



Insights into Open Local Governance

A product of the Open LGU Research Project
(<http://www.lguopendata.ph>)

ASSESSING OPEN GOVERNANCE DATA IN SOUTH COTABATO



The Province of South Cotabato (hereinafter referred to as South Cotabato), founded almost five decades ago, is one of the Philippines' culturally-diverse and nature-rich areas. Located in the southern part of the country, the province is home to roughly 1.3 million people of diverse origins, a mixture of settlers from Luzon and Visayas and the indigenous people of Mindanao, more particularly the Maguin-danao, T'boli, and B'laan.

South Cotabato has a long tradition of participatory governance processes after the enactment of the Local Government Code. The province is home to strong civil society organizations (CSO) that engage proactively with government. This is considered one of the reasons why the province has gained good reputation from donor institutions and the national government.

The Open LGU Research Project wants to assess South Cotabato's initiatives in making the local government more transparent, or open, to the public. Research was conducted in the second half of 2013 to gauge the province's initiatives on open governance and how these initiatives impacted on citizen groups as well as the local government bureaucracy.

The study found out the following:

- 1. South Cotabato fully complies with the Full Disclosure Policy (FDP)** of the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) by posting required governmental information in its website. (This was prior to the website redesign. However, the province posts required information also at the FDP portal). These documents, usually financial in nature, are made available in portable document format (PDF), and are regularly updated on a quarterly basis.
- 2. South Cotabato's website** focused more on tourism and on investment promotion. Apart from information on local government leaders and on recent activities of the government published as news articles, there is less governance information contained in the website. It does not also contain the programmatic thrust of the current government. There is an indication that the current website is not yet completed in terms of its design.
- 3. At the time of the assessment in middle 2013, South Cotabato achieves five of the ten criteria for open data.** (see table on the right) Relevant governance data exists. The data is available in digital form. The data is available free of charge and is up-to-date and it is easy to find information on the data set. But data can not be reused as it is not machine readable. However, these information are no longer available in the website after it has been redesigned. FDP documents are no longer published in the current website.
- 4. While local governance documents are accessible through websites, citizen groups access government information through traditional media.** Most (81%) of the civil society groups are aware of the existence of the FDP. However, several of them access the informa-

tion through multi-stakeholder meetings where they were provided with hard copies. Only one was able to access FDP document from the website.

5. Information provided by South Cotabato (in whatever form), are used by citizen groups for different purposes. Businesses use the Annual Procurement Plan of the provincial government to anticipate future bidding activities that will be conducted where they will likely have the possibility of participating in. For civil society organizations, they used the documents to plan the activities of their organization or to inform citizens about the activities of the government. Media representatives on the other hand, used the documents to study issues in local governance that are brought to its attention by the public.

The impact of providing information to citizens through the government website is still very low at this stage. The FDP only began in 2011 and the provincial website is currently undergoing a redesign process. However, there is strong evidence that when these documents will be provided, citizen groups will use these to advance public interest.

Criteria	South Cotabato
1 Does the data exist?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2 Is it available online in digital form?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3 Is the data machine readable?	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 Is the data available in bulk?	<input type="checkbox"/>
5 Is the dataset available free of charge?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
6 Is the data openly licensed?	<input type="checkbox"/>
7 Is the dataset up-to-date?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
8 Is the publication of the dataset sustainable?	<input type="checkbox"/>
9 Was it easy to find information on the dataset?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
10 Are linked data URIs provided?	<input type="checkbox"/>



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