AGNA

Who We Are

The Affinity Group of National Associations (AGNA) brings together national associations from around the world. Created in 2004, it aims at strengthening national umbrella organisations, fostering greater co-operation across national and regional boundaries to pursue mutual interests.

THE CONTENT OF THIS PAPER HAS BEEN PROVIDED BY CODE NGO

www.code-ngo.org
THE CONDITIONS OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE PHILIPPINES

WHAT WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT CHALLENGE FACED BY CIVIL SOCIETY IN YOUR COUNTRY IN 2014/2015?

Continuing the high level of awareness and action against graft and corruption and the abuse by politicians of their "pork barrel" or discretionary funds remained the most important challenge for civil society in the past year. This started in mid-2013 with the exposure of the decade old "pork barrel scam" involving senators, congresspersons, national and local government officials, "businesspersons" and fake NGOs.

A related challenge faced by civil society was sustaining and broadening the support for important reforms initiated by government in pursuit of people’s participation, transparency and accountability in governance despite the negative publicity for politicians and government officials in general, and even for NGOs, that resulted from the "pork barrel scam". These reform initiatives include the nationwide Bottom Up Budgeting and the Full Disclosure Policy.

WHAT WAS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ACHIEVED BY CIVIL SOCIETY IN YOUR COUNTRY IN 2014/2015?

Sustained pressure brought about by the widespread protest by civil society against corruption in the past year brought significant legislative and policy changes including the termination of the "Priority Development Assistance Fund" or discretionary funds of the legislators, which was also declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. It also brought about the prosecution and detention under plunder and/or corruption charges of alleged leaders of the scam including 3 senators, several congresspersons and their staff.

WHAT IS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT OPPORTUNITY OR CHALLENGE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY IN YOUR COUNTRY THAT YOU FORSEE IN THE NEAR FUTURE?

Local and national elections will be held in 2016. Transforming the outrage against widespread corruption into the election of political leaders who will pursue the fight against corruption and into the defeat of candidates who will coddle and protect corrupt leaders will be a big challenge for civil society organizations (CSOs). This is especially since it is expected that the corrupt politicians, both those currently jailed and those still enjoying their liberty, will pour money and fight hard to ensure their continuing hold on power.
With or without the election of political leaders who will continue the fight against corruption, sustaining the clamor and action for good governance after 2016 - and effectively linking this to poverty reduction and equitable and sustainable development - will be a major challenge for civil society.

There is also the challenge for CSOs to continue supporting the peace process in the southern part of the country with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) so as to put in place a new entity called the Bangsamoro (direct translation: Moro Nation) through the passage of the Bangsamoro Basic Law (BBL). The establishment of the new entity is an important mechanism to correct centuries-old injustices committed against the Muslims in Mindanao. CSOs have been actively supporting the information dissemination and lobbying for the passage of the BBL even as they remain to be the backbone of a peace constituency that is calling for an end to many years of intermittent violent conflicts that have resulted in the senseless loss of lives and property. CSOs will have to step up their advocacy linking peace and development.

Another major challenge faced by CSOs in the Philippines has to do with the impact of climate change and natural disasters, which increasingly present socio-economic and environmental risks to the Philippines. The World Disaster Report 2013 ranked the Philippines as the third highest risk country in terms of exposure to natural calamities, next only to Tonga and Vanuatu. Typhoons hitting the country in the past 10 years have become more frequent and drastic, bringing damages that we have never seen before, e.g. Typhoon Haiyan in 2013. Since the impacts of these events adversely undermine any development intervention being implemented in the areas affected by the calamities, it has become a necessity for development CSOs in the country to mainstream disaster risk reduction and management (DRRM) and climate change adaptation (CCA) in our interventions. It is also important that we reinforce our advocacy towards influencing our government at national and local levels to fully implement our DRRM Law and ensure citizen participation in our local government units’ crafting of local DRRM plans and budgets.

THE SITUATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY’S RESOURCING

ARE RESOURCING CONDITIONS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY GETTING BETTER OR WORSE?

Raising the needed financial and other resources for civil society has become more difficult in the past year, especially because of the negative publicity about the involvement of fake NGOs in the "pork
barrel scam” and the knee jerk reaction especially of government officials of tightening the access of even legitimate NGOs / CSOs to financial support.

IS CIVIL SOCIETY EXPLORING NEW STRATEGIES TO DIVERSIFY RESOURCING AND ARE ANY OF THESE PROVING SUCCESSFUL?

CODE-NGO has been promoting the diversification of resourcing among our members and other CSOs, particularly thru service fees, individual donors/supporters (including overseas Filipinos) and social enterprises. But all these are still in the initial stages.

ARE YOU SEEING A MOVE AWAY FROM GRANT FUNDING (AS PROVIDED BY DONORS AND GOVERNMENTS) TO OTHER METHODS OF SUPPORTING CIVIL SOCIETY?

In the past years, efforts have been made by many CSOs to develop a base of individual donors and also to put up social enterprises that are in line with their mission. These have yet to fully take off. In order to support local philanthropy and also to provide government support to CSOs thru direct identification by citizen-taxpayers of "grantee CSOs" (instead of the legislators and government officials identifying "fake NGOs"), CODE-NGO and other CSOs have in the past year supported a proposed “percentage law” in Congress. This proposed law, patterned after similar laws in several European countries, will empower individual taxpayers to select one CSO (from a list of qualified CSOs) which would receive 5 percent of his/her income tax payments.
Snapshot of civil society in The Philippines: Questionnaire to AGNA members