

Monitoring, preventing corruption

COMMENTARY

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It was at the Department of Agriculture where the alleged fertilizer and Napoles scams happened.

And both could have been prevented if the appropriate monitor and monitoring system were in place.

Last Feb. 7, a groundbreaking event took place at the DA. That day, the legally mandated public-private Philippine Council for Agriculture and Fisheries (PCAF-formerly NAFC) under the leadership of PCAF Executive Director Sarah Cayona and Assistant Director John Pagaduan called the private sector to a meeting.

Participatory monitoring terms of reference were presented by Cyril Soliaban, with the guidance of Estrella Tulay. The private sector proposed minor modifications, after which the joint public-private meeting unanimously approved the DA-recommended system. The system's rationale

was to "improve governance" by ensuring "effective, reasonable, and meaningful participation" by the private sector in monitoring the DA budget use.

The agreement was that the private sector would not only be a full participant in monitoring;

they would also recommend and expect DA action resulting from the monitoring. This action is the change that the private sector has been waiting for.

In 2011, because of persistent DA corruption reports that were not being acted on, an Alyansa Agrikultura leader recommended the creation of a PCAF private-public Committee on Budget Monitoring.

But this committee has shown limited success.

For example, in April 2015, as reported in an Inquirer commentary that year, most of the corruption complaints found in Region 5 were not addressed. Furthermore, from 2011 to 2015, the private sector Regional and Provincial Agriculture Fishery Council (AFC) chairs were not systematically given a copy of the DA projects implemented in their respective localities

How could they monitor projects they do not even know about?

The PCAF DA Secretariat has done a praiseworthy job and gets much support from the bureaucracy. But some in the DA resist its efforts, for obvious reasons. Thanks to PCAF, the AFC chairs now have a complete list of DA projects in the region. Nevertheless, their corruption complaints are still largely ignored. That is why, at the Feb. 7 meeting, it was agreed that DA should now systematically respond to the AFC monitoring reports.

The private sector was pleased that Soliaban presented a new comprehensive monitoring system.

This identified the monitoring team composition, public and private sector roles and responsibilities, project aspects for validation, a clear methodology, and monitoring tools with specific reports.

But the private sector suggested the addition of a missing component, which DA approved. It is a mechanism for DA to systematically report on each of the monitoring findings

by the joint public-private sector teams. Otherwise, monitoring would be a farce.

On Feb. 23, the DA is calling all its Regional Directors to discuss and act on the recommendations given during the Feb. 7 meeting. From this improved budget monitoring, two results are expected.

The first is correcting and preventing corruption. The second is that creative ideas will come from the monitoring to optimize budget use in each locality.

Private sector monitoring and a systematic monitoring system should be considered for implementation in all DA departments and attached agencies. This way, President Duterte's desire to eliminate corruption and install good governance will be fulfilled.

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* Corruption