

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: London School of Economics and Political Science		
Unit of Assessment: 19 – Politics and International Studies		
Title of case study: Promoting policy reforms in the Philippines by Thinking and Working Politically in development		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2012-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): John Sidel	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Sir Patrick Gillam Chair in International and Comparative Politics	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 2004 to present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2013-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Professor John Sidel's research has made a significant contribution to the Coalitions for Change (CfC) programme in the Philippines, by shaping its understanding of the political context for policy reform advocacy, advising on tactics and strategy, making decisive interventions on specific reform initiatives, and drawing lessons from successes and failures. CfC has successfully promoted reforms in disaster risk reduction, education, electoral processes, healthcare, land governance, public transportation and infrastructure, and tax policy. Sidel's research and publications have also influenced the approaches of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and The Asia Foundation to development assistance and provided evidence and analysis in support of an innovate approach to development - "thinking and working politically" - which has attracted interest among a broader audience of practitioners and policymakers, including the Overseas Development Institute, the World Bank, and United Nations agencies.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>Impacts described here are underpinned by a body of work on Philippine politics by Professor John Sidel, and by more recent research work with Coalitions for Change (CfC), a development programme in the Philippines which has pursued a self-consciously political approach to development work through reform advocacy. Sidel's overviews of developments and trends in Philippine politics [1] [2] have provided contemporaneous political contextualisation for CfC's reform advocacy campaign work. Overall, his research and writings have framed the opportunities and constraints for reform advocacy within the context of an "oligarchical democracy", in which the complex interplay of private business interests and personal political ambitions require careful mapping and continuous close monitoring [3] [4]. His research has shown the importance of identifying constellations of interests - and building coalitions - stretching across government agencies, congress, business, and civil society in order to overcome resistance to reform from among the political elite and the oligarchy.</p> <p>Since the establishment of CfC in 2012, Sidel has been engaged in an ongoing process of "action research" [5], an in-depth investigation and analysis of individual CfC-sponsored reform initiatives. His research has entailed interviews with government officials, legislators, congressional staffers, NGO activists, and academics in the Philippines, as well as close reading of thousands of pages of internal programme materials, government documents, journalistic reportage, and academic literature. Outputs of this research include a series of in-house reports and formal briefings which have recommended shifts in tactics and strategies in pursuit of various reform agendas. Case studies documenting the processes and outcomes of specific initiatives in land governance reform, addressing school classroom overcrowding, and international airport development have been published both individually in real time and as part of a more substantial account of the action research work [4].</p> <p>Since 2016, one focus of Sidel's research - both within and beyond his work with CfC - has been the politics of transportation and infrastructure in the Philippines. His research began with a careful mapping of the institutional arrangements and economic interests determining the opportunities and constraints for reform in this policy area, deepening with close investigations of government policies on airports, the Public Utility Vehicle Modernization Programme (PUVMP), the growing</p>		

problem of traffic congestion in Metro Manila [6], and the imperative of reorganising public transport amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic of 2020. His research has produced a systematic analysis of the political economy of this policy arena, including the underlying economic and institutional interests entrenched in the urban transport system in Metro Manila, thus providing a coherent framework for understanding the opportunities and constraints facing advocates of transport reform [6].

Beyond its impact on CfC's actual reform advocacy initiatives, Sidel's work has also explicitly argued - and illustrated through example - that the effectiveness and impact of reform advocacy campaigns such as those promoted by CfC can be subjected to rigorous forms of qualitative analysis. His research - using careful process-tracing and counterfactual analysis to establish the precise nature and extent of CfC's role in the making of policy reforms [4] - has shown that promotion of reform advocacy campaigns can lead to effective, impactful policy change in developing countries, but that such campaigns require operational autonomy, technical expertise, and political intelligence, and are highly contingent on the effective navigation of political circumstances. This analysis has yielded three key insights:

- When and where CfC has acted in an autonomous, iterative, adaptive, "opportunistic", and "entrepreneurial" mode, its initiatives have been most innovative and effective.
- When and where its activities have been relegated to a more supportive role, "backstopping" a pre-set reform agenda emanating from outside the programme (e.g. the Philippine government), its work has been far less effective.
- While CfC has been more effective than "traditional" development programmes in achieving policy reforms through autonomous advocacy campaign work, it has also built on the achievements of some such programmes, thus suggesting the potential complementarities and synergies between these two very different modes for development assistance.

Overall, Sidel's research and writings have provided not only a rigorous and richly contextualised systematic comparative analysis of various reform initiatives in the Philippines, but also an analytical framework usable by other programmes designed to promote development through reform advocacy elsewhere across the Global South.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[1] Sidel, J. (2014). The Philippines in 2013: Disappointment, Disgrace, Disaster. *Asian Survey*, 54(1), pp. 64-70. DOI: 10.1525/as.2014.54.1.64.

[2] Sidel, J. (2015). The Philippines in 2014: Aquino Fights Back. *Asian Survey*, 55(1), pp. 220-227. DOI: 10.1525/as.2015.55.1.220.

[3] Sidel, J. (2014). [Achieving Reforms in Oligarchical Democracies: The Role of Leadership and Coalitions in the Philippines](#). Development Leadership Programme Research Paper 27.

[4] Sidel, J. and Faustino, J. (2020). *Thinking and Working Politically: Coalitions for Change in the Philippines*. The Asia Foundation. ISBN: 9789719565260.

[5] O'Keefe, M., Sidel, J., Marquette, H., Roche, C., Hudson, D., and Dasandi, N. (2014). [Using Action Research and Learning for Politically Informed Programming](#). Development Leadership Programme Research Paper 29.

[6] Sidel, J. (2020). Averting "Carmageddon" Through Reform? An Eco-System Analysis of Traffic Congestion and Transport Policy Gridlock in Metro Manila. *Critical Asian Studies*, 52(3), pp. 378-402. DOI: 10.1080/14672715.2020.1793681.

[1] and [2] are articles published in a leading international, peer-reviewed journal. [4] was almost entirely (90%) written by Sidel and subjected to rigorous and extensive peer review, including a 19-page critique by a leading academic specialist on the Philippines at the Australian National University.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Sidel's research has made a significant contribution to the Coalitions for Change programme, firstly by shaping its understanding of the political context of the Philippines and how best to work within it, but also by making decisive interventions in specific programme initiatives. These

initiatives have led to reforms in disaster risk reduction, education, electoral processes, healthcare, land governance, public transportation and infrastructure, and tax policy. Sidel's analysis of the CfC programme has also influenced the approach of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs (DFAT) and Trade and The Asia Foundation (TAF) to development assistance and provided evidence and analysis in support of an innovative approach to development - "thinking and working politically" - of interest to a broader audience of practitioners and policymakers in overseas development agencies and multilateral institutions.

Contributions to successful reform initiatives in the Philippines: CfC, funded by DFAT and undertaken in partnership with TAF, is a AUD68 million programme designed in line with experimental and innovative ideas about "doing development differently" and "thinking and working politically". Instead of providing development assistance to the Philippine government and/or NGOs in pursuit of policy goals, CfC has sponsored a diverse set of advocacy campaigns for reforms across a range of policy areas. These advocacy campaigns have involved the exploration and conceptualisation of the policies themselves, followed by their promotion through the lobbying of government officials and legislators.

Sidel's work with CfC began at the programme's inception in 2012. He was invited by the Australian Embassy and the TAF office in Manila on the basis of his research and writings on Philippine politics [1] [2] and expertise on the context of policy reform in the country. His research and writings on Philippine politics have helped to shape the CfC programme's overall understanding of the political opportunities and obstacles enabling and constraining reform advocacy work at the national and local levels [A] [B] [C] [D].

In 2014, and on the strength of his research and engagement with CfC during those first two years, Sidel was appointed to the Programme Strategic Panel (PSP), set up to robustly interrogate CfC's analysis and progress and advise the executive-level Joint Steering Committee. As a PSP member, he has played a direct role in internal programme decision-making, reviewing concept notes for new initiatives and work/progress reports on ongoing initiatives, and providing extensive comments and recommendations. His accumulated expertise on Philippine politics and his empirical research and analysis was integral to shaping the programme as its work unfolded, including substantive input to tactics, strategies, and programming decisions. The importance of these contributions is confirmed by the Senior Programme Officer of the CfC programme: "*Given Sidel's knowledge of politics, the Philippine context, and Southeast Asian politics, his contributions to the strategic analysis and tactical approaches of CfC were critical*" [A]. Examples of his impact on individual streams of the programme include:

- He conducted an in-depth investigation - through interviews and analysis of documentation - of CRI+D (Coordinating Roads and Infrastructure Investments for Development), an initiative for improving local government decision-making on roads and other infrastructure projects [4]. This investigation identified limitations and loopholes in the design and implementation of CRI+D, most notably the varying input and effectiveness of local chambers of commerce in the provinces and the weak footing of the programme in terms of the national bureaucracy. His analysis helped to push CfC to clarify and strengthen its procedures for local business participation in CRI+D and to institutionalise its reforms within the national government's budgetary processes for funding of infrastructure projects [E].
- He assisted and advised the CfC-supported electoral reform advocacy group LENTE (Legal Network for Truthful Elections) in designing successive research projects as it drove forward the passage of the Electoral Service Reform Act in 2016, drafted implementing rules and regulations for the new law in 2017, and documented its impact over 2018-2019 [4]. The electoral reform legislation improved conditions for the service of public schoolteachers on local boards of election inspectors, reducing their vulnerability to political influence and interference, thus enhancing the quality of the electoral process [F].
- He provided careful analysis of the role of the CfC-backed reform advocacy group Action for Economic Reforms (AER) in the passage of the 2012 landmark "sin tax" reform [3] [4], repeatedly warned against AER lapsing into mere "backstopping" of the Department of Finance (DoF) in promotion of comprehensive tax reform since 2016, and strongly recommended a renewed focus on promotion of higher cigarette taxes to fund the Universal Health Care (UHC) programme [A] [C]. He thus helped to nudge AER to lobby DoF on this

front, leading to government pressure on legislators and passage of a new “sin tax” linked to UHC funding by congress in June 2019, with new revenues estimated at USD800 million as of early 2020 [G].

- He provided strategic advice and analysis to CfC’s Mobility team on urban transport reform initiatives, produced a systemic analysis of the political economy of traffic congestion in Metro Manila [6], and prodded CfC-supported transport reform advocates to rally behind a clear blueprint for the national capital region’s transportation system to meet the challenges of the COVID-19 global pandemic in the spring of 2020. He thus helped CfC in its successful promotion of unprecedented transport reforms - the establishment of a network of bicycle lanes and government service-contracting of buses and jeepneys - by summer 2020, thus providing a basis for safe, socially-distanced public transportation and promoting sustainable solutions to longstanding traffic congestion in the national capital region [A] [D] [H] [I].
- His investigation of CfC’s work in Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago through interviews, participant observation, and analysis of available documentation produced a critique of CfC’s - ill-conceived and ineffectual - activities in support of the peace process in the southern Philippines [4]. This critique helped to convince the programme to cease support for localised conflict resolution efforts and “security sector reform”, and eventually to terminate its broader involvement in this area of policy work, thus allowing the programme to focus on its core areas of strength and success in policy reform.

In addition to these specific and more targeted interventions, Sidel’s research has also underpinned wider CfC efforts which have assisted the passage of new laws, promulgation of new regulations, and introduction and incorporation of new practices, procedures, and processes into the working of the Philippine government [A] [C]. To date, CfC’s achievements in terms of reforms include the following:

- Introducing and institutionalising new bureaucratic procedures and budgetary provisions for addressing overcrowding in public schools [J].
- Introducing and institutionalising new practices and procedures enhancing accessibility of polling places for people with disabilities in elections [F].
- Extension of the Residential Free Patent Act of 2010 to cover public schools and other government building sites, thus enabling titling of these lands and enhancing their security and eligibility for improvement and/or extension [K].
- Passage of the Agricultural Free Patent Reform Law, streamlining and simplifying the bureaucratic procedures for farmers to obtain titles to agricultural land and to engage in agricultural land transactions [K].
- Securing government commitment to Clark International Airport through funding for a new terminal and rail links, thus alleviating air traffic congestion in Metro Manila [L].
- Introduction of new guidelines for Local Road Network Development Plans (LRNDPs) to include more transparent, participatory, and evidence-based procedures for decision-making on investments in local roads and infrastructure, thus enhancing the implementation of local road projects across the Philippines [E].

The Senior Advisor for Program Strategy at The Asia Foundation has attested to the positive impact of the programme: “CfC has achieved dramatic success in a wide range of sectors in the Philippines on reforms previously thought to be politically impossible, and it has done so in each case faster, cheaper, and with greater sustainability than would have been possible using conventional project modalities” [M].

Evidencing the value to programme funders of this mode of development assistance: Sidel’s research and analysis of the CfC programme has also been crucial to the continuation of its funding and to demonstrating its success to DFAT and TAF. He has particularly promoted the preservation and strengthening of those aspects of CfC which represent the most significant departure from traditional development assistance programming. In the 2014 interim review of CfC and the 2017 extension of the programme under “Phase 2”, the argument in favour of continued autonomy and adaptability for CfC won the day. DFAT has continued to support a programme which does not conform to standard bureaucratic procedures for budgeting, programming, monitoring, and evaluation. Sidel’s independent assessments, analysis, and advice have helped to ensure CfC’s extension and enhanced autonomy of operations [A] [B] [M].

Shaping best practice and influencing the design of other international aid programming:

Finally, Sidel's papers and his book [4] have provided the basis for independent documentation and analysis of one of the most experimental and innovative development programmes in the world. Over the past decade, a growing number of practitioners and policymakers in the development sector have become interested in ideas about "doing development differently" and "thinking and working politically" in development. One example is the [Thinking and Working Politically \(TWP\) Community of Practice](#), whose regular meetings and steady stream of communications and publications have included senior representatives from leading development agencies. Another example is the influential *From Poverty to Power* blog of Oxfam Senior Strategic Adviser Duncan Green, which has showcased Sidel's research [N]. The former Assistant Secretary for Governance and Fragility at DFAT describes how the CfC programme "is now cited internationally as one of the best examples of adaptive governance programming within global development practice and is cited regularly by bilateral development donors and multilateral agencies as an example of both innovation and best-practice" [B]. Sidel's book is now being used as a standard text at the Overseas Development Institute and in the United States Agency for International Development [A] [O], while his work on CfC is now informing other international aid programming within multilateral organisations, including the World Bank and agencies of the United Nations [B]. Sidel's research on CfC has thus provided much-needed evidence that support for reform advocacy campaigns can be effective and impactful, and much-needed analysis of the kinds of institutional arrangements, operating procedures, and political circumstances which determine developmental outcomes for reform initiatives such as those sponsored by CfC [B] [M] [O].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[A] Supporting statement from Senior Programme Officer, The Asia Foundation, 14 November 2020.

[B] Supporting statement from former Assistant Secretary for Governance and Fragility, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia, 12 November 2020.

[C] Supporting statement from Coordinator, Action for Economic Reforms, 11 November 2020.

[D] Supporting statement from Co-Convenor, Move Metro Manila, 13 November 2020.

[E] "[Proof for planning: mapping out road investments](#)", CfC Reform Story No. 9, April 2018.

[F] "[Revamping Philippine Election Service](#)", CfC Reform Story No. 7, October 2017.

[G] "'Sin' tax collections almost double to P269.1bn in 2019", Department of Finance, Republic of the Philippines, 21 February 2020.

[H] "[Government sets bike lines, BRT in metro](#)", *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 10 August 2020

[I] "[When the Trains Stopped, Cyclists Dodged Manila's Choking Traffic](#)", *New York Times*, 13 December 2020.

[J] "[Creative development aid modalities: alleviating school congestion in the Philippines](#)", CfC Research Paper Series No. 1, 28 June 2017.

[K] "[Promoting land governance reform in the Philippines, 2000-2017: long-term linkages, legacies, and lessons](#)", CfC Research Paper Series No. 2, 7 September 2017.

[L] "[Cleared for take-off: Coalitions for Change and the development of Clark International Airport](#)", CfC Research Paper Series No. 3, June 2019.

[M] Supporting statement from Senior Advisor for Programme Strategy, The Asia Foundation.

[N] "[What does the evidence tell us about 'thinking and working politically' in development assistance?](#)", *From Poverty to Power*, 2 July 2019. | "[Take-up and Doubt: where have we got to on Thinking and Working Politically?](#)", *From Poverty to Power*, 21 June 2019.

[O] Supporting statement from Senior Research Associate, Overseas Development Institute.