PRACTICES OF THE COTABATO CITY GOVERNMENT IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ITS PROGRAMS

Maarij Darwin A. Sero

Cotabato City State Polytechnic College

Sinsuat Avenue, Cotabato City

Abstract: **This study aimed to describe the best practices of the government of Cotabato City particularly on the implementation of its programs. The study utilized exploratory-case study method using interview guide questions to key informants like the mayor, vice-mayor, city administrator, councilor, planning officer and secretary. Data was interpreted using document and content analysis.**

Findings revealed that Cotabato City envisions to become a "peaceful, secured and highly developed multi-cultural community". Its mission geared towards "Cotabateños, enjoy equal rights and access to quality and basic social services thru continuous improvement and innovation."

Cotabato City Government has received several awards particularly Seal of Good Housekeeping was translated into good governance practices. The Seal of Good Housekeeping was achieved through the effort and initiatives of the local government officials with the cooperation of the stakeholders of Cotabato city.

The Seal of Good Housekeeping required local government units to maintain a sound financial status, and provide documents to prove it. Aside from good financial housekeeping, there were also other factors like peace and order, business friendliness, environmental protection, social protection, and others. Hence, in establishing the Seal of good Housekeeping was not an easy task. They have to use diplomacy in working out things towards achieving the award, conflicts and opposition they took care in dealing with people involved where some employees were supporters of previous administration. They involved everybody in the process, they will follow and communicate the vision with clear explanation. One of the effective processes used was the spirit of teambuilding in order to make people realize that election was over and it's time for everybody to work for the people of Cotabato City. The Cotabato City Government was able to bring them in one vision it showed they were now working together.

Keywords: **Seal of Good Housekeeping, Good Financial Housekeeping, Cotabato City, Maguindanao.**

1. INTRODUCTION

Cotabato City has been the subject of misconception, biases, prejudices and many forms of violence. However, it may not have known to most of the people in city that it has been declared as the 4th most competitive city in the entire country and the only component city in Region XII to enter top 10. On its first year, Cotabato City was in the 37th place nationwide and on its second year, it has jumped to 31st place in 2015, it was declared on 4th in July 2016. The competition was based on was based on three pillars: Government Efficiency, Economic Dynamism, and Infrastructure. In the Government Efficiency Pillar, the local government units we judged according to the quality and reliability of government services and support for effective and sustainable productive expansion. It is divided into ten indicators: transparency score in Local Governance Performance Management System, economic governance score in LGPMS, ratio of LGU-collected tax to LGU revenues, LGU competition-related awards, business registration efficiency, investment promotion, compliance to national directives for LGUs, security, health, and education. In this pillar, Cotabato City also finished as one of the top 10 component cities, in the 6th place.

Meanwhile, economic dynamism is usually associated with activities that create stable expansion of business and industries and higher employment, and has been a recipient of the Good Housekeeping award for two consecutive years. The seal recognizes local governments that accord primacy to the principles of accountability and transparency. After all, such principles are essential in building the long-term foundation of a responsible local government system in the country with a sound fiscal management, accountability and transparent governance. In addition it has also received award such as the Child Friendly City award because the city's environment is relatively safe for children.

It is an interesting phenomenon to note that Cotabato city has been a recipient of many awards despite the city is surrounded by areas affected by the Mindanao conflict. These would lead to the understanding of the style of governance employed by the city mayor, the vice-mayor, the councilors and the rest of the Cotabato City Local Government officials. This will describe the programs and projects of the city government funded through local, national and international resources. This attempted the researcher to explore and identify the best practices that has introduced by the local officials and the introduction of change despite resistance from few individuals.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on theory of best practices by Bendixsen & Guchteniere (2003) or smart practice by Bardach (2000); According to this theory best practices are about accumulating and applying knowledge of what is working and not working in different situations and contexts". They further note that the term "best" has strong inspirational value, and "the purpose of describing and publishing a successful practice, and calling it a best practice, is to make it function as an inspirational guideline, particularly with regard to decision-making". (Bendixsen & Guchteniere 2003). So, best practices carried a tripartite function: 1) identifying successful initiatives addressing important issues, 2) learning what works and does not work in different contexts, and 3) inspirational guidelines for decision making(Jennings,2007).

2. MATERIALD AND METHODS

This study used the exploratory-case study method. Exploratory-case study method aimed at defining the questions of a subsequent study determining the study of the desired research.

The design was used because the study explores the implementation of the programs, hence, the design was deemed appropriate.

The study was conducted only in Cotabato City. Cotabato city is administratively Region XII and politically under Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao. It is surrounded and enveloped by municipalities of Datu Odin Sinsuat (D.O.S), Sultan kudarat in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

Cotabato City is called a "City of Rivers" because two rivers crisscross in the different parts of the city 13 times; the Tamontaka River and Rio Grande de Mindanao. The name was coined from two Maguindanaoan words, "kuta" meaning fortress, and "bato" meaning stone. The city has a total land area of 17, 599 hectares and is politically subdivided into 37 barangays.

Purposive sampling technique was used in this study. Purposive sampling, also known as judgement, selective or subjective sampling, is a sampling technique in which the researcher relies on his or her own judgement when choosing members of population to participate in the study. It was chosen by the researcher in this study because only those who were officials of the Cotabato City government. Moreover, only those available data in the city government has been collated

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Practices on the implementation of the program

To answer the problem on practices on the implementation of the program of the local government of Cotabato City. the results of the data gathered from the interviews of six (6) informants were documented narratively. These were divided into five questions.

A number of related themes described what award/awards adopted good governance practices and how the city government came to have good governance. Most of the respondents replied that Cotabato City Government has received several awards which were interpreted into a picture that its implementers faithfully executing their mandates that lead good governance practices. These themes illustrated in the common responses of the key informants which are presented in the following discussion;

Participant 1: *"Good governance is not something that is done or achieved overnight. It needs a lot of time and effort especially in dealing with the different personalities of the people you work with. When the late Mayor Japal Guiani Jr. was elected as the mayor last 2010, it was one of his missions to really make everyone work and do their jobs. It may be a hard task to govern, but if you really have passion and you dedicate yourself to public service, then it is easy to make the people around you work with you and share the same vision with you. We strongly believed that awards were only a bonus for all the achievements that the city government has achieved under the Guiani administration. They did not really expect that we'd be able to receive these recognitions because we were only focusing on how to really make Cotabato City better. When we first received the Seal of Good Housekeeping, it was then that we were inspired even more to work hard and to really give to the people what is due to them."*

Participant 2: *"In 2010, the late City Mayor Jojo Japal Guiani envisioned Cotabato City to have good governance under his leadership. He worked hard to align all the city governments services in the proper perspective as far as good governance is concern. It was timely that the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) launches their program on Seal of Good Housekeeping (SGH). Luckily the City of Cotabato became one of the candidates and eventually won the prize. It means that the awards received by the city of cotabato were the result of Mayor Guiani's political will and zealous public services."*

Participant 3: *"Seal of Good housekeeping and proper implementation of program, project and activities."*

Participant 4: *"When atty. Frances Cynthia Guiani-Sayadi had assumed office on September 22, 2016, she vowed to push through with the advocacy of her late brother. The mayor is more concerned on the quality of work and efficiency of the employees rather than on number of work done. She sees to it that all projects and programs are completed as scheduled within the approved budget."*

Participant 5: *"The city LGU is an open book meaning there is no secret in terms of running the government. The project was implemented very well, the taxes was collected properly, we maintain peace and order and responded to the need in terms of health & sanitation. Its goal is modernized the city of cotabato for us to compete to other cities."*

Participant 6: "*we received awards it depends on the leaders values, if the intention is good naturally the awards will just come".*

The responses of the participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 have similar views on how the city government implemented its laws objectively and fairly. Obviously, proper implementation of infrastructure, maintenance of peace and order, quality of work are some indicators. However, 3 out of 5 participants said that their work habits they were influenced by the late city mayor to push through his advocacies in valuing work assignments. Nevertheless their dedication to work had become better simply because of the motivation and moral support of a leader.

This was supported by the study of The Institute for Local Government of California enumerates best practices in good governance, namely: (a) stewardship of public resources; (b) minimizing the risk of errors of misconduct or misbehaviour of the members of the council and the staff which could be done through training, documentation of internal controls, and periodic evaluation of internal controls; (c) local government adopts policies which take into account proscription against gifts of public resources, personal use of public resources; (d) LGU complies in spirit and in letter the procurement laws and policies; (e) LGU websites explains programs, projects and processes; (f) LGU engages in climate-friendly purchasing practices; (g) LGU creates a transparency portal that provides anticipated information that the public needs; and (g) LGU accepts on-line records request; (h) LGU develops relationships with community-based organizations.

The common answers on what were your intention or the intention of the Late Mayor Japal Jojo Guiani to work for the awards, or was it everybody's aspiration. These themes illustrated common answers of the informants which are presented in the following discussion;

Participant 1: *"We steered them towards the path that we have envisioned for Cotabato City and we worked with them. Since I assumed as mayor, I conduct a weekly meeting with all the department heads and that meeting serves as the venue where we can talk about the needs of their offices and also the progress that they are making when it comes to delivering services to the people."*

Participant 2: *"When I assumed as Vice Mayor, my ultimate goal is to continue, maintain and supplement the vision and policies set by the late Mayor Guiani. I believed that the awards we (our city) received were everybody's aspiration.*

Without collaborative efforts from stakeholders or the Cotabatenos, achieving milestones in our governance is difficult. We (the elected officials) of Cotabato city are just instrument of change."

Participant 3: *"No! And i guess YES! My reason in running as public official was to serve the constituents of this city. To share my ideas in legislation."*

Participant 4: *"It never came to my mind to work for the awards. It just so happened that we were already friends (the late mayor and me) since high school. I know his mind set and ambition and vision for cotabato city. Coincidentally, our mind sets jibed thus it was easy for both of us to achieve our agenda for the people of cotabato city. Moreover, i was challenged because of our same vision, with mayor Japal Guiani, Jr for the people of cotabato city."*

Particpant 5: *"Public service is public trust. It is the unified vision,mission and goals and objective of the local government of cotabato to be a better performing city setting development directions of the city for the years to come."*

Participant 6: *To develop cotabato city thats our goal, to make it Number 1. It is everybodys aspiration Yes! Because when we join the government the first thing we did we make all the staff & department heads undergo teambuilding so that we can bring together our objective to develop cotabato city. When everybodys working for the developemt cotabato city will get the awards.*

Five out of six participants answered that it was their intention to work for the awards while one answered that it never came to his mind to work for the awards. According to participant 4, he knows the mindset, ambition and vision of the late city mayor for the cotabato city. This implies that some of the participants have the same intentions but different approach in achieving its goals and aspirations.

Furthermore, these transcriptions were translated into one commonality of goal and that is making Cotabato city a peaceful place to live in. This goal does not require every status in life but it would precede economic status.

Moreover, peace does not mean that it can only be achieved when the law implementers are objectively implementing the laws but through a collaborative effort.

This was supported by the study of (Benincasa, 2012 as cited by Pulua, 2016). Manager and leader *are* two completely different roles, although we often use the terms interchangeably. Managers are facilitators of their team members' success. They ensure that their people have everything they need to be productive and successful; that they're well trained, happy and have minimal roadblocks in their path; that they're being groomed for the next level; that they are recognized for great performance and coached through their challenges.

A number of related themes described what did you actually do so that the city government will be run in accordance with good governance principles. These themes illustrated common answers of the informants which are presented in the following discussion;

Particpant 1: *"We steered our department heads towards the path that we have envisioned for Cotabato City and we worked with them. Since I assumed as mayor, I conduct a weekly meeting with all the department heads and that meeting serves as the venue where we can talk about the needs of their offices and also the progress that they are making when it comes to delivering services to the people."*

Particpant 2: *"As City Vice Mayor, I spearhead the members of Sanggunian Panlungsod, we see to it that we function as mandated by law. We perform regular session every Tuesday of the week. We dispense or take action on all government transactions during regular session through passage resolutions and ordinances. It includes giving authority to the City Mayor to transact in behalf of the city and authority to enter into different kinds of agreements. We also have total 30 standing committees on different areas of concern, purposely to look close on the matters that need further study or review. We conduct public consultation in aide of our local legislation at least twice a year."*

Particpant 3: *"We support the chief executive in her agenda. We pass an ordinance and resolution to make sure the project was properly implemented".*

Participant 4: *"We had a hard time reforming the personnel and changing their work attitude and vision. It took us almost two years to make change work. We sent a lot of people to re-training and re-orientation of values. We are able to make the necessary organizational changes also with the help of non-government organizations, among them were the Notre*

Dame University, University of the Philippines, Development Academy of the Philippines, Ateneo de Manila University, including foreign NGOs."

Participant 5: *"We project monitoring committee of the city government of Cotabato headed by the DILG takes charge of the monitoring of all projects implemented in the city by implementing the provision of the new local government code, ordinances, basic laws.*"

Participant 6: *"We have different department head, the Planning department the one who organize the staff to work for the city development plan we intend to review the plan and then adapt the plan every year. Every year we review and evaluate, if we meet or have good results. If programs not achieved we analyze why so we can make amendments or change".*

Five out of six participants answered that their approach are cooperation and coordination with the department heads, members of Sangguninang Panglungsod, chief executive and other personnel. While one answered that the projected monitoring committee to take charge of the monitoring of all projects implemented in the city. This implies that some of the participants believed that good relationship with other personnel is important while one believed that it is true monitoring of all projects implemented in the city that will help the city government to run in accordance with good governance principles.

This was supported by the concept of good governance refers to the responsibility of country governments, local government units or organizations, to meet the needs of the masses or the members or member units as opposed to select groups in society. The needs may be personal but maybe addressed because the actions done are too encompassing to cover them. There are 12 principles of good governance that are upheld by many governments throughout the world. Principle I, the conduct of fair elections, and representation and participation of most sectors in the governance unit; Principle 2, responsiveness, in which the objectives, rules, structures, and procedures are adapted to the legitimate expectations and needs of the people; Principle 3, efficiency and effectiveness; Principle 4, openness and transparency; Principle 5, rule of law; Principle 6, ethical conduct; Principle 7, competence and capacity; Principle 8, innovativeness and openness to change; Principle 9, sustainability and long term orientation; Principle 10, sound financial management; Principle 11, human rights, cultural diversity and social cohesion within the local authority's sphere of influence; and, Principle 12, accountability in which all decision makers, collective and individual, take responsibility for their decisions and do corrective measures for the errors in governance committed.

A number of related themes described the criteria of the award. These themes illustrated common answers of the informants were that the DILG sets the criteria which are presented in the following discussion;

Participant 1*:"The Seal of Good Housekeeping required local government units to maintain a sound financial status, and provide documents to prove it. But when it was changes to the Seal of Good Local Governance, the criteria expanded. Aside from good financial housekeeping, there are also the factors of peace and order, business friendliness, environmental protection, social protection, and others".*

Participant 2: *"The Seal of Good Housekeeping (SGH) or now the Seal of Good local Governance have the following criteria: a.)Good financial keeping b.)Disaster preparedness c.) Business friendliness and competitiveness d.)Environment and e.) Peace and order"*

Participant 3: *"One of the criteria of the award is efficient service delivery. is high social impact of the project"*

Participant 4, 5, 6:*"The DILG sets the criteria of the award."*

The responses of participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 understood the notion that before a city can receive the award of seal of good housekeeping you have to passed the criteria set by the DILG. This implies that the awards received by the City government was through a collaborative efforts from the top management to the rank and file, and local constituents of the city. Moreover, the city government is simply not working to comply the requirements set by the DILG but to remove in the mindset of the people in other areas that Cotabato city misinterpreted as unpeaceful place.

This was supported by the best Practice leadership in a municipality seeks to respond to the challenges facing its community. To do so, the leadership ensures good communications and creates a culture of improvement by encouraging learning. In addition, it develops its municipality as an entity that treats its staff as the most important asset. Finally, it champions the needs of local people and organizations, and welcomes their participation in the work of the municipality,

by maintaining its focus on good governance. Modern leadership means being willing to give power to staff and supporting them as they seek to deliver high service standards and meet the challenges of modern local government. It also means to facilitate staff creativity and to strengthen their sense of purpose and responsibility. When this happens, power is not reduced. On the contrary, power expands as more people learn to use it with the aim of achieving what is in the best interests of the municipality and the community.

This can be not easy after years of centralized decision-making, when staff had little right to decide things for themselves and when local people had no conception about working with public authorities. But sharing power like this will make the municipality stronger, not weaker. The task of the leadership of a municipality is to find those solutions that offer their community the best way forward. The mayor of an effective municipality will tend to evaluate the quality of service the municipality delivers to the local citizens, consult local people and organizations about the kind of services they want, analyze the efficiency of the organization, and always look for improvements in the municipality's performance. Such leadership actively seeks out best practice. Competent leaders are committed to delivering high quality services and are open to sharing what they do well and learning from others where improvements can be made.

A number of related themes described the challenges and how did you manage the challenges. These themes illustrated common answers of the informants which are presented in the following discussion;

Participant 1: *"The challenges are how to maintain the status of the city as being awardee to the seal of Good governance. Another is the voluminous investments coming in the city as a result of our development. I believed that this entails more updated and responsive legislative measures."*

Participant 2: *"The challenges that we face was how to maintain the trust and confidence that the people and constituents of Cotabato in me. To manage for me just do my job and be honest to all your endeavors."*

Participant 3: *"Aside from the mental and physical challenges, which i was able to handle and overcome, the most difficult challenge are the people who are against change. It is really expected. In every garden there is really a pest out to destroy the garden. In the performance of my job, it can never be discounted that i can meet opposition and to some extent, adversaries. These adversaries would never give in to your ideas and ideals. Unfortunately, these adversaries would even resort to killing you just to stop you from what you are doing. This happened to me on September 21, 2015. I was shot 5 times. Thanks to the almighty that i survived that attempt on my life. I know it was coming because i had been receiving reports and text messages warning and telling me to stop what i am doing. I know that i made enemies after we started filing case against those who stole money from the government. We fired dozens of employees for various violations of the Civil Service rules and regulations: from minor falsification of documents, misuse of government funds and even malversation and graft and corruption. The incident did not deter me from furthering my ideals and strengthening my commitment to work for the interest of the people of Cotabato City. As what my father said to me "it is more honourable to die simple man, than be buried not bringing with you worldly wealth that you have amassed".*

Participant 4: *"We determine our weak points and strengthen it and uphold the vision and mission of our city government with the trust to deliver good governance to our constituents in the best way possible, also in using strengths in implementation of programs and projects."*

Participant 5: *"we are able to make everybody work as one that is the biggest challenge."*

Participant 6: *"The Guiani administration struggled to get the city back on track after it was left exhausted. There were documents that were not in order, unliquidated cash advances, and other discrepancies."*

This implies that all participants have faced different challenges in order to serve the citizens of Cotabato city. According to Participant 1, the challenges was how to maintain the status of the city and the voluminous investments coming in the city as a result of our development. While Participant 2 states that the challenges that we face was how to maintain the trust and confidence that the people and constituents of Cotabato. Participant 3 states that the challenges was mental and physical challenges. The most difficult challenges are the people who are against change. Participant 4 states that the challenges he encountered is personal weak points. Participants 5 states that the challenge was we are able to make everybody work as one. This would be interpreted as leadership in Cotabato city really required political will, perseverance, and strong determination in addition to hard work to carry the very mandate.

Political will in the sense that Cotabato City has still influence of datuism. This would require a full force of law even how hard it is. This in addition to our commitment and obedience of a political party system.

Perseverance in the sense that leadership with this multiple sectors of datuism really demand patience and temperament for simple reason that some if not most of enemies in the implementation of the programs and projects are your relatives. However, law does not choose whom to apply with. The law must favor all and not for few.

This was supported by the study of (Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Francke et al., 2008; Boaz et al., 2011; Powell et al., 2014; Boersma et al., 2015). Literature on implementation frameworks, and on core aspects of implementation more broadly, shows that although evidence of the effectiveness of implementation frameworks is limited, a growing body of evidence shows that implementation in itself is important. The potential for the success of a carefully planned and sufficiently resourced implementation should not be underestimated. The literature and the practical results of the vast number of implementation strategies point to certain factors that would constitute implementation best practice.

Good implementation requires attention to the competencies and skills of both the individuals and the organizations involved. Both individual and organizational capacity must be built for implementation.

Individual behavioral change is an important driver of effective implementation. Implementation is a complex endeavour that can be influenced by the nature of the practice, program or policy being introduced; the individuals involved; the inner and outer context of the organization implementing an intervention; and the quality of the implementation process. Hence, changes should be well planned and considered. Implementation takes place in stages, and the effective implementation of practices, programs and policies takes time. Implementation quality can be improved by assessing the needs and readiness of organizations implementing change, training and continuously supporting relevant staff members, continuous quality improvement processes, an early focus on sustainability. The implementability of practices, programs and policies should be taken into account during their selection and development.

4. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Findings revealed that Cotabato City envisions to become a "peaceful, secured and highly developed multi-cultural community." Its mission geared towards "Cotabateños, enjoy equal rights and access to quality and basic social services thru continuous improvement and innovation".

Cotabato City Government has received several awards particularly Seal of Good Housekeeping was translated into good governance practices. The Seal of Good Housekeeping was achieved through the effort and initiatives of the local government officials with the cooperation of the stakeholders of Cotabato city.

The Seal of Good Housekeeping required local government units to maintain a sound financial status, and provide documents to prove it. Aside from good financial housekeeping, there were also other factors like peace and order, business friendliness, environmental protection, social protection, and others.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The participants' experiences the establishing the Seal of Good Housekeeping was not an easy task. They have to use diplomacy in working out things towards achieving the award, conflicts and opposition they took care in dealing with people involved where some employees were supporters of previous administration. They involved everybody in the process, they will follow and communicate the vision with clear explanation. One of the effective processes used was the spirit of teambuilding in order to make people realize that election was over and its time for everybody to work for the people of Cotabato City. The Cotabato City government were able to bring them in one vision it shows they were now working together.

REFERENCES

[1] BARDACH, E.(2000), A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis: The Eightfold Path to more Effective Problem Solving. New York:Chatham Publishers. Retrieved December, 2016

[2] BENINCASA (2012) as cited by Pulua(2016)Six leadership Styles and when you should use hem.http:/www. fastcompany.com/leadership-styles-and-when-you-shoud-use-them.Retrieved February, 2017

[3] DURLAK & DUPRE(2008; FRANCKE et al., 2008; BOAZ et al., 2011; POWELL,et. al., 2014; BOERSMA et al., 2015).Implementation best practice.https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/getattachment/Implementation-Best-Practice.Retrived March,2017

[4]   GISSELQUEST(2011).What Does "Good Governance"Mean? http://theotherside.org.in.Retrived November,2016

[5]   JENNINGS,EDWARD.T,Jr(2007).Best practices in public administration:How do we know them? How can we use them?Administrative Si Management Public, (9), 73-80. Retrieved November,2016

[6]   LEDUC,R. (2013).Best practices in good governance http://www.clearlogic.ca.com. Retrived January, 2017

[7]   SHENG (2010).United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the pacific. .www.unescap.org/pdd> .Retrived November,2016

[8]   TRUTKOWSKI. C Et al (2015) Value of best practice in local government. https:/ =best+practice+in+local+ government+-foeuropa.md.Retrieved December, 2016.