

Philippines – Voter Education Initiatives

In the Philippines, the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) and local civil society organizations worked to strengthen the delivery of voter education through projects that empowered local organizations to take a lead role in promoting the engagement of disadvantaged communities, including citizens in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and youth.

Citizens CARE

Citizens CARE is a consortium of Non-Government Organizations in the ARMM to advance electoral reforms in the region. Citizens CARE effectively mitigated the security and geographic challenges of reaching certain marginalized groups with voter education. Since its founding in 2005, it has grown to a consortium of more than 30 organizations from all five provinces in the ARMM. After its founding in 2005, it developed an ambitious project entitled “Strengthening Election Process through Voters Education and Election Monitoring in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (SEPVEEM),” which aimed to empower disadvantaged community members with knowledge and skills needed to actively participate in decision making processes and exercise their right to suffrage responsibly. SEPVEEM has three modes of intervention: Pulong Tayo/PT (Let’s Meet), Ugnayan Tayo/UT (Let’s Link Up), and Election Monitoring.

Pulong Tayo (PT) was the community-based voter education activity of Citizens CARE. It entails mobilizing and training the extensive staff and volunteers of Citizens CARE throughout the ARMM, including its Provincial Management Committee members, partner organizations, full-time provincial coordinators, and municipal and barangay (village) election gurus (or trainers) to effectively deliver voter education messages. In total, Citizens Care held 231, 620 and 1,000 training programs in its first, second and third stages of the PT respectively and enlightened the people with values, responsibilities and ethics concerned with voting. Various UT meetings were organized which brought together nearly 900 participants including representatives from Citizens CARE partners and member organizations; COMELEC and its deputized government agencies such as the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP), Philippine National Police (PNP), Philippine Marines, Department of the Interior and Local Government, Department of Education, National Statistics Office; media reporters; and representatives from the academic and interested private organizations.

To supplement the voter education activities of the organization, Citizens CARE also embarked on media/radio programs in all five provinces of the ARMM to discuss pressing electoral reform matters in order for people to be updated and well-informed. Expanding people’s knowledge on issues is seen to improve their decision making ability and will help the public develop more sound and objective decisions during elections when they go to the polling stations to vote for the right candidates. Through the radio programs, Citizens CARE received queries from listeners

on what they should do to become election monitors and volunteers. Citizens CARE member also received SMS/ text messages expressing appreciation for the effort of the organization in advocating for electoral reforms in the ARMM.

Kids Voting Philippines

The country has made efforts to promote kids voting as well. Philippine Center for Civic Education and Democracy, PCCED conducted the pilot run of the Kids Voting Philippines project in two urban schools in Caloocan City, Metro Manila and two rural schools in Laguna province.

In September 2008, PCCED used Kids Voting materials from Arizona and Minnesota as a guide to develop lesson plans and questionnaires to measure the participants' knowledge of democratic principles and ideas; knowledge of Philippine government structures; and likelihood to vote in a presidential election. PCCED then conducted a teacher training workshop. While PCCED pilot-tested the Kids Voting Philippines in high schools, PRRM adapted materials to work with out-of-school youth leaders from 17-23 years old, a significant population sector in the Philippines. Topics included voter education, participatory local governance, political reform issues and organizational management and leadership. PRRM selected Quezon City, in Metro Manila, and the municipality of Ternate, in the province of Cavite, to implement the project because PRRM could tap existing community-based youth organization partners. The partnership with local, barangay-based organizations immediately gave legitimacy to the project. Complementing the training seminar activity, PRRM also met with Barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan officials to initiate and strengthen interactions between local officials and grassroots youth organizations. In addition, these interactions encourage continued civic participation collaboration among the youth and local government bodies.

At the project's conclusion, youth groups in both target areas organized community events to campaign for voter registration and civic participation in general. In Quezon City, a dance contest and voter registration drive attracted more than 500 people from the community. In Ternate, a concert and voter registration drive gathered more than 300 participants. These activities engaged project participants in their communities and put in practice many of the lessons learned in Kids Voting Philippines.

Source: IFES