

# How the local officials were audited

**1** What is being done now about the audit of local officials?

The information gathering phase was finished on August 31 and now the President himself is going over the audit results. All the information is on file and we provide the President with particular information he wants at any time. To help the President, moreover, a set of recommendations has been submitted to him by the cabinet coordinating committee composed of the 12 cabinet members of the audit team.

**2** Did the audit teams do a thorough job? Or, should they have had more time?

In our opinion, they did their job extremely well. We have about 15,200 local government officials. We audited 14,380. About 600 officials were unaudited and 200 local positions were vacant. For a three or four month period, the audit was rather well done and I think there was no need for more time.

**3** Why were 600 officials unaudited?

Some had died. Others were out of the country. A few were sick at the time. We verified claims of sickness. Others were simply inaccessible, in a troubled area in the South which we could not penetrate. However, in these areas, the local officials were surveyed by other groups composed of, for instance, military people in the troubled areas. Such surveys were not audits, strictly speaking, but they were included which were also a part of the audit's functions. The inventories on the officials contain general personal information, the general opinion of the people about the officials, cooperation with national projects, and other such general matters.

**4** Did the performance audit teams meet obstacles to an efficient check-up of local officials? Did they, for instance meet any threats, bribery or concealing of records?

In any undertaking of this nature, operational problems are encountered. However, I think that, because of the cooperation of the participating agencies, the exercise went rather smoothly. There were no reported threats. There were, I think, one or two isolated reports of apparent efforts to influence the audit teams; but when we received such reports, all of them were reported to the audit teams involved were invalidated. And then new audits were called for.

**5** What guarantees are there that the audit teams have not been offset by local officials' attempts to hide any possible bad marks?

In the structure of the exercise, we had an in-cross-checking system. First, we conducted research on the programs; the national agencies had conducted on the local level. The national agencies gave us their ratings of local officials' participation in their programs. Secondly, we required spot checks of claimed projects. The people who made spot checks certified the existence of claimed projects so that, in case of any problems, we would know whom to ask about the projects. Thirdly, we conducted a records check on the local level. We checked municipal records and conducted interviews to check on the projects. We also made what are called exception reports. The exception reports were done by the regional audit teams. These exception reports included such information as they thought were material to the evaluation of local officials but which could not really be substantiated by the norms of formal evidence. In other words, matters of common knowledge: everybody knows, for example, that the governor is like this, the mayor is like that; things like these were included to be verified later on. Reports of citizens came into these exception reports.

There were two types of exception reports: those done by the regions themselves and those based on reports

An interview with Ronaldo V. Punzo, who directed the Local Government Performance Audit for the DLGCD.



CABINET members confer while helping in the audit.

given directly to the department or to other national agencies. The second type was done here in the central office, based on reports received from citizens through letters and the like: Newspapers, backfiles, etc., were studied to see if there were any anomalies or problems unearthed by the press in any particular area. All this data was evaluated and classified as positive or negative. These were also classified on the basis of the strength of evidence involved in the allegations.

**6** Some say that the citizens should have a chance to audit their own officials. Will there be a citizen's opinion poll?

As I mentioned earlier, the reports of citizens were all included in the files on local officials. We did consider a citizens' opinion poll sometime last May. But, based on studies, such an opinion poll would require a minimum of 300,000 respondents. This was not really feasible. There were such problems as getting trained interviewers and a selection of sampling. In any case, there were very difficult problems. If, for example, we worked on this for a year or two, then we might have done a more detailed survey. But in a seven-month period, it was not possible.

A citizens' opinion poll is generally impressionistic; we feel there are other indications of popular support, which are, of course, what a citizens' opinion poll is meant to measure. Other signs of popular support, for example, would be the nature of cooperation of the people concerned in the projects of the local official, and the support given by the barangays to a particular local official since the barangays also represent the grassroots of our society.

**7** Were barangay officials included in auditing the officials?

Not as a rule, but there were some barangays that, on their own, wrote us formal resolutions and made judgments on local officials. In other areas where there were clear signs that we had to measure further the popular support enjoyed by local officials, we did ask some barangays.

**8** What kind of information did the barangays give?

Barangay officials are normally close to what the people say. You cannot expect a barangay captain to tell you, for example, what are the development projects of the mayor because he would

not have access to this information. But he would have access to the opinion of the people in his particular barangay, as to whether or not they like of dislike their mayor. Inquiries on reports, for instance, that a mayor is an absentee or is oppressive were directed to the barangays.

**9** What were the bases for evaluating an official?

The premises for rating an official were integrity, efforts at peace and order, development projects implemented, and social concern or efforts exerted to uplift the quality of life of the local citizens. Through these, it is clear that the president wanted a lucid view of performance, not popularity. When the performance of an official appeared indefinite—when we could not say, one way or the other, how his performance had been on the basis of records (and there were many cases which were in the gray area)—then we turned to the people. If we could not decide on performance, then we went to other things like popular support. Popular support becomes more important in such cases.

However, some people believe that even if an official has popular support, if he does not improve the life of the citizens, then he should be reminded that his job is to be concerned about the quality of life of his people. So, at the very least, this is basically what will happen—that they shall be reminded.

**10** How were local citizens consulted?

We consulted them through the barangays. We maintained contact with the barangays through the office of the Federation of Barangays.

On the local level, we did not call for assemblies. We just conducted information-gathering, usually directed to the barangay captain.

A barangay captain lives in his barangay. So he is in constant touch with his people. I suppose he would be knowledgeable about what the people think. This should be noted: Barangay officials are an additional source of information. The information of local officials was by no means limited to what the barangay said. The accent of the audit was on performance.

**11** How were you able to measure integrity?

The absolute measure was made in terms of cases filed against the local official. We had a file on all criminal and administrative cases of all local officials.

However, there were qualitative measures of integrity and these came in the form of the exception reports made by the audit teams.

**12** How were the cases evaluated? They were, as noted earlier, divided into criminal and administrative cases. Then the cases were rated as to whether they were pending, dropped, exonerated, appealed or whether the penalty was served. Most of the pending cases, except for criminal cases, were filed here with the DLGCD. Whenever they were filed with us, a survey of the evidence was conducted. This has been going on for some time now. For audit purposes, we did a survey of all cases with us and the results of this are included in the information given to the president.

With respect to the other cases, criminal cases for example, we have not as yet had a complete file on the evidence related to such cases. We just deal with criminal cases according to the status of each. A pending case, for example, would be more serious than one from which the official has been exonerated.

**13** How did you deal with local officials whose performance records before martial law were bad but who improved during martial law?

Our audit covers the period from January 1, 1972, to May 31, 1975. So which would matter much anymore. If he was bad then, and then changed upon the advent of martial law, we think that is good.

**14** How were the audit teams composed so that each facet of an official's performance would be effectively audited?

The regional audit teams were composed of the regional directors of the 12 member departments. These included the regional director's for highways, the regional director's for public works, the regional development council chairman for NEDA, the PRODs, of each region, the DLGCD regional directors, the NBI regional directors, the DND representatives. The audit teams were very competent groups on that level. Then on the provincial level, a similar composition.

Then we put in a restriction that nobody assigned to a particular place could audit the same place. He had to audit another place. This was to remove the possibility that he was in the area he would audit. Nobody was allowed to audit his place to station.

**15** How many teams were fielded?

All in all, we had about 2,200 who actually were involved in the audit teams. Aside from this, we had 144 regional audit team members. Then we had a central office staff of about 80 who were conducting the research in the agencies. And then, of course, the national computer center had a large complement of people who were handling the computerization of data.

**16** Did you have enough cooperation from the agencies?

More than enough, actually. I think that their cooperation was overwhelming. Frankly, I was surprised with the help we got. We thought that we would have to rely on our field people; but this was not the case. Everybody helped. One thing that was very notable was that each agency shouldered its own expense. They did not give us any problem about logistics.

**17** Did you also have enough cooperation on the national level?

Definitely. The cabinet members themselves spent a great deal of time deliberating on the audit. The deliberation hours were even divided into two phases: the sub-team hearings and then the *en banc* hearings. For the sub-team hearings, the 12 cabinet members divided themselves into committees of three. Each committee tackled specific regions of the audit. Each committee dealt with a region from which none of the members originated. □



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