**Learning Agenda Mini-Case #14**

**Philippines**

**CSO Capacity Strengthening Project (Ayala Foundation funded by USAID)**

We are in the Lopez Center, a combination resort/conference/seminar facility that sits on a mountaintop in Antipolo, high enough to afford a wide angle view of Metro Manila's many "cities." The facility can accommodate several conferences or meetings at once, feeding and housing hundreds of people. The CSO Capacity Strengthening Project training is one of the smaller events taking place right now.

Marissa Camacho, the Chief of Party (COP) of the project explains that the 18 participating organizations who are here will be led through an organizational capacity assessment (OCA); a self-rating, self-scoring system covering 60 indicators in 6 organizational capacity areas. The OCA, we are told, was adapted from USAID to fit the local context. The exercise will take three days.

The project (funded by USAID at $1.3m for three years) began in October 2011. It is now approaching the two-thirds mark and Marissa says "we need to accelerate to meet our targets." The goal is to have some 90 organizations (out of 130 who go through the training process) ready to pass USAID's NUPAS (Non U.S. Pre-Award Survey) at the end, presumably so they could be eligible for direct grants.

The project was awarded to the Ayala Foundation (the corporate foundation of one of the largest and most venerable conglomerates in the Philippines) as the prime contractor within a consortium of five other local entities, each with a special area of expertise: the Association of Foundations (AF), Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP), Caucus of Development NGO Networks (CODE-NGO), Philippine Council for NGO Certification (PCNC), and the National College of Public Administration and Governance (NCPAG) of the University of the Philippines.

The consortium members put together an initial list of NGOs/CSOs and then sent out emails to them and generally passed the word about the project. Out of almost 1000 organizations contacted, there were about 270 responses and this number got narrowed down to 120 who constituted the first batch. The 18 present now are the second batch, needed, according to the COP, to reach the target of 130 organizations, since some in the first batch dropped out.

Of the total cohort of 130 that will have gone through the project, we are told, the mix is diverse: corporate foundations, NGOs, networks, people's organizations, cooperatives, MF organizations, think tanks, and advocacy groups. They range from very small, such as an organization that works with urban gangs and has two staff, a medium size org like Kythe, a 20 year old NGO that works with pediatric cancer patients and has a staff of 19

and an annual budget of $300,000, to quite large, such as the Zuellig Family Foundation, a grant-maker with a professional staff of 45 and a prestigious board of trustees, or the Int'l Solidarity for Asia (ISA) which trains corporations on good governance. Some are relatively strong in the basics of organizational capacity, and others weak.

After the OCA there is a "validation workshop" where the participants can re-negotiate their scores, after which they have to come up with a plan. The final score becomes the project baseline – against which the final outcome will be measured.

Marissa says they all appreciate the exercise. "In most of these organizations, things are not manualized (written in the form of manual), mostly everything is oral. Often they don't realize what systems they don't have." It's not that they neglect these things, they simply didn't know any better. We hear things like 'we've been doing this for 27 years and just did not know there was another way.' "

The rest of the training is supposed to proceed as follows: A three-day workshop on governance with members of their BOD attending; then a one-half day unit on Resource Mobilization; then a three-day training on "PDIMME" ((Program Design, Implementation and Management, Monitoring and Evaluation); then two days on financial management which includes one half day on USAID compliance, and finally two days on administration and personnel management. Including the OCA exercise the group is undergoing here the total adds up to 13.5 to 14 days.

"Doesn't this involve a lot of logistics - travel accommodation, reserving different venues, etc.?" we ask. Marissa says that is so, and in this case, "since we need to move things along quickly, we will do some of these units back to back."

The project plan also includes a mentoring program, an internship program and an on-line learning platform.

The COP tells us that 90% of the mentors are Manila based and all are volunteers, and most are Executive Directors or CEOs of their own organizations. They get a three-day mentoring training, "developed by a former academic here, on a pro bono basis, otherwise we could not have afforded it." Their flights/transport costs are reimbursed, and they also get a small allowance since in the Philippines, Marissa tells us, "it is a cultural norm to bring back gifts for staff if one has gone away somewhere."

She points out that OD mentoring is not the same as expert consulting – "it's very much process oriented." The terms of reference for the mentors, according to the project plan, call for 25 mentoring days for each mentor during the life of the project.

Who exactly are the mentors and how many are there? Marissa says that the main ones are the executive directors of the consortia – For example, the head of the Association of Foundations mentors seven organizations, others mentor five or six, and she herself mentors 15 organizations.

"How do they find the time, since they are so busy and have so much to cover?" Marissa admits it is hard, but "like me, they do it for the love of the sector." We ask how often they meet with their mentees? She says, with almost a sigh of resignation, that this too is a challenge, but it ends up being about once every two months or so.

We are about to begin the first afternoon session, which starts with a half hour of physical exercise to warm up the group and get people over the sloggy post-lunch feeling. Then Marissa takes the first session, where all are present. A set of Power Point slides goes up and she reads from them, pausing to explain in more detail each element, Governance, then Leadership, then Strategic Planning, etc.

She reads from a slide on the screen:

*"The BOD leads the organization's efforts to ensure long term sustainability in the areas of succession, resource development and planning; and engages management and staff to participate in the development of strategies and clear mechanisms for the long term sustainability of the organization."*

She continues and occasionally someone raises a hand to make a comment or ask a question. When, for example, Marissa gets to the desired indicator "participatory leadership style," one woman, the director of an organization, raises her hand and says "this style of leadership can be too time-consuming, especially when you have to meet a deadline."

When the presentation gets to Strategic Planning, another person raises his hand and points out how hard it is "to balance one's own ideals and agenda against the donor driven ones, so for me Strategic Planning isn't that simple - our plan tends to be according to what the donor's agenda is."

Marissa replies: "Don't be shy to negotiate with donors." And Jean Pierre, the CEO of another organization chimes in, "it takes courage," he says.

Moving along quickly Marissa gets through the full presentation in about an hour, and then instructs everyone to break into three small groups, two in this large room, and one in an adjacent room. Here is where the self-rating will begin.

We sit in on all three small group sessions. One is led by Marissa, the other by Vicki (a professional trainer with years of experience who had joined the project fairly recently), and the third by the finance person for the project. The core emphasis seems to be – as Marissa suggested – whether or not there are manuals, written documents, policies on everything from BOD roles, to job descriptions, to vacation leave taking, to emergency evacuation plans, etc.

All three facilitators have a different pace and style. There is some discussion among the participants, but by and large the facilitators guide them to understand the need to have these procedures in place. At one point the facilitator in group one asks if the

organizations present have a written policy on communication and dissemination?  No one does.  There is little discussion on this, and everyone writes down or taps it into their i-pad or laptop that this is something they need to have.

Later, we ask the COP "Are there things you would say are not working the way you expected in the project?"  Right away she replies: "The on-line communities of practice site– no one uses it.  People prefer face to face.  So now we are actively convening people and piloting a network.  "Also, the plan to have internships – there is no demand for this at all – people have no time."

Marissa adds that there is a big demand for templates for the various manuals the project emphasizes, people don't have the time to write these policies from scratch and admit they don't know where to begin.

She points out that everything they do has to be geared to the NUPAS – that is the goal- to have 70% of the participants pass this test.  Indeed, the indicators are linked to the NUPAS.  Near the final stage of the project the plan is to have USAID itself train the twenty-five members of the project steering committee members (who come from the consortium members) on how to conduct the NUPAS, and they in turn will be sent out to the selected 90 CSOs.

At the end of the day, we ask Marissa to reflect on what she has learned.  She says that if she were to do it all over again she would pay more attention to staffing – "among other things we really need a full time person just to work on and follow the mentoring process; we are all overstretched - we didn't realize how much effort everything would take."

## Questions:

For whose benefit does this training seem to be?

Is it likely that USAID will want to be doing retail grant-making with all 90 organizations that can pass the NUPAS?

Do you think this material will "take" in these organizations?

In what ways could the training have been done differently?

Is there a potential conflict of interest in having the consortia personnel conduct the NUPAS?

Are there any aspects of this program that could have been anticipated before hand?