

Private sector takes initiative in fight against corruption

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Government anti-corruption efforts will get a great boost from the launch of AIM's Hills Program on Governance. The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) fully supports this initiative by the private sector to promote business integrity and accountability among its employees since corruption is one concern that affects our competitiveness as a country.

This one-year project grant from the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) is being implemented by the Asian Institute of Management's (AIM) Hills Program on Governance.

This project has two objectives: to strengthen awareness and understanding of the social and economic costs of corruption among Philippine businesses by generating support for anti-corruption efforts, and to strengthen the ability of small and medium enterprises to prevent corrupt and other unethical behavior among their employees.

The DTI Bureau of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise Development Director Rhodora M. Leño said this initiative is seen to benefit the small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and consumers as a whole as this can significantly reduce the cost of doing business. We all know that SOPs (standard operating procedure) exist in transacting with both government and private sector. And this is exactly what this project aims to address. This way, money that would have been lost to corruption which is estimated to run from 30 percent - 50 percent of the project cost will be used instead to expand businesses. In the end, enterprises with ethical business practices will be able to provide good products and services to its consumers, and become more competitive since we do not have to fear of sub-standard or inferior products and services.

In case you did not know, small and medium-sized businesses constitute 99 percent of registered businesses in the country, and employ approximately 70 percent of the country's workforce. Can you imagine how much impact this project will have if it becomes successful?

To gain momentum for this initiative, the AIM Hills Program on Governance project started securing the support of the business community through signed pledges to abide by ethical business practices, and to support a national fight against corruption.

This project includes a series of workshops and focus group discussions (FGDs) for small and medium-sized businesses on strategies to combat corruption. It also intends to come up with a manual on how to operate a business minus the corruption for small and medium enterprises (SMEs). A website has been developed by the DTI <http://www.businessesfightingcorruption.org> to further support this project. As I had stated in my columns past, new media is now emerging

as the fastest way to reach a wide number of people and encourages people participation through instant feedback.

The website will serve as a clearinghouse for all information relating to business ethics and the control of corruption in the private sector in the Philippines. It also provides a forum for business owners and managers to post comments and share their experiences in dealing with corruption. By facilitating the exchange of information, the website seeks to help businesses conduct their operations without giving in to corruption. Hopefully, this will promote transparency as well as prevent unethical behavior by their employees. The website also has useful links, contacts, news and events related to this initiative.

Now, the question is what will happen after the one year grant is over? Many of our projects start out well only to be cut short when funding runs out. The question always boils down to sustainability. Also, since pledges only have been signed as a start, how do we put more teeth into this so that these pledges are translated into life-long commitments?

I am hoping that this project has included a budget for monitoring and evaluation which is a crucial part in any project. We need some form of measure or indicator for success and I am hoping that this measure of success will not be on the number of pledges or companies that have signed up. Through these indicators, we can determine if a project should be continued, revised or totally scrapped. While this is a grant and it is not coming out from my contribution as a taxpayer, it does not give license to the proponents to spend it aimlessly. Transparency and accountability must start in the implementation of this project. Walk the talk!

Good is Great!

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