

INSIGHT FROM A DBM JUNIOR LEADER

The Bottom Line of BuB

My first impression of handling an agency that implemented a BuB project would entail the regular tasks of a budget analyst like me. I was mistaken. I thought I would not be involved in targeting the areas where BuB projects would be implemented because the agencies' regional offices do just that. I also thought that my skills and expertise would not be needed to do budget attribution since the agency identifies the components of a project or a program that would be undertaken under BuB. I thought it would be easy.

Like other reforms, BuB experienced birth pains, facing seemingly insurmountable challenges. There were cases when the projects identified by LGUs in their Local Poverty Reduction Action Plan (LPRAP) would be disapproved for not including them in their Annual Investment Plans. In other cases, projects would not correspond to their development needs as identified in the LPRAP workshops. At other times, some LGUs would not receive information from their NGA counterparts that there had been changes in their proposed projects. The attendance of civil society organizations (CSOs) in the planning workshops had tended to be uneven. Some project proposals would not be as detailed as needed.

LGUs had also proposed projects that were not in the BuB funding menu: even as those projects would benefit their constituents, they would be disapproved. Other proposals would fail to meet the minimum requirements set by the NGAs, apart from the LGUs' incapacity to provide counterpart funding. To address these challenges, coordination meetings were conducted with the NGAs. These meetings resulted in this consensus, as recommended by DBM: work within the menu and follow the criteria set by the NGAs.

In the following years, the stakeholders became more receptive to the process. The menu for developmental projects was expanded to be more responsive to the needs of the communities. Discussions were held about including more BuB projects in an agency's budget program for the year 2017 to encourage the CSOs to participate fully in prioritizing and implementing the projects in the communities.

By Vanessa R. Mendoza¹

Implementing the BuB had not been easy. The guidelines issued and the series of workshops conducted to educate the stakeholders about the reform seemed inadequate to encourage them to participate. We need time to capacitate them in terms of complying with the process and the requirements. We need time to get the stakeholders—the government and the CSOs— to internalize the values and principles of the BuB.

Moreover, an effective monitoring and feedback system should be in place so we could measure the real success of the implementation. A strong network of CSOs should also be created; and government leaders should ensure that the guidelines are followed and project implementation is managed as well.

Even as it is hailed as a best practice in fiscal transparency, the story of the BuB does not end here. While I did not see firsthand the implementation of projects at the grassroots, the feedback of the stakeholders made me more open and receptive to change. "*Hindi sayang ang bawat piso ni Juan,*" so to speak, when the financial and physical targets of projects were being met, and when they did, I would recommend the continuation of such projects. The BuB had been one of the meaningful undertakings in reaching out to our fellow Filipinos in the poorest communities.

BuB is an extraordinary reform. The next administration should continue to support it. BuB promotes transparency, accountability, and responsiveness to the needs of the poorest LGUs and their communities. Likewise, it helps achieve convergence among the stakeholders. It strengthens the capacity of the LGUs to make better plans, ensure that the budget achieves the targets, and effectively implement projects. Through the BuB, we institutionalize the participation of all stakeholders in the budget process.

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