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GRADUATE STUDIES

PUBLIC FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT IN THE PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to present different articles and that explains the significance of the Public Financial Management Competency Program (PFMCP). It will show the history of how the PFMCP was crafted and made into an Executive Order (EO No. 55, s. 2011), allowing public financial management practitioners to be equipped and re-tooled on the reforms on the government financial and budgetary system. Government issuances, circulars, and office orders are the primary resource of this paper. It focuses on the findings and recommendations based on the focused-group discussions conducted by virtue of said publications. Thus, the development of the PFMCP is a key strategy to provide the PFM practitioners with access to necessary skills, behavior, attitude, and knowledge that will enable them to perform their current tasks, as well as their emerging tasks in light of the reforms that are being implemented.

Index Terms – Competency Program, Government, Public Financial Management

I. INTRODUCTION

Many reform initiatives in developing countries fail to achieve sustained improvements in performance because they are merely isomorphic mimicry—that is, governments and organizations pretend to reform by changing what policies or organizations look like rather than what they do. Also, the flow of development resources and legitimacy without demonstrated improvements in performance undermines the impetus for effective action to build state capability or improve performance. This dynamic facilitates “capability traps” in which state capability stagnates, or even deteriorates, over long periods even though governments remain engaged in developmental rhetoric and continue to receive development resources (Matt Andrews, Lant Pritchett, and Michael Woolcock, 2012).

The Public Financial Management (PFM) Reform Program aims to improve efficiency, accountability, and transparency in public fund use to ensure the direct, immediate, substantial, and economical delivery of public services especially to the poor.

The Program implements the key strategies of the *Philippine PFM Reform Roadmap: Towards Improved Accountability and Transparency (2011-2016)*, a comprehensive reform agenda that seeks **to clarify, simplify, improve and harmonize the government’s financial management processes and information systems**. The integrated systems will cover all transactions of government and apply uniformly to all government agencies.

Honest and effective governance—truly transparent, disciplined, and serving the interest of the country and its people — is our vision for the Philippine Public Financial Management (PFM) System (PFM Roadmap 2011).

Its vision is to have a sound public financial management system that helps government decision-makers—both oversight agencies and spending agencies—in performing their functions do their jobs effectively, efficiently, and economically. It helps them to channel funds to where they are intended and will do the greatest good and sends off signals when deviations occur. Most importantly, it helps to inform citizens where public funds are being spent (PFM Roadmap 2011).

Although the aim of financial management among state institutions is to prevent wasteful spending, loss of resources through fraud, irregularities, and improper spending to reduce cost (Simon et al., 2012), the public institutions in the low-income countries are characterized by poor financial management systems design (Zeng et al., 2010). These systems lack critical functionalities, including automated bank reconciliation, audit trails, systems documentation, data checks, and internal controls (Diamond & Khemani, 2006). Poor financial management systems have poor response time, limited ability to generate reports, and weak access security controls, which can lead to low financial management performance (Zeng et al., 2010). But the use of integrated financial management information systems can improve processes (Zeng et al., 2011) and productivity (Sampaio et al., 2012) in public institutions.

II. DISCUSSIONS

Countries around the world are modernizing and enhancing public financial management (PFM) systems (Joshi, 2010). This comes as a result of the desire on the part of international donors and financial organizations to institutionalize financial transparency and auditability (Asif et al., 2010) to foster responsible governance. Since 1984 the World Bank has promoted an integrated financial management information system (IFMIS) as the core component of reforming PFM in low-income countries (Combaz, 2015). The Bank has financed 121 PFM

projects, including 86 completed and 35 on-going projects, spending over 3.5 billion USD (World Bank, 2015). An integrated financial management information system is an integrated technology package that computerizes budget management and accounting system for governments (World Bank, 2015). Unlike non-integrated systems that are characterized by high levels of complexities, inconsistencies, and excessive bureaucracy in internal financial management (Sampaio et al., 2012; Zeng et al., 2010), a fully functioning IFMIS can improve public financial management. An integrated financial management information system can provide real-time financial information that managers can use to formulate budgets, manage resources, and administer programs effectively, comprehensively, transparently, and securely (Almeida et al., 2014; Combaz, 2015). IFMIS solutions can significantly improve the efficiency and equity of government operations. It offers great potential for increasing participation, transparency, and accountability (World Bank, 2015), which in turn leads to reducing corruption by increasing the risks of detection (Chêne, 2009).

The Commission on Audit (COA), the Department of Budget and Management (DBM), and the Department of Finance (DOF) including the Bureau of the Treasury (BTr) are collectively committed to promoting fiscal responsibility and good governance through transparency and accountability in financial transactions in the Philippine government. At the core of this mission is the need to put in place a government integrated financial management information system that will provide reliable and accurate information to support operational budgeting, cash programming and management, timely financial reports, and effective enforcement of financial accounting rules and procedures (PFM Vision, Mission and Goals 2008).

The group's mission is in support of the Philippine governance reform agenda. As stated in the draft Philippine Development Plan (PDP) for 2011 to 2016, the overall goal for reforming governance: Effective and honest governance will be promoted and practiced through four key strategies thru (1) ensure effective, efficient, transparent, accountable, and economical delivery of public service; (2) curb corruption; (3) strengthen the rule of law; and, (4) enhance citizens' access to information and participation in governance." (NEDA, 2011, Philippine Development Plan 2-11-2016 Results Matrices)

Memorandum of Agreement among COA, DBM, and DOF led to the establishment of an interagency steering committee called the Government Integrated Financial and Management Information System (GIFMIS) Committee to oversee, coordinate and develop the integration and harmonization of the government's financial management information systems. (MOA, January 21, 2010)

From the outset, the group agreed to focus efforts on the review and reengineering of existing operational budgeting, cash management, and accounting and auditing rules and procedures with the end-in-view of developing timely, more effective, and responsive ways of managing, monitoring, and reporting on the financial performance of the Philippine government.

Having been brewing since 2008, PFM reform gained high-level attention under the new administration and was considered to be a necessary condition for honest and good governance which President Benigno Simeon C. Aquino and his cabinet strongly espoused. Most of the short-term measures that were identified by the GIFMIS Committee were adopted and applied by policymakers in the preparation and enactment of the 2011 Reform Budget, thereby also obtaining concurrence from legislators. Recent developments bode well for the more challenging tasks for the medium and long-term tasks of integrating the systems for the oversight agencies – COA, DBM, and DOF – and implementing agencies and putting in place the infrastructure for a modern GIFMIS.

GIFMIS is defined as a customized and integrated application or automation of financial operations of the national government particularly financial planning and budgeting, treasury, and accounting functions. This eventually will generate reliable and accurate reports promptly for the use of government decision-makers and the scrutiny of the public.

The GIFMIS Committee noted weak enforcement of certain spending policies. Examples of this were the realignment of unreleased appropriations, unfocused spending of congressional allocations, and the preponderance of highly discretionary lump-sum funds and unprogrammed appropriations. Most of these problems were addressed in the enactment of the 2011 Reform Budget but their full enforcement requires an information system capable of supporting more robust public reporting on actual budget execution and financial management. This group assumed a formal identity when the COA, DBM, and DOF-BTr signed a Memorandum of Agreement on Cooperation to Foster Development and Implementation of Government Integrated Financial Management Information System (GIFMIS) on January 21, 2010. Through this MOA (January 2010), the GIFMIS Committee, delved deeper into the specific processes under the budget, accounting, and auditing systems to try to remedy gaps and deficiencies—so important in a fragmented system that exists in the Philippines—and to pave the way for a modern GIFMIS. The second workshop in Tagaytay City was held in February 2010 to further develop the ideas from the first workshop and get down to the business of PFM coordination. The group defined the reform goals and key strategies for their PFM reform roadmap but consensus on the policy implications of such strategies came later. (Validation Workshop on GIFMIS Functional Requirements)

The finalization of the PFM Reform Roadmap was temporarily restrained with the coming of the new administration in July 2010 and the preoccupation with the budget preparation work for 2011. In the meantime, the GIFMIS Committee benefited from technical assistance provided by World Bank experts who came on separate missions to help the government in the elaboration of the issues and to look at available solutions. Mr. Jim Brumby, a PFM expert, came in March 2010 and Mr. Cem Dener, a GIFMIS expert, came in June 2010. The Committee continued its collaborative work to fine-tune the PFM Reform Roadmap but formal adoption by the new administration had yet to be obtained.

These developments ushered in the final stage of fine-tuning the PFM Reform Roadmap and the development of concrete implementation plans. With measures to liberalize and simplify data sharing, treasury accounts, budget execution, and accounting, the operationalization of the GIFMIS within the term of President Aquino is greatly enhanced. Hence the GIFMIS Committee intends to present its PFM Reform Roadmap to the President.

The PFM reform program seeks to clarify, simplify, improve and harmonize the financial management processes and information systems of the public sector and, as necessary, reengineer and integrate the relevant systems in the COA, DBM, DOF, and implementing agencies. The desired result is that the national government can perform its functions of maintaining fiscal discipline, fund allocation efficiency, and operational efficiency for the effective delivery of public services. The financial transactions of the government can be characterized as a linear flow of activities from budget formulation, authorization, execution, accounting and reporting of expenditures, and monitoring and audit. There are critical gaps between the vertical columns of activities and reports because each is governed by a set of rules and procedures that have their respective system of collecting and analyzing data to complete said activities. For instance, the appropriated budget or GAA gives the level of authorized spending for agencies but funding availability is determined through DBM's budget release orders. Historically, amounts released are much lower than appropriate, due mainly to the chronic shortfall in revenues. Moreover, the amount of appropriations is usually difficult to determine due to the prevalence of reenacted budgets and substantial amounts of funds carried

over from the previous year. The system of budget execution generates budget accountability reports from spending agencies that do very little to explain the real financial performance of the agencies and the overall status of budget obligations and balances. This is partly the result of the disconnect between budget execution, reporting, and monitoring. Financial reports are not presented in the same structure and expenditure classifications as the budget, hence analyzing agency budget performance impossible. The system is also found by the COA to be vulnerable to double-payment of accounts payable, non-transparent realignment of funds, and diversion of funds to unintended uses (Statement of Reform Objectives).

It follows that with the fragmentation of processes, financial information systems are also splintered, duplicative, exclusive, and inaccessible to some important users. The tendency is for each oversight agency to develop its own set of data requirements, reporting formats, and definition of terms. The result is messy traffic of documents and duplicative reporting requirements. Oversight agencies are unable to validate reports and the analysis is hindered by different budget and accounting classifications.

The government intends to replace this with a systematic and orderly flow of shared data to support PFM requirements. The objective is to use the GIFMIS to solve the government's fragmented financial management system, underpinned by the effective integration of processes between COA, DBM, and BTr, at its initial phase. Simplification of procedures and harmonization of reporting requirements will increase the chances of beneficial application of available integrated FMIS solutions to reduce development time and cost (by considering, for instance, off-the-shelf software package solutions).

The group identified specific objectives and strategies for clusters of related activities in preparation for the tasking of groups that will carry them out. These are the proposed PFM reform projects and four of them are initially envisaged: Budget reporting and performance management, treasury cash operations, contingent liabilities, and GIFMIS conceptual framework. Composite sub-committees consisting of organic personnel of COA, DBM, and DOF/BTr were already created to work on the four projects (Planning Workshop, Tagaytay City on January 13-14, 2011).

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(Andrew Lawson) A strong PFM system is an essential aspect of the institutional framework for an effective state. The effective delivery of public services is closely associated with poverty reduction and growth, and countries with strong, transparent, accountable PFM systems tend to deliver services more effectively and equitably and regulate markets more efficiently and fairly. In this sense, good PFM is a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for most development outcomes. A key element of statehood is the ability to tax fairly and efficiently and to spend responsibly. These are fundamental characteristics of 'inclusive' state institutions, which generate trust, promote innovative energies, and allow societies to flourish. Improving the effectiveness of a PFM system may generate widespread and long-lasting benefits, and may in turn help to reinforce wider societal shifts towards inclusive institutions, and thus towards stronger states, reduced poverty, greater gender equality, and balanced growth. Even where

donor staff does not seek to strengthen PFM systems, they need to understand them because they will often work through them, by providing budget support or climate finance, or with them, by providing project-financed interventions, which are then staffed and maintained through the national budget. In short, PFM matters, and all donor staff need a basic knowledge of PFM.

In practice, the assessment of PFM systems focuses one level down from outcomes – that is on the examination of the institutions, rules, and procedures most likely to ensure the achievement of the key objectives of the PFM system. This approach was pioneered in the 1930s and revived by Allen Schick at the Maryland School of Public Policy (Reading 1). This approach provides the conceptual basis for the Public Expenditure & Financial Accountability (PEFA) assessment framework, developed by the IMF and the World Bank in conjunction with the EU, DFID, and other bilateral donors. It provides a set of 31 high-level indicators, by which to measure the performance of a PFM system. Since 2005, some 300 PEFA assessments have been undertaken of national and sub-national PFM systems in over 100 countries. Despite the inevitable shortcomings of a standardized system of measurement of this kind, the PEFA framework has justifiably gained wide acceptance and, when properly interpreted, provides a good guide to the status of PFM systems. (PEFA Indicators, 2015).

What is known about how best to strengthen PFM systems? (Andrew Lawson) Since the late 1990s, DFID and other donors have devoted an unprecedented level of attention to the reform of PFM systems in developing and transition countries. Yet, the results have been mixed. With some exceptions, reform progress has been slow and the benefits elusive. Nevertheless, some countries have been more successful in implementing PFM reforms than others. What explains this difference in performance? And what implications does it have for the design of reforms and the provision of external support? Accountability in its most fundamental sense refers to the answerability to someone for expected performance (Kristiansen, et. al.2009).

The three objectives of a PFM system and explains the characteristics of the institutional arrangements most likely to ensure the achievement of these objectives. It is simply written and provides an excellent introduction to the institutional approach to PFM, which is implicit in so much of the subsequent literature. (Schick, A. 1998)

While these lessons may seem obvious in retrospect, evidence suggests that many past donor interventions to support PFM reform have ignored them – attempting to drive reform from the outside and imposing ‘blueprint solutions’ inappropriate to the context. Many governments, unwilling or unable to engage in genuine reform processes, have often bought into this charade, pretending to adopt reforms but in reality, adopting form rather than function. Current research on PFM issues focuses on understanding better the approaches and techniques that can help to avoid this.

A sound PFMIS will help decision-makers – both oversight and spending agencies – channel funds to where they are intended and will do the greatest benefit. More importantly, it sets off alarms whenever spendings are riddled with irregularities and inform citizens where their taxes go and how they will be spent. In the absence of a PFMIS, organizations risk duplicating their efforts, misplacing their priorities, and spending without a clear direction. The Philippines for example is now embarking on implementing a Government Integrated Financial Management Information System that will provide reliable and accurate information to support operational budgeting, cash programming and management, timely financial reports, and effective enforcement of financial accountability rules and procedures. (Africa, C. November 2012)

Many PFM reforms involve the introduction of Integrated Financial Management Information Systems (IFMIS), often at substantial cost in financial outlays and administrative

efforts. Experience shows that these systems often fail or under-perform. (Petersen, S.B. 2006)

Philipp Krause (ODI) provides a critique of the practice of transposing ‘international best practice’, without regard to the domestic context. He describes the widespread adoption of such models as a process of imitation rather than innovation, and, at its worst, a mere process of ventriloquism. This is when only the form rather than the function has been imitated, the purpose being to provide a reform ‘signal’ while serving to hide the absence of real reform. (Krause, P. 2013)

In line with its commitment to modernize and reform PFM systems, the GoP has started the development of the PFM Competency Framework as a whole-of-government approach to capacity development across oversight and spending agencies. As integrated learning interventions are vital for the current PFM modernization efforts, the framework will define a package of qualifications or specified skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for efficient and effective public financial management and operations to meet the future PFM demands. The envisioned framework will also provide a full range of qualifications standards (from entry to middle management to executive levels) to guide training and career development of individual employees in each of the PFM areas covering budgeting, accounting, audit, and treasury/cash management, among others. (Competency Framework, 2017)

What is Public Financial Management Competency Program (PFMCP)? The PFMCP is a competency-based training focused on enhancing the technical competencies of PFM workers with Salary Grade levels 22 and below in the oversight and spending agencies. It was developed as a strategy to provide the PFM workforce quality and relevant learning intervention that will translate into better workplace practices necessary to sustain broader PFM reforms.

The GoP has an estimated 24,000 PFM practitioners from the NGAs and State Universities and Colleges, excluding GOCCs and Local Government Units. Making the PFMCP accessible to as many PFM practitioners as possible at the same time ensuring the quality of the program is a vital determinant for the success of this initiative. It is for these objectives that the DBM seeks to enter into a partnership with universities as LSPs for the PFMCP.

PFMCP is a competency-based training program that seeks to provide an impact on behavior, attitude, skills, and knowledge (B-A-S-K), as well as work performance of PFM practitioners.

In 2013, the PFM Committee commissioned a group of consultants to assess the challenges, gaps, and needs of the PFM professionals who will spearhead and implement the reforms as spelled out in the PFM roadmap.

Some of the key challenges identified in the report were: not all agencies undertake appropriate capacity development initiatives for their PFM staff, and the learning interventions are piecemeal and do not answer all training gaps.

In 2014, the PFM Committee, with support from the Government of Australia–PFM Program, developed a PFM Competency Framework modeled on the roles that the PFM workforce in the Philippines perform, namely, budgeting, procurement, cash management, accounting, and auditing. This framework was the primary basis in the development of the PFMCP as part of the strategy of the PFM Committee to enhance the competencies of PFM personnel of the GoP. To further strengthen the PFM capacity-building program, the PFMCP as an inter-agency initiative was officially included as part of the PFM Reform Roadmap in October 2014 (COA-DBM-DOF Joint Circular No. 2014-1).

III. RESULTS

As a result of this study, the Public Financial Management Competency Program was crafted to address the gaps identified. The PFMCP is composed of six (6) functional or learning tracks that include the different phases of public financial management in the Philippines. These are Budgeting, Accounting, Auditing (Internal and External), Procurement, and Cash Management Tracks. The Foundation Track serves as an overview of the program and a pre-requisite course before proceeding to the specialty tracks. (Jamison, et.al., 2014) Competency-based education has become the norm for professional graduate degree programs, as well as for employed personnel in the government.

The PFMCP is composed of six (6) functional tracks to cover all the phases of the PFM in the Philippines: from planning and preparation to legislation, and the execution to the accounting of the budget. From these core stages of PFM in the GoP, the six (6) learning tracks of the PFMCP is established. This includes the PFM Foundation, Budgeting and Performance, Procurement, Cash Management, Accounting, and Auditing (Internal and External) Tracks.

The PFM Foundation Track (FT) aims to build the foundation for developing the competencies [behavior, attitudes, skills, and knowledge (BASK)] necessary to all PFM practitioners. As the prerequisite track, it seeks to let the practitioners understand how the PFM system in GoP works and the inter-relatedness of its different functions. The FT brings about the importance of internal controls, using data effectively to support analysis and decision-making, and working collaboratively to strengthen financial management.

The Budgeting and Performance Track (BPT) deepens the understanding of the PFM cycle by looking closely at the budget process, highlighting the all-important linkage in the planning, preparation, and execution phases of the budget necessary to achieve the target program outputs and outcomes. It provides the basic principles and technical knowledge on how the budget is crafted with the primary priorities and the essential needs of the country. The BPT will lay down the evolution of the different concepts and approaches that are being applied in the GOP's budget process.

The Internal Audit Track (IAT) underscores the underlying importance of internal audit in improving the efficiency of an organization's operations and seeks to clarify the delineation of roles between internal and external auditors. It expounds on the basic concepts and principles of internal control processes and risk management and its relevance to PFM as a system. The IAT will demonstrate the processes involved in the conduct of compliance, management, and operations audits.

The Cash Management Track (CMT) discusses the principles and processes as well as the importance of fiscal and cash management in the PFM system. It demonstrates the process of analysis and preparation of an agency's revenue and expenditure program hence giving the participants a better appreciation of the process.

The learning modules for all the courses under the BPT, IAT, and CMT has been completed and the training will be implemented starting 2018, in time for the kick-off of the twinning arrangement among DBM, BTr, and select universities for a more sustainable and long-term implementation of the programs under the ambit of the PFMCP.

The key reforms will ensure full public disclosure and proper management of public funds by providing real-time financial information on government taxes, expenses, and debt to all government and the public. (Digitization of Government Financial System Gains Momentum, 2012).

IV. CONCLUSION

Underspending caused by low consumption and investment activities has been a constant problem of the government. Data shows that the Government of the Philippines (GoP) has been spending below the program. The main reason was the structural weakness (from planning to procurement to implementation) within the National Government Agencies (NGAs) and Government-Owned and/or Controlled Corporations (GOCCs), which hampers their ability to spend fast and with measurable results. Thus, the development of the PFMCP is a key strategy to provide the PFM practitioners with access to necessary skills, behavior, attitude, and knowledge that will enable them to perform their current tasks, as well as their emerging tasks in light of the reforms that are being implemented.

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