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**NGOs/POs PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING AND
DECISION MAKING: THE CASE OF BAGUIO CITY, PHILIPPINES.**

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Abstract:

Contemporary development theory gives much emphasis on civil society participation in any development discourse. Particularly, it puts non-government organizations (NGOs) and peoples' organizations (POs) in the forefront of efforts to influence government towards becoming more responsive to citizen needs. The Philippine experience demonstrates that NGOs/POs participation in development has a long history and that NGOs/POs have emerged as the major player in the provision of basic needs and services to the disadvantaged groups. In recent years, the Government of the Philippines enacted the Local Government Code of 1991 and devolved certain powers to local governments and encouraged and broadened civil society, mainly NGOs and POs, participation in local governance and development processes. The Code provides the overall frameworks and a wide range of mechanisms for NGOs/POs participation. Although NGOs/POs participation in the overall development process has been steadily growing since 1991, not too many are taking advantage of the opportunities opened by the Code. The situation is highly unsatisfactory in the case of Baguio City in which many NGOs/POs are still limited to service provision and have not shifted to the new role of influencing policy, to make the local government more responsive to public needs. Hence, this study is initiated to assess the status of compliance with the 1991 Local Government Code provisions, the level and quality of NGOs/POs participation, and to investigate factors constraining meaningful participation of NGOs/POs in Baguio City.

Focus group discussions with various groups, key informant interviews with different actors, and documents review were utilized to gather data and information. Descriptive analysis, simple statistical analysis, and different participation models developed by various authors were used to analyze data and information gathered.

The study found that in Baguio City accreditation of NGOs/POs has hardly been implemented. Representation of NGOs/POs in CDC is below the required proportion, the level of NGOs/POs participation is not going beyond consultation, decision-making process is closed door for NGOs/POs and participation is not inclusive and not open to all NGOs/POs.

The study identified eight (8) major hindrances to such a low level of participation, four of the identified factors are associated with LGU while the other four are related with characteristics of NGOs/POs. Lack of political will and commitment of city leaders, lack of two-way communication, lack of incentives and the needed support, and political differences between executive and legislative branches of the city government and the contributory

factors to low level of participation. From the NGO's side, unstable and scarce financial resources of NGOs/POs, the lukewarm attitude of some bigger NGOs/POs to participate in LGU programs, limited technical and leadership capabilities of smaller NGOs/POs, and the lack of networking and coordination among NGOs/POs themselves.

The other important finding is that the CDC, mandated to provide a participatory forum, has not yet been institutionalized enough to foster meaningful participation of NGOs/POs.

To improve the situation, the study suggests the need for stronger political will and commitment of political leaders to strictly enforce the existing law and policy, institutional capacity building of CDC as well as NGOs/POs, and creation of network and linkages among NGOs/POs to take advantage of the opportunities provided by national laws and policies.