distinction of being the first, or one of the best, LGUs in the Philippines in many respects. Achievements include setting up the City Commission for the Urban Poor, receiving UNDP acknowledgement for best practice in GO-NGO partnership in service delivery, ranking top in social housing implementation, reaching consultative agreement between the Division for the Welfare of the Urban Poor and the judges regarding demolition, completing a separate detention centre for offending minors, and receiving a Galing Pook award for support for Bantay Banay. However, from the perspective of some NGO/PO leaders, inclusiveness in governance means pro-poor programmes and decisions that are motivated and generated from within the LGU, rather than being the products of reactive responses. What matter most to the urban poor are shelter, livelihood opportunities and security, as well as the improvement of their living conditions.

NGO participation has purportedly moved to a higher plane, from service delivery to a potentially more substantive role in the city development council (CDC). The NGOs recognize the opportunities to influence development orientation, policies and direction. Since the NGOs and the city government have not arrived at a common vision, collaboration is at best activity or project based, not programmatic. Being in the corridors of power does not necessarily mean power-sharing in decision-making. Participation and "concessions" are still very much at the mayor's discretion. The CDC is a highly politicized body. Progressive NGOs with clear development agendas are a minority in the 140-member council, although they can influence about 40 per cent of the 56 private sector members. The council is still hammering out a set of documents that would guide it in the formulation of policies, plans and projects, as well as budget allocation and release. Slow or untimely release of these documents could affect the targets and timetable of programmes and projects approved for implementation. While the CDC has allocated funds to NGO projects, NGO participation in budgeting is limited to their share of the 20 per cent local development fund out of the total annual investment fund.

NGO accountability begins when projects are conceptualized with the involvement of the people or partner communities in planning, and later in monitoring and evaluation. Periodic or regular updates and feedback on performance and financial reports during meetings or assemblies keep the people informed and provide them with the opportunity to contribute. These NGOs are more accountable than the politicians in that they are directly answerable to the people in the community. Although politicians are also accountable to the people because they are elected by them, in practice their financial accountability is limited to the question of liquidation, which must be approved by the Commission on Audit. Unlike the politicians who tend to take personal credit for any achievement, the NGOs make it clear that the projects are implemented in partnership with the people.

On the other hand, there are a few NGOs that have yet to engender transparency by treating the community as partners rather than beneficiaries. Sadly, many POs that regard themselves as mere beneficiaries neither question nor demand accountability from the NGOs.

Organizing, awareness-raising on electoral processes and voters' education, and capacity-building seminars on the Local Government Code lay the groundwork for PO participation in political processes, particularly at the *barangay* level. Already, a few PO members sit on the *barangay* devel-

38. As members of the CDC, NGO representatives are mandated by the Local Government Code to participate directly in setting the general direction of economic and social development of the city. Specifically, the CDC are tasked to formulate long-term, medium-term and annual socioeconomic development plans and policies; formulate the medium-term and annual public investment programmes; appraise and prioritize socioeconomic development programmes and projects; formulate local investment incentives to promote the inflow and direction of private investment capital; and coordinate, monitor and evaluate the implementation of development programmes and projects.

opment council, while others are involved in participatory rapid appraisal, leading to *barangay* development planning.

NGO participation in governance is far from the ideal.⁽³⁸⁾ Only when NGO/PO participation is fully integrated into the CDC, and takes a meaningful role in the planning, programming, budgeting, and monitoring and evaluation, can city governance be considered truly inclusive. Meanwhile, the NGOs continue to refine their strategies of engagement, upgrade their capabilities, conduct environmental mapping, network with other civil society groups locally and nationally, and intensify their media advocacy.

XI. CHALLENGES

KAABAG IS IN a transitional stage. The reins are gradually being transferred from the original founders to the second-generation leaders. It also has to reinvent itself in the face of a changing political landscape. To engage effectively, Kaabag needs to revisit its vision, mission and goals in order to develop strategies that reflect the current needs, and unity within the coalition must be strengthened. Otherwise, the member NGOs will continue to carry out their individual agendas and not the Kaabag collective agenda.

The coalition needs to develop an NGO-led road map for the city, to guide whoever is at the helm. Kaabag members must maximize their presence in the CDC, linking and networking with other NGOs and private sector representatives to attain a critical mass on development issues. NGO representatives on the CDC must participate in budget setting in the council, to ensure a balance of priorities between infrastructure and social development. They need to enhance their absorptive capacity in fund utilization.

To sustain collaboration with the city government, periodic evaluation of the partnership is a must. The NGOs need to develop monitoring tools with indicators, to assess the gains quantitatively and qualitatively. Most importantly, the NGOs must maintain their independence and not be co-opted by the powers that be. Lest the NGOs unwittingly foster an unhealthy sense of dependence on the side of the urban poor, they should strive to capacitate partner POs so that they too can participate effectively in governance. In the words of a dynamic social development worker: *“Empowerment is a learning process. NGOs should educate their POs not only in articulating their own vision but also in going about accomplishing it.”*

Call for Papers

Children, Youth and Environments, the on-line journal, announces a call for papers on the topic of "Governance and Children." The projected publication date is fall 2005. Please submit an abstract by August 1, 2004 to cye@colorado.edu

The Convention on the Rights of the Child establishes clearly that children are citizens, and that their best interests must be a primary consideration in all actions that concern them. This places a very specific responsibility on all levels of government, and on other institutions and actors in the public and private sectors as well as civil society, all of which participate in the wider process of governance. The best interests of children are *not* always identical with the best interests of the "universal citizen" who may be the focus of most planning and decision making (or, perhaps more pragmatically, with the general bias in favor of those who vote or who otherwise exert influence on the processes of governance.) This means that government has, to start with, some responsibility for determining what, in fact, these best interests are.

There is also this matter of "in all actions that concern them." This is most often seen as entailing a relatively narrow range of

issues – health, education, social services and protection ... perhaps some attention to recreation. It is the rare government, local or otherwise, that actually acknowledges the degree to which most of its actions concern children in the end.

This special issue is intended to draw attention to this matter of governance as it concerns children. We welcome papers that describe creative and practical responses to this mandate to give attention to children's best interests and that contribute to an understanding of the factors that help or hinder genuine attention in this area.

Because of CYE's focus on environment, there is a particular interest in papers that address planning, impact assessment and decision-making around physical living conditions – housing, public space, transport and other environmental infrastructure and resources – as they affect children.

Since these issues are so very local in nature, we expect most papers to be on

the subject of local governance. But we recognize that the context for local governance is much broader, and we welcome papers that explore the ways in which government at higher levels establishes this context. Since an important component in identifying children's best interests is consultation with children, papers on the inclusion of young people in the processes are governance are especially welcome.

We would particularly like to encourage contributors to move beyond a focus on special projects for children; these can be interesting, but we are more interested in exploring the ways in which attention to children becomes part of the routine business of governance. We would also like to encourage, wherever possible, accounts that follow efforts over time. So many ideas fail to take off or to survive – or they change and improve in the course of experience. Either way, the most useful lessons come not from snapshots but from a better understanding of a process as it unfolds.