

municipality. Data gathered by the Service Provider for every identified municipality during the two (2) runs of their respective MLGU *Talakayan* were duly recorded, kept and feed backed to the respective municipalities for purposes of improvement.

The next phase of the gathering process was done after the successful conduct of the 2 runs of the *Talakayan* per identified municipality. Interview guides were designed to be group-specific for the particular respondents based on the previously collated data. Highlights on the concerns and challenges left hanging and unaddressed were given emphasis in the interview and Focus Group Discussion during this phase. The respondents were the same group as per data bank of the participating stakeholders during the actual runs.

The data culled from the various stakeholders were duly recorded and then analyzed.

Identification of Research Locale and Respondents

The provinces in Region VII with the most number of identified municipality-beneficiary under the KALAH! CIDSS-NCDDP were identified as the research locale, namely the provinces of Cebu and Bohol. For Cebu Province, the municipalities of Alcantara, Aloguinsan, Moalboal and Poro were identified. For Bohol Province, the municipalities of Alicia, Anda, Antequera, Candijay, Catigbian, Guindulman, Lila, Pilar and Sagbayan were particularly selected.

The key informants included all the participating stakeholders in the conducted *Talakayan* runs, to wit:

- GROUP 1 – MIAC / MLGU;
- GROUP 2 – BRGY. CAPTAINS;
- GROUP 3 – CSOs/POs/Academe; and
- GROUP 4– Community Volunteers and Members.

The identified specific stakeholder as indicated above, are the same participants and group selected in the *Talakayan*. Below is the table showing the research locale in Region VII, Provinces of Cebu and Bohol.

Table 1. Research Locale of the Study.

REGION	PROVINCE	CITY / MUNICIPALITY
REGION VII	CEBU	Alcantara
		Aloguinsan
		Moalboal
		Poro
	BOHOL	Alicia
		Anda
		Antequera
		Candijay
		Catigbian
		Guindulman
		Lila
		Pilar
		Sagbayan

Meeting the Objectives of the *Talakayan*

Table 2. *Talakayan* Objectives as Attained in the Actual Run.

OBJECTIVES	CEBU	BOHOL
	ATTAINED	ATTAINED
Raise awareness of the people on the development initiatives of the municipality.	The presentations were delivered clearly and in a plain and understandable language (vernacular). The data were complete and accurate. LGU initiatives and the municipal situation were delivered during the <i>Talakayan</i> . The Gallery Walk is seen as very informative and helpful.	The presentations were delivered clearly and generally regarded as complete and comprehensive. The vernacular was effectively used. Prior to the <i>Talakayan</i> , LGU initiatives were almost unheard of. The method in gathering the data was also explained by the presenters.
Provide an avenue for dialogue of all stakeholders.	The participants were given an opportunity to ask/ raise questions or clarifications although only a few had the courage to raise them. Most reserved their questions for the Focus Group Discussion.	The open forum encouraged participation for clarification of points. The <i>Talakayan</i> provided a safe atmosphere to freely clarify points and share personal opinion on certain issues especially those presented during the sessions.
Proper use of data for planning and policy formulation.	The participants already attained a clear idea on how the planning was made to address the development gaps which were both identified by the community and the LGU.	Generally, the participants are one in saying that the Executive Legislative Agenda was made to address the issues and gaps that were seen by the stakeholders.

In terms of raising awareness of the people on the development initiatives of the municipality, this objective is clearly attained according to the stakeholders. To them, it was very helpful that the presentation was delivered in clear language (vernacular). In fact, they were one in saying that most of the data presented were only made known to them because of the *talakayan*. They also feel that presentation was complete and that after their activity, their questions regarding the implemented projects of the Municipality were answered. “*Nindot kaayo kay bisaya*” (It’s nice because it is in the vernacular), “*Kay gi present man ug pina-agi sa lumad nga lingwahe*” (Because it is presented in our local language), “*Kompleto cya*” (It is complete), “*Kay makasayod ta unsay sitwasyon sa atong lungsod*” (Because we will know the state of our municipality), “*Human sa presentation natubag ang akong pangutana kabahin sa mga gi-implementar na mga proyekto sa lungsod*” (After the presentation, my questions were answered

with regard to the projects implemented in our municipality.). The stakeholders are also one in saying that the data gathering process was clearly discussed, thus, “*Napasabot ra jud nila gi unsa pag kuha sa mga datos*”, “*Kay nakita man nako ang kausaban u gang kalambuan nga nahimo apil ang sa kasikbit nga mga barangays.*” (They have really explained how the data was gathered)

In terms of providing an avenue for dialogue of all stakeholders, the participants were given an opportunity to raise questions or clarifications. A safe space for dialogue was created by the *talakayan*. Thus, “*Na encourage mi na mu apil ug kung adunay pangutana, mangutana para matuki ang tanang nay kalabutan sa pag-uswag sa lungsod.*” (We were encouraged to participate, ask questions in order to inquire about everything relating to the development of the municipality).

In terms of the proper use of data for planning and policy formulation, to the participants, the *Talakayan* made them

understand how the municipal development agenda was crafted and about its effectivity and usefulness. As they were made aware of the gaps in development of their municipality, they became mindful also of the need for proper planning in order to effectively address these gaps. “*Kay gi-initiate man sa KALAHI-CIDDS and na realize sad namo nga kinahanglan sad gyud na makahibalo ang katawhan kabahin sa mga nabuhat, gibuhat ug buhaton pa nga mga proyekto sa lungsod*”, “*Nalipay ang mga katawhan nga nakabalo sa mga accomplishments, on-going projects, ug mga projects nga himoon pa.*” (Because it was

initiated by the KALAHI-CIDDS and we realized that the people should know about what has been done, what the LGU has been doing and what has to be done in terms of projects for the municipality).

Concerns and Challenges

While the stakeholders generally receive the *talakayan* activity with positive feedback as can be collated from their evaluation, some concerns and challenges of the activity were drawn out from the participants especially from the first *talakayan* run.

Table 3. Concerns and Challenges of the Municipal *Talakayan* as Perceived but the Stakeholders.

STAKEHOLDER	CEBU	BOHOL
MIAC/MLGU	There are overlapping activities of the LGU. In some instances, original schedule had to be reset. Some concerns for the MLGU officials on the data gathering process which was resolved during the validation. Some MIAC members who were not present during the validation are the ones who question the data presented on the day of the <i>Talakayan</i> .	The LCE wants to be there during the pre-works but in some cases, had to battle with several obligations. The participants are sometimes hesitant to participate during the open forum. There is constraint of time as to data gathering so as to assure that data to be presented is accurate and comprehensive.
BARANGAY CAPTAINS	In some instances, the hesitation is due to differences in party alliances. They view the open forum as a good opportunity to freely express their ideas and for some of their queries to be addressed.	While <i>talakayan</i> is a very good venue for discussion, participants still fear to voice out for fear of antagonism. Thus, most questions and opinions are reserved during the FGD but there is time constraint for the FGD. The MLGU responds to the queries of the participants, but some responses are not direct and categorical.
CSO’s/PO’s/Academe	The need for inclusion of many participants for the <i>talakayan</i> . In most of the munis, the CSO’s are the smallest in number yet are very participative during the open forum and FGD.	While <i>talakayan</i> atmosphere is welcoming, the venue is not conducive to discussion. There are instances wherein only a few of the CSO’s are selected to participate in the activity.
Community Volunteers/Members	In some instances, the venue is not conducive to discussion. To some who live in distant barangays, transportation cost is a problem.	While the LGU is very welcoming as to the queries coming from the participants, some presentations are too long thus, interest in listening dwindles.

As can be gleaned from the table above, while the *Talakayan* is viewed as a very good

avenue for all the stakeholders to sit down and discuss matters concerning the development of

the municipality, the MIAC sees as challenge the constraints in schedule due to overlapping activities of the MLGU. Because of this, not all of them can commit to be present during the data validation phase. While the Mayor wants to be there during the pre-works, in most instances, he sends a representative in his stead. For the Barangay Captains, they see politics and party affiliation as a hindrance to a free discussion. For their part, CSO's/PO's/Academe regard the need for inclusion of more participants for the *talakayan* as they notice that in the activity, CSO's are the least in number. For the community volunteers

and members, venue is a challenge and can be a hindrance to participation. To those in distant barangays, transportation cost is a problem.

Best Practices

The table hereunder reflects the best practices of the municipalities of Cebu and Bohol in the conduct of the *talakayan* as per evaluation of the stakeholders/participants. In particular there are best practices observed by the MIAC during the Pre-*Talakayan* Activity and by all of the stakeholders during the actual *talakayan* run, as follows:

Table 4. Best Practices of the Municipal *Talakayan*.

BEST PRACTICES	CEBU	BOHOL
Pre- <i>Talakayan</i> Activity	Attendance of most of the MIAC and at some instances, the SB members during the validation session. Most of the hesitations of the Mayor are being raised and addressed during this stage. Usually during the validation session, most of the data needed are already available or if they are not available, are readily obtainable.	The Local Chief Executive is present during the pre-works and is very hands-on as to the planning of how the session presentations will be handled. The Mayor is very active in the scrutiny of the data during the validation. The MIAC are allowed to comment on the data so far gathered for purposes of accuracy. There is a discussion of “what went well” during the <i>talakayan</i> of other munis.
Actual <i>Talakayan</i> Run	Session presenters are guided by actual print-out of the powerpoint presentation and they are also given time allocation and actual program flow in order to be time-bound. In one municipality, print-out of the powerpoint presentation of the three (3) sessions are given to all the participants upon registration.	The open forum after each of the session presentation is fully utilized and the Mayor directly responds to them. In most instances, the Mayor is present during the entire day activity. In some instances, the department heads concerned take part in the delivery of the Executive-Legislative Agenda, particularly pertaining to their respective offices.

For Cebu, the best practices for the Pre-*Talakayan* Activity are as follows: presence of the mayor during the validation session and the dry-run. At this point, many of the misconceptions of the activity are already addressed and clarified and data is ready. Also, during the validation session, most of the data needed are already available or if they are not available, are readily obtainable. In the

actual *talakayan* run, a municipality of Cebu through its assigned ACT/MCT provided hard copy or print-out of the powerpoint presentation. Session presenters are guided by actual print-out of the powerpoint presentation and they are also given time allocation and actual program flow in order to be time-bound. This is very important to ensure that all the session presentations are

delivered in the morning as the afternoon is allotted for the Focus Group Discussion.

For Bohol, the best practices for the Pre-*Talakayan* Activity are as follows: The Mayor is present during the pre-works and is very hands-on as to the planning of how the session presentations will be handled. There is a discussion of “what went well” during the *talakayan* of other municipalities. This will serve as a guide for the municipality to apply best practices and anticipate possible glitches and problems for the *talakayan* run. During the actual *talakayan*, the open forum every after session presentation is fully utilized. In some instances, the department heads concerned take part during the presentation of the Executive-Legislative Agenda, particularly pertaining to their particular office. Thus, any questions raised are directly responded by the respective head of office concerned directly.

***Talakayan* as a Manifestation of Empowerment**

Empowerment is defined as the capacity to make effective choices; that is, to translate their choices into desired actions and outcomes (World Bank Policy Research Paper, February 2005). This capacity to make an effective choice is primarily influenced by two sets of factors: agency and opportunity structure.

As mentioned in the research methodology, this study adopted the empowerment framework of analysis by Ruth Alsop, Mette Frost Bertelsen and Jeremy Holland (2006) from their paper entitled, *Empowerment in Practice from Analysis to Implementation*. Shown here is

Figure 2, *The Municipal Talakayan Correlates for Empowerment towards Community-Driven Development* in the Provinces of Cebu and Bohol.

In sum, a person or group’s agency can be largely predicted by their *asset endowment* (Alsop, et al). Simply put, assets are the resources of the individual or groups which led them to access economic, social and political opportunities. Such may pertain to psychological, informational, organizational, material, social, financial, and human assets. In the case of the *talakayan*, as exhibited in the figure, agency includes leadership skills, spirit of volunteerism, and knowledge of the activity and ownership of the vision-mission-goals of the LGU. These assets open the gate of opportunities for the involvement and engagement of an individual or groups to the municipal *talakayan*, conducted annually to selected recipient municipalities and is even identified as a best practice that is worthy to be institutionalized at the level and instance of the LGU.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the schema are the organizational structures, in this case such pertains to MLGU initiatives (projects, activities and programs), MLGU development agenda, DSWD funded-projects, governance and bureaucracy. These mechanisms formalize the conduct of the *talakayan*. The beginning of empowerment comes with the interplay of assets (agency) and the governmental mechanisms (opportunity structure) upon the adoption and institutionalization of the municipality of the *talakayan* as an apt avenue for community dialogue between and among the stakeholders.

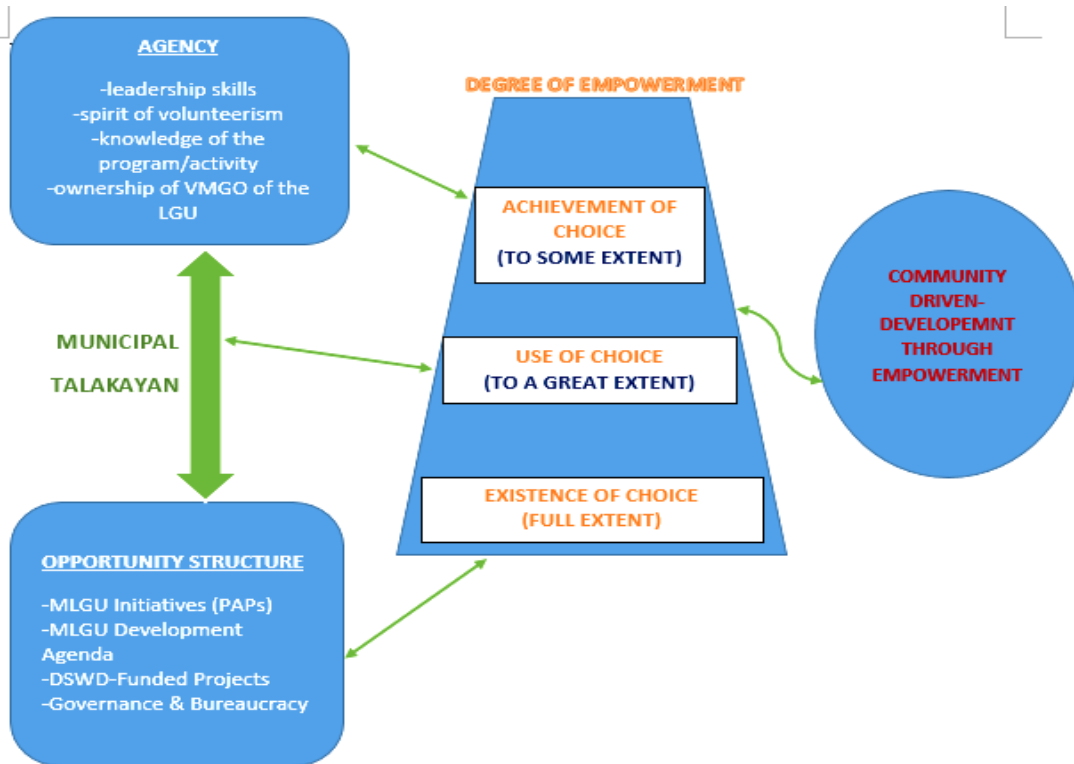


Figure 2. The Municipal *Talakayan* Correlates for Empowerment towards Community-Driven Development

As for the degree of empowerment from the lowest existence of choice, the use of choice to the highest achievement of choice, only the first is attained to a *full extent*. This means that the conduct of the annual municipal *talakayan* provides a range of choices to the public and the community in relationship to community engagement and political involvement. As a dialogue initiative, the participating stakeholders of the *talakayan* feel that the recognition of their voice to the LGU’s goals which validates their participation.

On the other hand, the next level, the use of choice is deemed to be at a *great extent* of attainment as individual or organizations’ choices may be affected by other factors such as the leadership and governance; thus, prohibiting full extent of the use of choice. Indeed, the brand of leadership influences the utilization of choice among and between society and its civic

organizations. It can either strengthen or weaken the available choice, which was already with the knowledge of the community. Otherwise stated, the more action they see from the government, the more they feel their government is working for them, thus, they become more concerned and, in a sense, involved with the government. Participation then becomes a natural consequence thereof.

Otherwise, the transformation towards the next level regresses, as distrust and mistrust in the leadership heightens.

Unto the next, the *talakayan* affords *some extent* for the achievement of choice. This becomes the most elusive to achieve as there are already external factors affecting the prior level (the use of choice). When the available choice is not utilized, ultimately no achievement of choice can unfold. Only those who made a choice will have an opportunity to witness an evolution – a

transformation of some kind. As for the *talakayan*, those who made the choice of actively participating in the dialogue and genuinely cooperating with the LGU may observe a certain degree of development within the community. After all, utilization of choice is solely done by the individuals themselves.

With the foregoing considered, the Municipal *Talakayan* is a clear manifestation of an *existence of choice* for the people in society as represented by the varying stakeholders, nonetheless, the *use of choice* by the individuals is often interrupted by external elements beyond their control, that is politicking and bureaucracy. In the end, the individuals always fall short of their *achievement of choice*.

RECOMMENDATIONS

After the data has been presented, the following recommendations are made. On *ownership*. Among the challenges as mentioned by the stakeholders of the *talakayan* is the conflict of schedule between *talakayan* and some other municipal-led activities. Further, it was relayed that the personnel in the MLGU still perceives *talakayan* as a national-led activity, specifically spearheaded by the DSWD. This is opposed to the nature of *talakayan*, a municipal-led activity initiated by the municipal leadership and supported by the national government agency thru DSWD.

The concern on being able to fully embrace the program as one's very own (MLGU) is crucial in the future success of the future undertakings of the *talakayan*. The conflict in terms of the scheduling of municipal activities can be resolved through synchronization of activities. Once, there is ownership from the municipality, the LGU does the planning including setting of prospective dates for incoming activities with the inclusion of the *talakayan*.

On *decision-making*. As defined, *empowerment* is the capacity to make effective choices. It was shared by the beneficiaries that *talakayan* is one positive avenue for community

dialogue where the people are apprised of the programs, activities and projects (PAPs) undertaken by the MLGU. Moreover, they are also able to give feedback to local leaders as to the necessity, beneficially and practicability of those PAPs. The *talakayan* provided the open space whereby the two parties can freely share their thoughts and be heard. The MLGU officers, personnel and the community partake on key issues crucial to the development of their locality. This is the most relevant contribution of the *talakayan* to the MLGU, specifically and the community, generally.

Nonetheless, it (*talakayan*) can only outline the myriad of choices to the community members or the beneficiaries. It can inform the public of the available choices as can be accessed through the different government entities. But at the end of the day, the choice of whether or not to continue to push forward towards the road for development lies on the hands of the community members themselves. The *talakayan* simply gave them the head start, however the commencement of the actual race is for them to decide. This is when empowerment begins.

On *collaboration*. The national government thru the DSWD can take the lead towards full institutionalization of the program, Kapit-Bisig Laban sa Kahirapan-Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services (KALAHI-CIDSS). This move can facilitate the institutionalization of *talakayan* as a municipal-led community dialogue bringing in different stakeholders on the level of the LGUs. Currently, the program follows an institutionalized framework, however full institutionalization through a law is yet to be enacted. The funding of said program, likewise comes from an international funding institution.

If full institutionalization can be done, this will be a collaborative initiative for both national government agency and the LGUs towards the community development. *Kapit-bisig* (linking arms together) is symbolic of the cooperation of these two levels of government leadership aimed

at achieving a common goal for the betterment of the community.

On **commitment**. *Talakayan* as an avenue for community dialogue brings together people from different walks of life. This is rather easy to say but in reality, the varied interests of said groups of stakeholders make it rather challenging to pursue *talakayan*. This is where commitment from the two (2) major groups of stakeholders play an important role.

The **MLGU** should be committed to pursue *talakayan* as an annual gathering for purposes of monitoring projects and feed backing from beneficiaries of said projects. To the LGU officials including barangay captains and councilors, the commitment to be truthful in the assessment of existing projects implemented and to be open-minded with the comments from the civil society organizations (CSOs) and the community beneficiaries are critical towards the attainment of community development. Political affiliation should be shelved for the general welfare of the people. Same thing for the LGU personnel. Their commitment should remain with the public and not to the elected officials.

The **Community** and the **CSOs** should be committed to stay engaged and involved with all the activities done by the LGU. Empowerment after all is ignited by keen social awareness. The community should continue to pursue access to government mechanisms towards betterment quality of life. The knowledge of the existence of government initiatives both local and national to assist and to facilitate employment, sanitation and health should be pursued. For the very reason that such knowledge paves the way for being able to make the right choice in the future. Making the right choice is the primary foundation of empowerment.

CONCLUSION

The Municipal *Talakayan* is able to attain the objectives by which the program was conceived. However, as a supposed LGU led activity, the actual *talakayan* run had some administrative concerns and challenges as this is still perceived

by some local leaders as a DSWD initiative. Cultivating a sense of ownership to the *talakayan* activity by the LGUs is key to the full success of the future Municipal *Talakayan* runs. The cascading of the *talakayan* down to the level of the barangay largely depends upon the acceptability and the sense of ownership by the LGU of this endeavor. As seen by its stakeholders, the *talakayan* is an effective avenue for dialogue while they are made aware of the development initiatives of the municipality and the available data which can be utilized for planning and policy formulation

An avenue for dialogue however does not necessarily translate to empowerment per se. Empowerment should after all translate choices into desired actions and outcomes. For one, the *existence of choice* and the *use of choice* do not always end up with the *attainment of choice*. Thus, empowerment as encouraged in the *talakayan* is taken only as a means towards an end and not an end in itself. Empowerment after all is a process and the process of empowerment is further strengthened in the conduct of the *talakayan* as perceived by all the stakeholders. However, the actual state of empowerment remains a goal that is yet to be achieved through the concerted efforts of the state and society to achieve genuine development, while fulfilling the domains of justice, politics and public service that will trickle down to the level of the community and the household themselves.

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Discussions with Mr. Johnroy Payos on several occasions from July 2017 to December 2017. Mr. Payos is the Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist of DSWD KALAHI-CIDSS NCDDP assigned with this particular study under the Regional Mini-Studies Program.

Interviews

Discussions with Atty. Cyril Bryan D. Cuizon, MPA on several occasions from May 2017 to December 2017. Atty. Cuizon is the Regional Service Provider of the Municipal *Talakayan* for Region VII from 2016 to present covering the provinces of Cebu, Bohol, and Siquijor. He is also engaged in private legal practice as the Senior Lawyer of Cuizon & Associates Law Firm.

