

**COMMENTS ON HOUSE BILL 568 (“ENHANCED PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE ACT”) INTRODUCED BY HON. SABIANO S. CANAMA AND HON. ANTHONY M. BRAVO, COOP-NATCCO PARTYLIST<sup>1</sup>**

1. The proposed bill seeks to enhance people’s participation in policy development and decisionmaking by giving accredited nongovernment organizations (NGOs) the opportunity to directly participate in provincial boards, city councils, and municipal councils through their chosen representatives. A People’s Council in every local government unit (LGU) shall serve as the umbrella organization of all accredited NGOs in the LGU.
2. The bill is aligned with the government’s goal of inclusive growth. Giving citizens a direct avenue to participate in decisionmaking promotes inclusion of local communities in development planning. This ensures relevance of development interventions to the needs of citizens and generates broad-based stakeholdership and community ownership of programs, projects, and policies, which increases the probability of success.
3. The establishment of a People’s Council and the implementation of a similar mechanism to promote participatory governance have been proven to be both feasible and effective based on the experience of some LGUs, notably Naga City. The Naga City People’s Council (NCPC) is a key development actor in the city’s People Empowerment Program (PEP), an initiative of the city government that dates back to the late 1980s under the leadership of then-City Mayor, the late Jesse Robredo. The NCPC was institutionalized in 1995 through the enactment of Ordinance 95-092 or the Empowerment Ordinance Act. The PEP, which later evolved into the i-Governance Model of Naga, is considered a best practice in local governance whose successful implementation gave Naga a string of local and international awards, including the 2004 Outstanding Program in Local Governance for the i-Governance Program at the *Gawad Galing Pook* Awards, Global 107 Best Practices at the 2004 Dubai International Awards, One of the Most Improved Cities in Asia by the *Asiaweek Magazine* in November 1999, and the 1998 Dubai International Awards for Best Practices in Improving the Living Environment.
4. The accreditation of NGOs, which is stipulated in Section 4, is an important process to ensure that only legitimate organizations become members of the People’s Council and, consequently, will have the chance to directly participate in local decisionmaking through their elected representatives. In this regard, the accreditation should follow a systematic process. There are existing guidelines for accrediting civil society organizations (CSOs), NGOs, people’s organizations (POs), and other groups. Memorandum Circular No. 2013-

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70 of the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) provided guidelines for evaluating applications for accreditation. Nevertheless, it is still recommended that submitted documents be double-checked by interviewing key informants in the community where the CSO/NGO operates and/or organizations/agencies it has worked with in the past. Records on CSOs generated by the LGU through the Bottom Up Budgeting (BUB) Process, which works with CSOs, are useful for triangulation. The same DILG memorandum circular enjoined all LGUs to come up with a Directory of Civil Society Organizations. This directory should be periodically updated by the LGU.

5. The proposed bill notes that the office of the elected representative “shall find its own sources of funding”. This is not advisable as it may constrain the representative to perform his/her duties. It is suggested that annual funds be allocated to the People’s Council from LGU funds and from yearly contributions of member-organizations. These funds, however, are not to be used as salaries of the elected representatives consistent with Section 5. They may be used to pay for allowable items of expenditure to enable the elected representative to effectively participate in the board or council to which he/she has been elected to participate. The funds may also be used to pay the honoraria of the officers of the People’s Council and the operating expenses of its programs and projects. To ensure transparency and accountability, the Council funds should be subject to government audit procedures.
6. In connection with Item 5 above, the proposed bill should consider expanding the role of the People’s Council. In Section 6, it mentions only local legislation as the means by which NGOs can participate.

This commentary, however, recommends developing a fully functional People’s Council that has a direct voice and participation not just in local planning and decisionmaking but also in program/project implementation and monitoring and evaluation (M&E). The feasibility of this suggestion, however, depends on the level of capacity and maturity of the Council. Given the recommendation to allocate funds to the Council each year from the LGU and the member-organizations, the People’s Council should have an annual work program approved by the *Sanggunian*. The program may include activities or projects on institutional development, strengthening of the basic sectors in the LGU, and capacity-building in project development, implementation, and M&E for the member-organizations.