

Summary of Experience

Tourists who enjoy a relaxing tour at the Old Street of Sanxia District in New Taipei City often allocate part of their time to visit Qingshui Zushi Temple, a site with 240-years of history and surrounded by a variety of stores offering fragrant butter croissants. However, inside some of the stores, a small amount of soap selections or coffee stands share rooms with other products. These handmade merchandises and the sales channels are the brainchild of the community – a collective effort to help neighbors with disabilities under a participatory budgeting (PB) plan.

The “Sanxia Experience” marked the world’s first PB process focusing on promoting the employment of disabled persons. The voting rate of this plan reached 14.16 percent, which is much higher than the worldwide average voting rate for PB practices (below 3%). A total of 1,000 individuals (the majority being disabled persons) participated in the Sanxia event. This number accounted for 50 percent of the entire disabled population in the district.

It marked an innovative approach where the New Taipei City government and its leadership endeavored to revitalize local governance by expending civic participation.

Regardless of the government type or the level of economic development, nations around the world have seen a wave of social uprisings during the period between 2010 and 2016. The worldwide social movements began with the Arab Spring revolution in 2010, followed by the Wall Street Occupation in the United States, the Anti-austerity Movement in Spain, the student protest in Myanmar, the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong, and the Sunflower Movements in Taiwan.

The voice made by citizens, especially those belonging to the young generation, has been loud and clear: more democratic participation, greater transparency in governance, and higher-level of social equality. Responding to the pressing need for social reform, government leaders have adopted innovative measures to realize grassroots involvement.

Participatory budgeting (PB) – a reform allowing residents of cities, towns, and districts to decide on the allocation of taxpayers’ money – was first implemented in Brazil in 1989. It has been employed by more than 1,500 cities worldwide. However, it is a comparatively new form of civic engagement for Taiwan.

New Taipei City, the most populous city in Taiwan with 4 million residents, underwent a transformation in city administration after being upgraded as direct-rule municipality. The City government intended to incorporate a deeper and broader extent of public involvement into local governance.

New Taipei City Mayor Dr. Eric Liluan Chu indicated that democracy development in Taiwan has reached a new level and is ready to move a step further. Residents are well-prepared to serve as “public citizens” and handle the responsibility for instituting policies and deciding the priority of public spending.

Sponsored by the City’s congresswoman Chen Yi-jiyun, municipal government agencies joined effort with a young village chief to complete the first PB modeling practice in Taiwan (“Da Guan Village” project) in 2015. Gaining momentum from this pioneering effort and backed by the City’s leadership, the City agencies have been implementing PB for different subjects in various forms. A portion of public budget (ranging from 7,000 to 150,000 dollars) was set aside for PB projects. Areas employing PB initiatives include reducing electricity consumption, renovating school dormitory, organizing cultural activities and establishing community activity centers and social welfare programs.

Among those efforts, one initiative stood out for its role as a special endeavor targeting a population sector which has traditionally been non-participatory and at risk of social exclusion - disabled people.

More than one billion people in the world live with some form of disability. According to the World Report on Disability 2011, despite a variety of mechanisms designed to help disabled job seekers, working-age individuals

with disabilities are still burdened with significant labor market disadvantage when compared to people without disabilities. What causes these supportive programs to be ineffective or less than satisfying?

Yeh Hsin-yi, Assistant Professor at National Taipei University Department of Sociology, indicated that policies designed to assist disabled job seekers lack the opinions from disabled persons themselves. In addition, policies regarding the wellbeing of disabled persons are often decided by members “representing” disabled persons, rather than by the disabled persons themselves.

“Nothing about us, without us” was the main spirit of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) announced and promoted by the UN. New Taipei City government recognized the importance of this principle value. It should be regarded as a fundamental guidance when drafting disability employment policies. Therefore, the City department initiated the PB plan for disabled persons in an effort to overhaul the present employment promotion measures.

The plan was implemented at the Sanxia district. Among the 29 administrative districts in New Taipei City, disabled persons in Sanxia are considered more vulnerable to labor market competition. In fact, the unemployment rate of disabled people in Sanxia reached 6 percent, which is higher than the average disability unemployment rate of the City (5.3%). Second, it lacked government-sponsored vocational rehabilitation center or sheltered workshops. Third, due to the geographic limitation caused by its mountainous terrain (90 percent of the district’s land consists of hills and mountains) and remote location, disabled persons in Sanxia encounters higher barriers when it comes to attending policy discussion events in person. Finally, National Taipei University is situated in the district. There are teachers and students at the university who have the professional ability and enthusiasm to help make this plan work.

The plan officially began in August, 2015. It took eight months to produce 2 proposals. The selected packages are still being implemented at this area. The process consists of four stages : (1) brainstorming (2) making proposals (3) voting, and (4) execution and monitoring. An executive committee was established since the beginning. It comprises 5-7 experts from multiple fields, including budget allocation, PB promoting, community organizers, disability rights protection and local government. Two disabled individuals serve as committee members. The responsibilities of the committee include inspecting the executing progress, helping to produce feasible proposals, and monitoring the realization of selected plans.

Moreover, a large number of discussion sessions took place during the process. It included 3 sessions of town hall meetings (intended for collecting the opinions from disabled persons), 2 workshop sessions introducing PB basics to village chiefs and officers, 1 workshop for training volunteers and students, and numerous occasions for informal opinion exchange organized by community members interested in this plan.

To ensure effective access to disabled persons, the implementation team worked with local social welfare agency to mail all of the introductory and promoting materials – even voting notices – directly to their mailbox. Aside from this, all the information a decision-maker needs to know - including meeting arrangements, proposal contents, voting methods, implementation progress, video of proposal presentation and so forth - were available on the website and facebook page specifically created for information revelation. All the locations and meeting facilities for disabled participants were inspected by volunteer students on wheelchair, ensuring complete obstacle-free environment.

Two projects proposed by local NGOs emerged through the process. These projects offer job training packages and start-up supportive mechanisms, which mainly came from the local store owners.

In conclusion, the “Sanxia experience” of New Taipei City generated job promotion measures for disabled people which are effective and from the grassroots. It reached out to those who have traditionally been non-involved, creating a participative culture which revitalizes community cohesion. In light of the level of participation, which is often considered to be the biggest problem jeopardizing PB execution, this experience indicated that ideal solutions involve pragmatic planning, public-private sector collaboration, and the confidence in civic management.



3/21 記者會公布 2 個獲選方案

New Taipei City Mayor Dr. Eric Liluan Chu unveiled two most voted proposals during a press conference on March 21, 2016.



Coffee stand at Sanxia Indigo Dyeing Center where persons with disabilities serves as barista after they completed the vocational rehabilitating lesson under the PB initiative.



A promotion event for the soap selections made by persons with disabilities after they completed the vocational rehabilitating lesson under the PB initiative.