Short-Route Accountability in the Philippines

In the early 1980s, the poor condition of infrastructure in remote areas of the Philippines hindered economic growth and heightened regional inequalities. A new ISS case study examines how involvement of residents of the northern province of Abra increased the efficiency and quality of public works projects in the region.

Recognizing the central government's inability to follow through on improvement projects in far-flung parts of the 7,100-island archipelago, in 1986, President Corazon Aquino created the Community Economic Development Program. This initiative changed the way the government managed its rural public works projects and empowered citizens in places like Abra to monitor the progress and quality of construction.

In the wake of the program's creation, two dozen volunteers in Abra formed Concerned Citizens of Abra for Good Government to ensure that officials and contractors carried out their jobs faithfully. Members visited construction sites, checked compliance with technical standards, and kept track of progress. By the end of its first year of operation, Concerned Citizens had monitored about one hundred projects, alerted central government agencies to 20 incomplete ventures, and provided evidence on which to base a high-profile inquiry against a number of local officials. It earned a presidential citation and national and international recognition. Although Aquino's program ended, the group continued its activities over the next two decades. By the end of 2012, it had monitored more than 600 infrastructure projects valued at about 300 million pesos (US$7 million), including roads, school buildings, irrigation systems, and bridges.

Changes at Nigeria's Ports

In 2003, Nigeria's seaports were among the least efficient in the world. Businesses suffered, investors stayed away, and shippers diverted their loads to ports in neighboring countries. A new ISS case study describes
how the government improved infrastructure, mitigated corruption, and
reduced the procedural entanglements caused by dozens of
government agencies competing for slices of the ports’ revenues.

President Olusegun Obasanjo invited private companies to manage
Nigeria’s port terminals in exchange for commitments to invest in port
infrastructure and to remit a share of profits and other fees to the
National Ports Authority. The ambitious reform was not easy.
Opposition from Nigeria’s legislature nearly derailed the transition, and
acrimonious negotiations with labor unions threatened the smooth
transfer of managerial responsibilities to private operators. To achieve
its reform goals, the country’s privatization bureau relied on a
transparent and closely monitored concession process, political support
from the presidency, and controversial legal arguments. Private terminal
operators brought substantial new investments and improved port
operations, though complementary reforms in customs and regulation
still had to take place before Nigerian businesses could realize the full
benefits of the new system.

Improving Government Accountability and Leading Reform

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