

Personal Stories of Change

Ramon Alikpala: A perspective from a national regulator

“There used to be this perception that the PSP model was the solution to everything”



Ramon (Dondi) B. Alikpala is the Executive Director of the National Water Resources Board (NWRB) of the Philippines. He previously was the head of the Financial Regulation Group of the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS). Dondi has been a member of the Philippines National Working Group since its inception in November 2005. He was one of seven who formed the Steering Committee responsible for guiding the direction that the Dialogue would take.

Dondi brought to the table his perceptions as a regulator. “There used to be this perception that the PSP model was the solution to everything,” he says. “I was encouraging this early on – because that’s the group I was regulating and I saw the value of the PSP model.”

Through the National Dialogue various new information and resources were now available to the stakeholders involved. In Dondi’s case, he was able to witness the drawing together of different utilities into the National Water and Sanitation Association, NAWASA – a single body for the regulator to communicate and deal with – as well as changing attitudes among larger utilities “who had always seen the smaller providers as competition. Over time and with engagement – they saw them as complementary; perhaps in time evolving into partners”.

Through the Dialogue, Dondi indicates that the regulators became aware of the need for different regulatory mechanisms “that would be suitable for smaller providers” and were not over sophisticated. It also became possible for financing institutions to recognise the existence of small utilities and to consider this untapped market as an opportunity for financing.

Dondi recognises, with humour, one example of the type of “epiphany” that The Water Dialogues could create. At the Stockholm Water Week in August 2007, as “a symbol of the establishment” he realised he was sitting next to a “left-leaning, labour-loving, anti-private-sector, anti-government” person! As two members of The Philippines Dialogues they were able to sit together to inform people, as Dondi says, “...what we were doing with The Water Dialogues and how it was helping our country move the water agenda forward.

“What The Water Dialogues did was open up the reality that the small providers played just as crucial if not more crucial a role in water service provision. [It] also built relationships between players that had opposed each other: putting a face to the people; putting people in other people’s shoes; enabled communication.”