



Training in Northern Luzon, Philippines (Nina McMurry).

RESEARCH BRIEF / 2018

Examining the Impact of Civic Leadership Training in the Philippines

What impact does civic leadership training have on community leaders from poor, marginalized groups? On the one hand, training could ideally increase leaders' participation in government and prompt government officials to be more responsive to people's needs. On the other hand, trained community leaders might be co-opted by local politicians and leveraged for political gain. Over four years (2013-2017), MIT GOV/LAB explored the effects of civic leadership training on citizen engagement¹ with a network of civil society organizations in the Philippines, led by Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Governance (CCAGG), Responsible Citizens, Empowered Communities and Solidarity towards Social Change (RECITE, Inc.), and Partnership for Transparency Fund (PTF).²

This research brief provides a summary of MIT GOV/LAB research results for practitioner and policy audiences. Results have been internally replicated, but may undergo further revisions. MIT GOV/LAB reserves all rights over data, methods, and results for publication.

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¹ The detailed research results are available in the Making All Voices Count report "The effect of civic leadership training on citizen engagement and government responsiveness: experimental evidence from the Philippines." Tsai et al. (2018).

² Local civil society organizations including Diocese of Urdaneta, Project 101, Caritas Nueva Segovia, Molte Aires, Northern Luzon Baptist Pastors and Preachers Fellowship, Inc., and Kataguwan Center.

Summary

What impact does civic leadership training have on community leaders from poor, marginalized groups? On the one hand, training could ideally increase leaders' participation in government and prompt government officials to be more responsive to people's needs. On the other hand, trained community leaders might be co-opted by local politicians and leveraged for political gain.

To explore the effect of training leaders from poor communities, MIT GOV/LAB partnered with a coalition of local civil society organizations³ to conduct a field experiment in the Northern Luzon region of the Philippines. In the Philippines, over 4.4 million households considered “the poorest of the poor” participate in the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program. This large-scale government conditional cash transfer program (CCT) provides cash directly to beneficiaries who comply with social welfare programs focused on child health, nutrition, and education.

We evaluated a civic leadership training program that specifically targets CCT beneficiaries. The training program, known as Project i-Pantawid,⁴ is implemented by local partners and trains existing community leaders (known as “parent leaders”) to monitor CCT implementation, hold service providers accountable for its administration, and, more broadly, to act as representatives for their communities in local decision-making.

Eight of the 16 municipalities in the study were randomly assigned to receive the training, while the other half served as a comparison group. Within these 16 municipalities, we studied 441 villages and surveyed 4,998 respondents. Our research evaluated how the civic training affected the political participation of these parent leaders, the responsiveness of local government officials to the needs of the poor, and the potential unintended political consequences of leadership training, such as increased co-option and vote-buying. Given its small sample size (in terms of the number of municipalities to which treatment status was randomly assigned), this study should be considered more akin to a plausibility probe than a definitive impact evaluation, though even suggestive evidence of effects on the different outcomes measured is potentially important for policy-makers.

³ Led by Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government (CCAGG) in collaboration with Responsible Citizens, Empowered Communities and Solidarity towards Social Change (RECITE, Inc.), Partnership for Transparency Fund (PTF) and local civil society organizations including Diocese of Urdaneta, Project 101, Caritas Nueva Segovia, Molte Aires, Northern Luzon Baptist Pastors and Preachers Fellowship, Inc. and Kataguwan Center.

⁴ Project i-Pantawid's official name is “Guarding the Integrity of the Conditional Cash Transfer Program for the Philippines.”

Key Takeaways

- **Participation:** Political engagement appeared to be greater among parent leaders who received the training. They attended local town hall meetings at higher rates and spoke up at these meetings more often compared to those who did not receive training. The effects on some forms of political engagement were statistically significant, despite the small sample size, and merit further consideration from policymakers and practitioners.
- **Government responsiveness:** In communities with trained parent leaders, government officials were slightly more likely to comply with government transparency regulations. Interestingly, *perceptions* of government responsiveness among parent leaders were, if anything, lower [i.e., less positive] compared to the control group. Neither of these results were statistically significant; however, they provide some suggestive evidence that the intervention could have influenced the behavior of officials as well as citizens.
- **Co-optation:** There was no evidence that newly-trained parent leaders were co-opted or used by local government officials for political gain [e.g. through vote-buying schemes]. In fact, the municipalities with trained parent leaders had lower reported rates of co-optation than their comparison group. However, the postponement of local elections [originally scheduled to take place during the study period, but ultimately postponed until May 2018] made this hypothesis difficult to assess. MIT GOV/LAB is collecting additional data to assess the effects of the intervention in closer proximity to an election period.

Research Process

This study randomly assigned Project i-Pantawid training to eight out of 16 municipalities, comprising a total sample of 441 villages (or *barangays*) in the Northern Luzon region of the Philippines. Between April and August 2017, we conducted face-to-face interviews with 4,998 respondents, including CCT beneficiaries, parent leaders (both trained and untrained), and barangay officials.

Intervention

The Project i-Pantawid training builds on two innovations unique to the Philippines: parent leaders and family development sessions. “Parent leaders” are individuals chosen by their fellow CCT beneficiaries to act as liaisons between the group and the CCT implementing agency. “Family development sessions” are monthly lectures that CCT beneficiaries throughout the Philippines must attend as a

condition for receiving cash grants. They focus on topics such as responsible parenting, substance abuse, and health and nutrition.

Project i-Pantawid involves training parent leaders in leadership and civic skills, and gives them a chance to practice their skills and teach them to other beneficiaries during the family development sessions. What sets Project i-Pantawid apart is its duration (monthly sessions over approximately one year) and its emphasis on civic education and putting skills into practice, rather than simply sharing information. Once a month, parent leaders gather for a training workshop that focuses on the content for the family development session they will lead later that month. The training workshops emphasize civic skills and civic values, and show parent leaders how to teach the material to other CCT beneficiaries.

Through this process, parent leaders learn and practice skills such as public speaking and mobilizing their fellow CCT beneficiaries. Project i-Pantawid also modifies the content of family development sessions. While these lectures are usually delivered by local government agencies, religious leaders, and civil society organizations, in Project-i-Pantawid they are delivered by the trained parent leaders and focus more explicitly on civic education, including modules on the duties of local officials, the rights and responsibilities of citizens, and local government budgeting. This means that information can theoretically “cascade” to all CCT beneficiaries in the municipality.

Evaluation

We randomly assigned the training program to eight out of 16 municipalities (the *treatment* group), with the other eight municipalities serving as the *control* or *comparison* group. Treatment was assigned randomly to one municipality within predetermined matched pairs. Municipalities in each pair had to be in the same province, and had to have similar income levels, population, and numbers of CCT beneficiaries.

The training program began in the treatment municipalities between May and July 2016. Between April and August 2017, we conducted face-to-face surveys with 4,998 respondents (including parent leaders, CCT beneficiaries, and barangay officials) in all 16 municipalities included in the study.

High-Level Findings

We investigated the impact of the civic leadership training on the following **primary outcomes**:

- 1) political participation by parent leaders
- 2) government responsiveness
 - a) perceived by parent leaders and

- b) in terms of compliance with government regulations on transparency and citizen feedback
- 3) co-optation of parent leaders by elected officials and political candidates

We also assessed several **secondary outcomes** to give a more complete picture of the training’s effect, including:

- civic knowledge among parent leaders and CCT beneficiaries
- “self-efficacy”—the sense of having the ability to influence decision-making.
- perceptions of inequality between citizens and officials
- interactions between citizens and officials
- salience of parent leaders to local officials—for example, local officials’ acknowledgement of parent leaders at barangay meetings

All in all, we tested the impact of civic leadership training on 16 distinct outcomes. For two out of the four primary outcomes and 11 out of the 16 secondary outcomes, the treatment and control groups showed a difference in the expected direction.



Fieldwork in the Philippines [Nina McMurry]

Political participation by parent leaders

Newly trained parent leaders exhibited greater political participation. For example, they had

higher attendance rates at barangay assembly meetings and engaged more directly with barangay officials [e.g. by asking questions and providing comments].⁵ Parent leaders who received training also demonstrated greater knowledge of government regulations and citizens' rights, and were more likely to report interacting with local officials outside the context of barangay assemblies.

Government responsiveness

There was little difference in how citizens perceived local government responsiveness to their complaints and concerns. In practice, however, barangay officials in the treatment municipalities reportedly complied at higher rates with government transparency regulations by posting the barangay budget in public places and reporting on budgetary revenues and expenditures during barangay assembly meetings. These findings suggest that the impact of the intervention may have gone beyond the parent leaders to affect the behavior of local government officials.

Co-optation of parent leaders by officials

One potential unintended consequence of leadership training is that parent leaders might become more attractive to politicians as 'vote brokers'—individuals who can deliver the votes of their fellow beneficiaries in exchange for personal gain. Unfortunately, barangay elections during the study period were postponed multiple times, preventing us from measuring any effects on co-optation during actual elections. Nevertheless, we proceeded by evaluating differences in co-optation between treatment and control municipalities, with the understanding that if we found any impacts during a period without upcoming elections, this impact would likely intensify during an actual election season.

We found that co-optation of parent leaders, measured with a series of questions about whether officials engaged them in election-related issues or offered personal assistance, was lower in barangays in the treatment group. There was little evidence of increased clientelism in their relationships with politicians. This is consistent with the other results, which point toward the generally positive impacts of training on the civic engagement of these parent leaders. Barangay elections were eventually held in May 2018, and we are in the process of collecting data that will more accurately capture election-related co-optation.

Table 1 below summarizes the primary outcomes, and Table 2 summarizes the secondary outcomes. Each outcome has its own row, and is measured by an index constructed from various survey questions.

How to read Tables 1 and 2:

- The **Observed Effect** column indicates whether the average value of the outcome was higher or lower in the municipalities where the civic leadership training program was implemented, compared to the average within control municipalities.
- The **Effect Size** [or *standardized mean difference*] quantifies the magnitude of the difference of means between treatment and control municipalities. This allows us to directly compare outcomes, each of which may be composites of various measures on various scales. A larger effect size indicates that the civic leadership training may have had a larger impact on that particular outcome, compared to others. This column also indicates whether the effect sizes are statistically significant; effect size is not significant unless noted.⁶

⁵ These two outcomes individually, unadjusted for multiple comparisons, showed statistically significant differences between treatment and control means, as seen in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Primary outcomes of the intervention

No.	Primary Outcome ⁷	Observed Effect	Effect size
1.	Parent leaders' participation in local barangay government processes	Increases, as expected	0.77 [statistically significant at 10% level]
2a.	Parent leaders' perception of barangay officials' responsiveness	Decreases, not as expected	-0.49
2b.	Barangay officials compliance with procedures for transparency and citizen participation	Increases, as expected	0.37
3.	Attempted co-optation of parent leaders by elected officials	Decreases, not as expected	-0.30

Details on the measurement of each outcome are available in Appendices 3A and 3B of the full Making All Voices Count research report [Tsai et al., 2018].

Table 2: Secondary outcomes of the intervention

No.	Secondary Outcome	Observed Effect	Effect size
5.	CCT beneficiaries' participation in local government processes	Increases, as expected	0.01
6.	CCT beneficiaries' perception of barangay officials' responsiveness	Increases, as expected	0.11
7.	Parent leaders' knowledge of local government processes and procedures	Increases, as expected	1.39 [statistically significant at 5% level]
8.	CCT beneficiaries' knowledge of local government processes and procedures	Increases, as expected	0.38
9.	Perceptions of self-efficacy among parent leaders	Increases, as expected	0.35
10.	Perceptions of self-efficacy among CCT beneficiaries	Increases, as expected	0.38
11.	Power differentials between parent leaders and barangay officials (as perceived by parent leaders)	Decreases, as expected	-0.51

⁶ Unless otherwise noted, the effect size was not statistically distinguishable from zero. Due to the small sample size ($n = 16$), we did not assess statistical significance using conventional standard errors that rely on distributional assumptions. Instead, we used a non-parametric permutation procedure to test a sharp null hypothesis of a constant zero treatment effect. The level of statistical significance refers to the p-value obtained from this test.

⁷ Each outcome was an aggregate of a few survey questions (variables). Outcome #2b, for example, was made up of 8 variables. They measured: whether the barangay assembly happened, if officials provided the mandated 7-day notice for the assembly, if the budget, past project updates, and updates on future projects were each raised as a topic in the assembly (without citizens asking), whether people were allowed to ask questions at the assembly, whether the budget figures were presented in writing, and if the budgeted was posted publicly in the barangay.

12.	Power differentials between parent leaders and barangay officials [as perceived by CCT beneficiaries]	Decreases, as expected	-0.11
13.	Power differentials between parent leaders and barangay officials [as perceived by barangay officials]	Decreases, as expected	-0.16
14.	Parent leaders' interactions with barangay officials	Increases, as expected	0.44 [statistically significant at 10% level]
15.	Parent leaders' and CCT beneficiaries' participation in local collective work	Increases, as expected	0.48
16.	Prominence of CCT beneficiaries and parent leaders to barangay officials	Decreases, not as expected	-0.55

Empowering Community Leaders with Civic Training

The initial results from the Project i-Pantawid intervention suggest that civic training for community leaders has the potential to increase citizens' participation and engagement in local governance. Parent leaders who received the civic training attended local town hall meetings at higher rates and spoke up at these meetings more often, compared to those who did not receive training. They also had higher levels of interest in local community politics and affairs, higher levels of knowledge about local government systems and citizens' rights, stronger self-efficacy (i.e. that someone like them could influence government decisions), and more face-to-face interactions with local officials.

Our research also indicates that local officials started to shift their behavior in response. Though further investigation of these preliminary findings is warranted, given the small sample size, the data suggest that Project i-Pantawid is achieving some of its goals.

There are several unique characteristics of Project i-Pantawid that might contribute to its effectiveness:

- **Local leadership:** Project i-Pantawid is run by a coalition of organizations local to the region, and embedded in an active and established civil society sector with deep roots and long-

standing relationships with local communities.

- **Long-term programming with an emphasis on practice:** The Project i-Pantawid training program was built on the findings of a thorough pilot initiative, and designed to provide sustained, intensive training, occurring once a month for 11–14 months. Instead of simply disseminating information, the training program gave participants repeated opportunities to practice their skills in the real world. Our research focused on Project-i-Pantawid's third iteration, which allowed for improvements to the design of the training program over time.
- **Government support:** The program was designed with active support from government, both from the national and local offices of the Department of Social Welfare and Development, the implementing agency of the CCT. This support stemmed, in part, from the constructive working relationship between Project i-Pantawid's implementers and the Department's secretary at the time, who came from a civil society background.

Lessons for Future Research

The study's results suggest two important lessons for future research on the effects of civic leadership training.

The first is the **importance of putting civic skills into practice**, rather than simply providing information. All CCT beneficiaries in the treatment municipalities received information about their rights and the government's responsibilities, and were involved in evaluating government performance through scorecards and interface meetings with local officials. However, only the parent leaders had monthly opportunities (for more than a year) to practice their leadership, organizational, and public-speaking skills—all of which are essential to interacting with government officials and influencing their decisions. Furthermore, only parent leaders were tasked with 'cascading' or disseminating information from their monthly training workshops to the other CCT beneficiaries in their barangay. This provided an additional opportunity to put their skills into practice, as they were required to speak in public settings, answer questions during meetings, and explain materials.

The second lesson is the potential benefit of **focusing explicitly on building leadership capacity within a targeted group**, in addition to providing information to the community at large. In particular, targeting individuals who have already been identified as potential leaders among marginalized groups may boost the impact of civic education interventions. Since only people with pre-existing leadership roles received the full Project i-Pantawid curriculum, we cannot disentangle these two mechanisms in the current study, but looking separately at these mechanisms could be fruitful for future research.

The case of Project i-Pantawid also raises the question of whether constructive engagement and adversarial strategies can operate at different government levels within the same initiative, and suggests they may in fact be mutually dependent on one another. The constructive engagement between local civil society actors and the national government no doubt contributed to the program's success.

At the same time, there are indications that the relationship between parent leaders and local barangay officials actually became more adversarial in the treatment group. In municipalities that received the training, parent leaders reported, in surveys, that their barangay officials seemed less responsive, and were less likely to mention CCT beneficiaries or parent leaders during barangay assemblies. Most researchers view constructive engagement and adversarial tactics as being in opposition to each other, and there is a growing consensus that the political context should determine which strategy is most appropriate.

Moving forward, the findings from this research collaboration will contribute to our understanding of leadership-building programs in similar contexts, and also help inform decisions about the scaling up of this particular model of civic empowerment alongside conditional cash transfer programs throughout the Philippines.

*Data collection in
the Philippines
[Nina McMurry]*



Featured research projects:

Lily L. Tsai, Nina McMurry and Swetha Rajeswaran [2018]. *The effect of civic leadership training on citizen engagement and government responsiveness: experimental evidence from the Philippines*. Making All Voices Count Research Report, Brighton: IDS. Available online:

<http://www.makingallvoicescount.org/publication/effect-civic-leadership-training-citizen-engagement-government-responsiveness-experimental-evidence-philippines/>.

Nina McMurry and Lily L. Tsai [2018]. "The effect of co-training citizen and government officials at the village level: experimental evidence from the Philippines." *Work in progress*.

Partners:

This research was undertaken with a network of civil society organizations in the Philippines, led by Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Governance (CCAGG), Responsible Citizens, Empowered Communities and Solidarity towards Social Change (RECITE, Inc.), and Partnership for Transparency Fund (PTF). Civil society organizations include Diocese of Urdaneta, Project 101, Caritas Nueva Segovia, Molte Aires, Northern Luzon Baptist Pastors and Preachers Fellowship, Inc, and Kataguan Center.



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