

**Towards Greater
Local Democratic Governance:
A View from the Philippines**

Alex B. Brillantes Jr. and Wilhelmina L. Cabo
*Professor and Dean and Assistant Professor, respectively,
of the National College of Public Administration
and Governance, University of the Philippines
Republic of the Philippines*

Towards Greater Local Democratic Governance: A View from the Philippines

Introduction

Five years after the historic and jubilant EDSA people power revolution, another revolution begun to take shape, quietly this time, in the landscape of Philippine politics and governance. The revolution swept across the country from one end to the other, from the smallest *barangay* (village) to municipalities, cities and provinces. It can be said to have harkened the voice of the EDSA people power because its essence breathed life to small democracies in urban and rural communities so the people can directly take part in the making of public decisions that affect their life. It continues to take place in many parts of the country to this day in the form of the Local Government Code, that was passed by Congress in 1991 and was considered by many as a revolutionary piece of legislation and one of the most significant accomplishments of the Aquino administration. It not only altered the balance of power between the national government and the local government but also the Code was perhaps more significant in laying the enabling framework and environment for local empowerment and democratic governance to take roots in thousands of communities around the country.

Local governments essentially are the bedrock of Philippine democracy. Physically close to the grassroots, they serve as access points of citizens in having their voices heard and acted upon. Local governments play a significant role in the far flung and isolated areas of the country since they are the links in the chain of governance that are in direct contact with the people. Their role as frontline institutions is even more crucial in an archipelagic country like the Philippines that is composed of more than 7000 islands. Thus for many people, local governments are THE government.

What also animate local governance today are the ubiquitous civil society organizations particularly the non-government organizations (NGOs) and people's organizations (POs) that engage the citizens and local governments in many aspects of local governance. These organizations have given voice to the many problems and aspirations of the common people. Their presence has been felt in many aspects of community governance — in urban housing, livelihood projects, capacity building, health, development planning and other local concerns. And where government appears ineffective or unresponsive, NGOs and POs are thrust to somehow fill the gap.

Thus, when one speaks of decentralized governance and empowerment in the country today, the talk will include not only how most local governments have taken full advantage of the greater powers and resources offered by the Code but

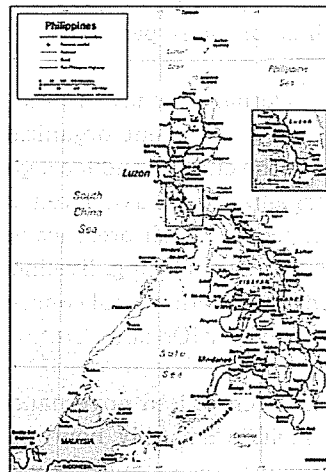
also how civil society organizations have acted as complementary, supplementary or even alternative institutions for governance at the local level.

This paper discusses local governance in the Philippines in the context of broadened engagement of civil society organizations, more specifically the non-government organizations and people's organizations. It proceeds to tackle this topic in this manner. This section introduces the topic. The second section describes the national setting in which the exciting developments at the local level are unfurling after which the historical sketch and overview of local governments in the Philippines is discussed. The basic features of the Code are tackled in the fourth part of the presentation. The fifth section focuses on participation of NGOs and POs in local governance. Two caselets are included in this section as examples of NGO engagement in local governance. The paper concludes with a discussion of the issues and challenges that face civil society organizations as they strive to contribute to the creation of vibrant small democracies and promote the well-being of the people.

I. The National Context

Comprising of 7,107 islands and a land area of 300,000 square kilometers, the Philippines is one of the largest island groups in the world. Stretching from the south of China Sea to the northern tip of Borneo, its coastline of 34,640 kilometers is longer than that of Great Britain and more than twice the length of the United States coastline. It lies south-east of Asia continent directly below Taiwan, surrounded by the waters of South China Sea in the west, the Pacific Ocean in the east, Sulu and Celebes Sea in the south, and the Basli Channel in the north. The Philippines is the third largest English-speaking country in the world and has over a hundred ethnic groups and a mixture of foreign influences that had shaped a distinct Filipino culture. In 2000, it had a population of 76,504,077 and 2005 estimates place it at 85,236,913. The latest (1994) figure of national literacy rate is 93.9%.

Map of the Philippines



The Philippines is a democratic and republican state where sovereignty resides in the people and all government authority emanates from them. It is a unitary state with a presidential form of government. The government operates through its three independent and co-equal departments — the executive, legislature and judiciary. Regular elections are held to elect officials at the national down to local levels.

The Philippines is politically and geographically subdivided into provinces, cities, municipalities and *barangays* which are scattered across its three big island groups, Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. During the martial law period, administrative regions composed of these subdivisions were created in line with the government's administrative reform to decentralize national government. From an initial number of 13, the regions grew to 16 to date. Among others, the reform was characterized by the establishment of field offices of national government agencies at the regional, provincial, city and municipal levels ostensibly to reduce red tape and speed up the provision of public services, address regional disparities and facilitate regional growth and development.

II. A Historical Sketch of Philippine Local Governments

Local governments in the Philippines did not come about until the country was conquered and subjugated by Spanish forces in 1521. Before then, it was an archipelago of small nation states called *barangays* (villages). The *barangays* were small independent communities with a simple governing system headed by a *datu*, who was assisted by a council of elders in looking after the affairs of the community. In the southern part of the country, a more elaborate structure of sultanate system existed. The conquest of the country by the Spanish forces saw the superimposition of a central government over these independent small communities, in the process forced a nation into being.

The rulers later grouped and organized these *barangays* into towns, cities and provinces to suit colonial objectives and integrated them in a highly centralized government that was run from Manila. Historical accounts tell us that the conquerors were less successful in making headways in the south where they were fiercely rebuffed by the native Muslims.

The Americans who took over in early 1900s maintained the set-up as a convenient controlling mechanism over their new colony. These local units were retained in the Philippine Constitutions (1935, 1973 and 1987) as the platform for structuring local governments in the country. The Malolos Constitution produced by the Filipino *katipuneros* (revolutionaries) during the Philippine–Spain war in the late 18th century also used these divisions as the core units of the budding republic.

Four subdivisions comprise the local governments in the country today. These are the provinces, cities, municipalities and *barangays*. Democratically elected officials govern these local units. The Philippine Congress creates, merges or abolishes provinces, cities and municipalities, subject to certain criteria. The Local Government Code accordingly allocates the powers, functions and resources to each of these units. When regarded as a hierarchy, Philippine local governments consist of three

tiers. At the top is the province. The second level consists of the cities and municipalities while the *barangays* form the lowest tier. As of March 2005, the Philippines has 79 provinces, 117 cities, 1,500 municipalities and 41, 975 *barangays*. The province is the largest unit. It is composed of municipalities and in some cases includes component cities. Given their vantage position, provinces perform developmental and coordinative functions and services that benefit the component municipalities. They can significantly address, for instance, comparative advantage and equity issues in implementing development programs for the province. To a certain extent, provinces exercise general supervision over their component municipalities and

Table 1 Number of Local Government Units by Island Groups and Regions

Group/Region	Provinces	Cities	Municipalities	Barangays
Luzon				
NCR		13	4	1,693
CAR	6	1	76	1,176
I	4	8	117	3,265
II	5	3	90	2,311
III	7	12	118	3,102
IV-A	5	11	132	4,012
IV-B	5	2	71	1,457
V	6	7	107	3,471
Subtotal	38	57	715	20,487
Visayas				
VI	6	16	117	4,050
VII	4	12	120	3,003
VIII	6	4	139	4,390
Subtotal	16	32	376	11,443
Mindanao				
IX	3	5	67	1,903
X	5	8	85	2,020
XI	4	5	43	1,160
XII	4	5	45	1,194
CARAGA	4	3	70	1,308
ARMM	5	1	99	2,459
Subtotal	25	27	409	10,044
Total	79	116	1,500	41,974

The statistical data in the table were assembled from various Philippine official sources.

cities.

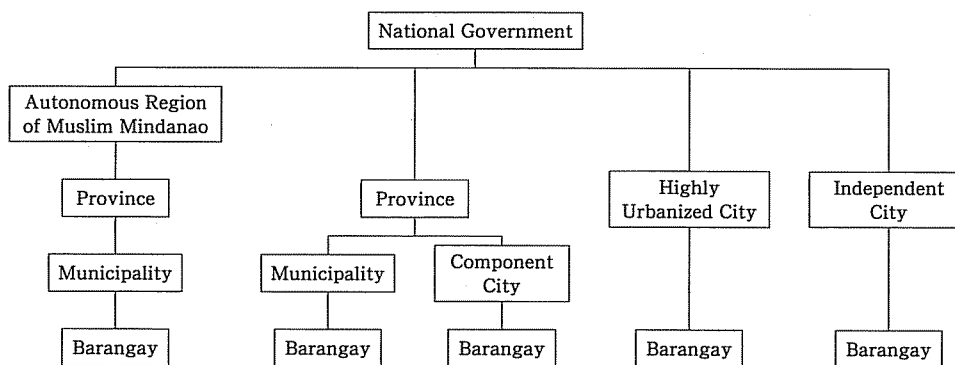
The cities and municipalities are the units that directly provide generally all basic services to the residents in the community. Primary health care, lighting of the streets, collection and disposal of waste and garbage, health and maternal care, construction of local roads and other local infrastructures, local parks, and operation of public markets are but a few of the basic services that cities and municipalities provide.

Cities in the Philippines are further classified as component, independent and highly urbanized. The component cities are administratively supervised by the province that has territorial jurisdiction over them and their residents vote for the provincial officials. On the other hand, the independent and highly urbanized cities are independent of the province and their residents do not vote for the provincial officials. Otherwise, all cities perform the functions and services provided by the province and municipality. This means that cities have broader responsibilities and powers, compared to provinces.

The smallest units are the *barangays* or villages. They comprise the cities and municipalities. Being the smallest units, *barangays* have residual powers only and these are performed in support of the services that their mother units provide. For instance, *barangays* are assigned to assist in the distribution of planting materials, maintain *barangay* health center and day care center and other infrastructure facilities within their community.

Local governments are also classified according to their income. The income classification serves as basis for fixing the maximum tax ceilings that local governments may impose. It is also used as basis for determining administrative and statutory aids, financial grants and other forms of assistance to local governments. The implementation of salary laws and administrative issuances on allowances and emoluments that local government officials and personnel may be entitled to also uses this classification.

The President has general supervision over local governments. In practice the responsibility to supervise is delegated to the Department of Interior and Local Government. In the southern part of the country where the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao exists, the regional government acts as the direct superintending authority over the local governments instead of the President. In Metro Manila, there is the Metro Manila Development Authority but it serves as an administrative agency whose mandate is to take care of specific metro-wide public services like garbage disposal, flood control, traffic management, and metro-wide physical planning. These activities have to be coordinated however with the local government units comprising the metropolis. While the highest policymaking body of Metro Manila Development Authority is composed of the local chief executives of the metropolitan units, the Authority does not have political or administrative control over them. Unlike in the autonomous region where the component units are under the supervision of the regional government, it is not the case in Metro Manila. It is still the President through the Department of Interior and Local Government that has direct general supervision over these metropolitan local governments.

Figure 1 Local Government Structure in the Philippines

In general, the powers and functions of local governments range from the provision of basic services and facilities to revenue generation, regulatory functions and other governmental and corporate powers. Their powers and functions include levying and collecting fees, taxes and other impositions, budgeting, development planning, land use planning, enacting and implementing ordinances, enforcement of building code, reclassification of agricultural lands, regulation of real estate trade, and provision of basic services, facilities and infrastructure within their jurisdictions. These include, among others, primary health care, social welfare, garbage collection and disposal, extension services, provincial and city hospitals, health centers, markets, waterworks, slaughterhouses, sewerage and drainage, roads and bridges, and parks.

III. Laying the Ground for Democratic Local Governance

The long history of centralized administration in the hands of the invaders which continued even after political independence was gained in 1946 had shaped the character of local governments in the country and their relation to the national government. Undeniably, local governments were given incremental authorities and resources over time to manage local affairs. Direction towards decentralization was in fact discernible in the 50s and 60s. Yet for the most part, local governments tended to be submissive to and dependent on national government especially for fiscal resources. And the nearly two decades of dictatorial rule further deepened local government acquiescence to the higher authority particularly the President. Parenthetically, national politicians relied upon local political leaders for their electoral victories. But beyond this, the balance of relationship tipped towards the central government. National government continued to hold sway over local governments through issuances and guidelines on particular local functions and activities.

The enactment of the Code in 1991 was a significant development welcomed by local governments and local autonomy advocates including those who are engaged in grassroots development initiatives, not the least of which are civil society organizations such as non-government organizations and people's organizations. Decen-

tralization was one of the democratization thrusts of the post-EDSA government under Aquino and the passage of the Code became the centerpiece of this decentralization policy. It may be argued that the Code was not only a corrective measure to a long history of centralization that governed central-local relations in the country but also it echoes the struggle of social movements, NGOs and people's organizations for genuine people empowerment during the dark days of martial law.

Expanded Governance Framework

The Code is monumental in that in one fell swoop, it vested local governments with ample powers and resources that enable them to explore and exploit the substance of devolution and local autonomy. Apart from consolidating all laws pertinent to local government, which is an achievement by itself, the Code is significant in a number of ways.

The Code devolves to local government units the responsibility for delivery of certain basic services that earlier were provided by the national government agencies. These basic services include the following: health (field health and hospital services and other tertiary services); social services (social welfare services); environment (community based forestry projects), agriculture (agricultural extension and on-site research); public works (funded by local funds); education (school building program); tourism (facilities, promotion and development); telecommunications services and housing projects (for provinces and cities).

It should be noted that devolution involved only certain aspects of the concerned services and these are generally the services that are deemed essential and within the capacity of the local governments to provide. And even the distribution of devolved functions among the local government units varies such that the more complex and expensive services are assigned to higher levels. In the case of health services, for instance, the *barangays* take charge of the upkeep of health centers, the municipalities are responsible for primary health care, maternal and child care and communicable and non-communicable disease control services and the provinces manage and operate hospitals and tertiary health services. The cities provide the services performed by both municipalities and provinces.

These new responsibilities could have been daunting for local governments especially those with limited financial capacity. The case of health service in particular is worth mentioning. Its implementation met some setback as some provinces found the hospitals too costly to maintain. There were efforts from health workers to return the responsibility to the national health department but these did not succeed as then President Ramos promptly vetoed the Congressional bill recentralizing health.

The Code has prepared for these potential difficulties by increasing the local government share in the national internal revenue collections. From 11%, the internal revenue allotments (IRA) were increased to 40%. Since 1991, the IRA shares of the local governments have increased significantly in absolute values from 9.4 billion pesos in 1991 to an estimated 141 billion pesos in 2003. But as a percentage of the total national budget, the IRA share is miniscule, ranging from about 7% in 1992 to

14% in 1997.

Not only was the transfer of functions matched by increased funds, the national government personnel who performed the devolved functions were also transferred to the local units and the movement initially involved more than 70,000 personnel. Most of these personnel were residents anyway in their respective work assignments and so physical dislocation was minimized. The transfer also included the attendant personal costs outside of the allocations that went to the direct cost of providing the devolved functions. This meant that the devolved personnel were assured of their salaries.

Through these "safety nets" the financial apprehensions that were encountered in the initial years of implementing the Code were overcome. The Local Development Assistance Program reported that by 1993, all cities and municipalities received more than what it actually cost them in delivering the devolved services. Even provinces which initially suffered negative net transfers owing to heavy costs of maintaining devolved hospitals eventually caught up such that by 1995 and 1996, all local government units were experiencing substantially increased resources (Rood: 1998).

The Code has also enhanced local government financial capacity in a number of ways. Aside from increased IRA, local governments now enjoy broadened taxing and other revenue raising powers in terms, for example, of increased tax rates and greater elbow room for imposition of fees and charges. A new source of income has also been included in the form of share in the proceeds from the development and utilization of national wealth located within the territorial jurisdiction of the local units concerned. They are also given share from the income of government-owned or controlled corporations that are operating within their respective areas.

Also, local governments are now authorized to float bonds and enter into build-operate-transfer agreements with the private sector as a way of sourcing local projects. A number of local governments have actually used this scheme to finance their projects such as public market and housing. They can also access foreign and local grants directly and secure loans from domestic sources without need for prior approval of higher authority, unless in instances that involve national security.

Certain regulatory powers have also been devolved to the local governments. The more significant ones include the power to reclassify agricultural lands subject to certain requirements and the power to approve housing subdivision plans.

Beyond the powers that have been specified by the Code, local governments have the opportunity to further flex their authority. This is found in the General Welfare Provision which says that:

Every local government shall exercise the powers expressly granted, those necessarily implied therefrom, as well as powers necessary, appropriate, or incidental for its efficient and effective governance, and those which are essential to the promotion of the general welfare. Within their respective territorial jurisdiction, local government units shall ensure and support, among other things, the preservation and enrichment of culture, promote health and safety, enhance the

right of the people to a balanced ecology, encourage and support the development of appropriate and self-reliant scientific and technological capabilities, improve public morals, enhance economic prosperity and social justice, promote full employment among their residents, maintain peace and order, and preserve the comfort and convenience of their inhabitants (Sec. 16).

This provision finds a strong ally in the Rules of Interpretation:

The general welfare provisions, any provision on the powers of an LGU, and any question regarding the devolution of powers shall be *liberally interpreted and resolved* in favor of the LGU. Any fair and reasonable doubt on the powers of LGUs shall be *liberally interpreted and resolved* in favor of the local government unit concerned (Sec. 5a).

The general welfare provisions in this Code shall be liberally interpreted to *give more powers* to local government units in accelerating economic development and upgrading the quality of life for the people in the community (Sec. 5c).

While others may find limiting the Code's specifications of what local governments should be able to do, though these may be seen, too, as a guarantee that no less than the minimum level of services should be provided to the people, the General Welfare Provision clause tries to balance that and with ample support from the Rules of Interpretation. For all intents and purposes, these twin provisions afford local governments greater latitude to flesh out and maximize the meaning and substance of local autonomy in pursuit of public good. These give them greater space to explore creative strategies that will contribute toward a responsive and accountable government. They can practically do whatever they deem is beneficial for their constituencies, limited only by expressed prohibition of law.

This is really an exciting challenge to local governments. They can demonstrate their mettle and creativity in pushing the limits of local empowerment and breaking new grounds as they fulfill their mandate to their constituents and secure a better life for all.

Democratic Impetus

The spirit of devolution ushered in by the Code goes beyond the transfer of powers and functions or the broadening of fiscal resources. A revolutionary provision that is making profound changes in the way local affairs are managed is the institutionalization of mechanisms in the legal-political framework that encourage and promote direct participation of the people in governance process. One writer noted that in all of Southeast Asia, it is the Philippines that has created a "most supportive statutory environment for local participation" via the Code (George in Sillman and Noble: 1998, p. 223). On this aspect, the Code indeed offers many entry points for the involvement of citizens in local governance.

The importance attached to citizen participation and civil society organizations

such as the non-government organizations (NGOs) and people's organizations (POs) is quite obvious in that a whole chapter (Chapter 3 under Title I) in the Code is devoted to how this sector can be involved in the governance structures and processes. This is not to mention that other provisions such as those found in Recall (Title Chapter 5), Local Initiative and Referendum (Title IX Chapter 2) and Local Special Bodies (Title IV to Title VII) and sectoral representation in the local council from the women, workers, and marginalized group open up opportunities for people participation in local governance.

The Code urges local governments to "promote the establishment and operation of people's organizations, NGOs and the private sector, to make them active partners in the pursuit of local autonomy" (Section 31). To give flesh to this intention, the Code has necessitated the membership of NGOs and POs, after due accreditation, in the various local special bodies. This is significant because membership in these bodies would allow the sector to substantially participate in formulating, planning, implementing and evaluating local policies and programs. To the extent that the NGOs and people's organizations can meaningfully affect the content and implementation of public decisions through these local bodies in a way that respond to the sector's interest and public welfare issues, democratization and local empowerment will indeed be significantly realized.

For instance, the local development council reserves at least one-fourth of its total membership to NGO representatives. This is an important body for it sets the direction of social and economic development of the area and decides on the priority programs and projects that the local government will undertake. However, reports that some councils have not convened or, if at all, have met only rarely, the opportunity to participate in this important body cannot just be ignored.

Another vital body is the prequalification, bids and awards committee. This is a powerful committee for it evaluates and recommends public tenders for local infrastructure projects. This is an area where NGOs and POs can contribute in making administrative processes fair, transparent and accountable. Other local bodies where the NGOs and POs are represented are the local school board, local health board and the local peace and order council. The school board is particularly significant for it has power of the purse that it can use to fund education projects. This budgetary power comes from the special education fund which is an automatic allocation from the proceeds of special levy on real property. The board determines what projects to support under this fund and authorizes fund releases, subject to the usual auditing rules and regulations.

It is worth noting, too, that apart from participation in processes, financial assistance and other forms of incentives await the NGOs/POs when they undertake economic, social, environmental and cultural projects in the community. These incentives are given in the form of local tax exemptions, tax relief and other forms of schemes. This is a laudable provision. It is common knowledge that NGOs and people's organizations are non-profit non-earning entities usually dependent on donor funds or other external contributions. Thus, any form of assistance, financial or otherwise, that will support their involvement in local activities will encourage

and promote participation.

Truly, the Code can be said to be one of the very first, if not the first, Philippine laws that explicitly gives flesh to people participation in governance. People participation particularly in government programs and projects is not entirely new in the Philippines. But its practice was more contingent on the principles and attitudes espoused by the programs and its implementors and which oftentimes tilted towards tokenism especially during martial rule.

The recognition of the NGOs' and POs' political and developmental role reflects the state's acknowledgement of the meaningful contribution that this sector can bring to the whole process of governance and development. Some quarters add that it is also an indication of government's incapacity to perform its functions so NGOs are needed to fill in the gap left by the government. The entry of NGOs and POs in the local scene is also viewed as a way of checking against possible capture by local elite of their enhanced power and resources that result from devolution. Whatever the reasons, the Code creates tremendous opportunities for expanded democratic governance to take root and thus should be taken advantage of in a meaningful and responsible way. It is a learning opportunity for the local government and the NGOs/POs as they dialogue, argue, negotiate, agree and collaborate on issues affecting the community and the people.

IV. Engaging the Non-government Organizations and People's Organizations in Local Governance

This section looks at the involvement of NGOs and people's organizations (POs) in local governance as spurred by the implementation of the Code. This will be done by a limited review of the literature on the NGO/PO participation in local governance and presentation of two caselets. The caselets are included as examples of NGO/PO and local government interactions that are increasingly taking place in many parts of the country.

But before discussing this topic further, some clarifications of the terms NGOs and POs as these are generally understood in the Philippine setting will be made. A brief historical sketch of their origins will also be presented to contextualize their development within the changing socio-political environment in the country.

Though fewer then in number compared to today, non-government organizations in the country started to gain wider recognition in the 70s during martial law as they tried to respond to people's needs, especially the poor, that government failed to meet either through sheer neglect or ineptitude. The NGO antecedents had, of course, been in existence in the country as far back as colonial times though their orientation was more towards charity or philanthropic work and they were invariably called charitable institutions and social welfare agencies (Carino: 2003; David: 1998).

Not only were the NGOs recognized for their socio-economic development activities at the grassroots level. Their political role has also been significant in their efforts to link people's voice to government policy agenda through advocacy and to

build people's capacity through the founding of people's organizations that can stand and act on their own behalf. It is the combination of these activities that they do for people and community that distinguish them as "development NGOs" or non-government development organizations (NGDO) or what David (1998) calls "genuine" NGOs.

These efforts did not, for sure, take place in a convivial atmosphere as NGOs were often the object of government's suspicion of undermining the martial law government, imputing them with labels like "activists," "subversives," "communists," or "leftists." On hindsight, it is perhaps this repressive environment that also stimulated the growth and tenacity of NGOs in the country that by the time the EDSA people revolt occurred in 1986, their place in development and political advocacy was already firmly rooted and recognized in local and national community. The NGOs and POs undoubtedly were a critical component of the social movements that peacefully (read: without bloodshed) overthrew the authoritarian regime in 1986. The provisions in the post-EDSA Constitution and Local Government Code enshrining their role and participation in government and development are thus affirmation of the important role this element of civil society has played and continuously play in Philippine society and politics. Today, NGOs and POs enjoy a stature fully recognized in Philippine legal and policy frameworks and in the development community here and abroad. No less than the 1987 Constitution provides that "The State shall encourage nongovernmental, community-based, or sectoral organizations that promote the welfare of the nation."

They are officially recognized as partners of government in development activities. The NGO literature often cites the Philippines as a country that has the most vibrant NGO community and the highest per capita NGO in this part of the world. They are active elements of contemporary civil society in the Philippines.

But how are NGOs delineated and generally understood in the Philippine context? The Philippine government, through the National Economic and Development Authority which is the government's central planning agency, officially defines NGOs as non-profit, voluntary organizations that are committed to the task of socio-economic developments and established primarily for service. Such service may involve assisting citizens or people's organizations in various ways by educating, training, or giving financial assistance to them (NEDA: 1993).

One may note that the legal definition confines the role of NGOs as service providers in the area of social and economic development and skirts their more political role that they have historically played in the 70s and 80s. This character of the NGO is too important to be missed for it is salient to the experience in democratic governance that is evolving today at both the national and local level.

The usage of NGOs in the Philippines refers to private, non-profit, voluntary organizations engaged in development work that benefits the poor and marginalized. They are intermediary organizations between the people and government. They speak for or on behalf of the poor and marginalized without necessarily being part of the group or being members of the communities they serve (Carino: 2003; Aldaba: 1993). As intermediaries between the citizens and state, NGOs may be

further distinguished as either grassroots support organizations or complex structures of networks, coalitions or taskforces (Silliman and Noble: 1998). These two form the second and third level, respectively, of the three-tiered NGO system that Silliman and Noble had devised to describe Philippine NGOs.

Some NGOs have the distinction of being advocacy groups for specific issues or causes such as the Freedom from Debt Coalition, Haribon Foundation and Task Force Detainees of the Philippines. Still, there are NGOs that started as such then eventually became sectoral political parties by virtue of their participation in electoral politics, though they continue to preserve their NGO roots.

NGOs and POs in the Philippines are increasingly differentiated according to their functions and membership (Carino: 2003; Aldaba: 1993). Thus, there are NGOs that have community organizing as its major function and others are involved in training, education and information, participatory research, economic livelihood and other activities. They may also be identified according to the sector that they focus on such as environment, coastal resource management, housing, agriculture, health, appropriate technology, education, and other sectors.

People's organizations, on the other hand, are community-based composed of community members who have banded together in pursuit of their common interests and welfare. They correspond to the first level called grassroots organizations in Silliman's and Noble's configuration of Philippine NGO community. POs come from a broad spectrum of sectoral groupings that encompass farmers, fisherfolks, women, urban poor, drivers, workers in the formal and informal sector, and similar groups. These groups are also called the basic sectors, which, under the Social Reform and Poverty Alleviation Program of the national government are also the disadvantaged sector of Philippine society. The cooperatives composed of community members are also considered part of this group.

By Buendia's account (cited in Carino: 2003), there were about 71,034 POs in the country between 1987 and 1999 that were accredited by government agencies, though overlaps may not be discounted due to multiple registration with different agencies. The POs embrace rural workers' associations, associations of agrarian reform beneficiaries, women's organizations, fisherfolks organizations, indigenous people's councils, urban poor organizations, trade unions, working women organizations, etc.

Like the NGOs, there are POs that also advocate particular causes and convictions. Whether the first or second type, POs represents themselves and are bound by their collective mission and purpose. This is clearly the intention of the 1987 Constitution when it defined people's organizations as "*bona fide* associations of citizens with demonstrated capacity to promote the public interest and with identifiable leadership, membership, and structure" (Sec. 15).

The importance of people's organizations in democratic governance resonates in the Constitution. Section 15 is unequivocal in calling upon the State to "respect the role of independent people's organizations to pursue and protect, within the democratic framework, their legitimate and collective interests and aspirations through peaceful and lawful means." It also enshrines their right to effective and reasonable

participation at all levels of social, political and economic decision-making and for this purpose, calls upon the State to pass laws that will facilitate the creation of adequate consultation mechanisms.

It is more than a decade now since the Code was implemented in 1992. How has the landscape of local governance, politics and development evolved given the NGO-PO friendly governance framework?

It may be said that local governance in the Philippines has never been the same since then, if only to take account of the veritable presence of civil society organizations in the thousands of local government units around the country. It depicts diverse experiences of engagement between local government and citizens and civil society organizations as they come and work together to chart their destiny. Many of these experiences provide inspiration and valuable lessons and insights for the deepening of democracy in the country.

The NGOs and POs participate in myriad ways in governance and development process at the grassroots level. They are involved in community organization which often is their major strength and which they are popularly known for since martial law years. George (1998) points out in his case study of four Philippine municipalities that community organizing has significantly contributed to the effective participation of the poor in local politics. Community organizing built the confidence, trust and solidarity of the people to collectively undertake economic projects and pursue political advocacies. The importance of community organizing by NGOs and POs was also noted in preparing communities to participate more meaningfully in government-initiated projects (Bautista: 1999)

It is not uncommon to find that NGOs and POs working at the grassroots level establish linkages with other entities. Linkage building is a source of strength of NGO work for a number of reasons. It provides alliance and solidarity for the various development and advocacy efforts they do. It is also a way of tapping and mobilizing funding support for their activities. In an analysis of politics and participation in four municipalities, George (1998) observed that the most successful NGOs and POs were those that had established partnerships with local and Manila-based NGOs, government officials who were receptive to their ideas and PO federations. The alliances enhanced the public image and resources of NGOs and POs.

In tandem with the POs, many NGOs also act as policy advocates in making demands on local government, as one of the two caselets below show. Others act as channels of funds from external donors to POs to support their projects. They also provide link to networks and alliances at higher levels of the NGO community (Sillman and Noble: 1998).

In engaging the local governments, the NGOs and POs facilitate the process of regime reorientation from a patrimonial to developmental state (George: 1998). As local governments work with civil society to tackle the social, political and economic issues in the community, the government is itself strengthened through a development of a pro-active stance in development and good governance.

The review done by Aldaba (1993) showed that NGOs and POs are engaged in practically every aspect of development. They have projects dealing with various

sectoral concerns. They are involved in health service delivery, environmental management, integrated area development, housing and infrastructure, local government capacity building, local government planning and fiscal management, disaster relief operations and gender-related concerns. Many NGOs organize and support cooperatives and small-scale economic activities to assist the poor raise their economic status and improve their well-being. They are harbingers of development that is more participatory and more inclusive. It is interesting to note that in the cases reviewed by Aldaba, NGO engagement in these activities is done mostly in partnership with the local government.

What is equally interesting is the pattern that is discerned in the Galing Pook Awards (literally, Community Excellence Awards). This is an awards program run by, an NGO, the Galing Pook Foundation in partnership with the Local Government Academy of the Department of Interior and Local Government and Ford Foundation. The program recognizes outstanding projects implemented by local government units. Many of the recipients received their awards for projects that they had implemented in collaboration with the citizens, NGOs and POs in their community. The awards were for wide-ranging projects such as ecotourism, social awareness, gender sensitivity, children's welfare, integrated area development, livelihood, health, agriculture, peace and security, and the list goes on. These experiences suggest that not only has local governance been enhanced by the participation of civil society organizations, they also demonstrate that successful partnerships can develop between the NGOs and POs to address common objectives.

At this point, two caselets will be presented to show examples of how NGO and PO participation is beginning to transform old habits of governance at the local level to one that is participatory and inclusive. The first case is about advocacy for coastal resource management and the second case is on engagement of the urban poor with the city government for pro-poor policies and programs.

Case No. 1

Prieto Diaz is a small fishing municipality in the province of Sorsogon at the far end of Luzon island. A local priest had earlier helped organize a people's organization composed of small fishermen, the Samahan ng Maliliit na Mangingisda sa Muntopar (SAMAMAMU). The name literally means association of small fishermen of Muntopar.

The priest had invited Tambuyog, a development NGO to assist the area and continue on the organizing work he had started. (Tambuyog is a local word and literally means water buffalo's horn. In olden times, horns are used by town criers to announce public meetings. As used by Tambuyog, the horn symbolizes the call for unity.)

In 1994, Tambuyog chose the municipality as a site for its project on sustainable coastal area development or SCAD. The project was an integrated approach to building community-based coastal resource management and used research, training and education, organizational development, gender development and advocacy as strategies. Tambuyog had already experience in capacity building for environmental management in previous projects. The NGO chose SAMAMAMU as its main partner in implementing SCAD in the municipality.

A long series of community organizing work — group self-assessment, teambuilding, meet-

ings, community assemblies and discussions, information gathering and situational analysis through participatory research, training PO leaders, dialogues with stakeholders, transforming the organization into a cooperative to make it sustainable, lobbying with local officials, — were carried out to capacitate and mobilize the people for coastal resource management. One concrete output of the collaboration and advocacy work of Tambuyog and SAMAMAMU was the crafting of a bottoms-up community-owned five-year development plan for SCAD. The advocacy and mobilization done by Tambuyog and SAMAMAMU included not only lobbying with local officials and dialoguing with key stakeholders but also campaigning, particularly by SAMAMAMU, during the 1995 elections for the incumbent mayor and other candidates sympathetic to the fishermen's cause. Their electoral support for the winning candidates accorded them some influence in local decision-making.

While these organizing efforts were taking place, the national agency Department of Environment and Natural Resources had a national project called Coastal Environment Project (CEP). The implementation of the project in Prieto Diaz was contracted out to FDFI (not spelled out in the original case). FDFI formulated its own version of coastal management plan for the municipality which SAMAMAMU objected to because it did not benefit from the same intensive consultation process that their own plan went through. There were also provisions in the plan that the fisher folks considered not feasible or unacceptable. All these objections anyway were articulated during the public presentation (in a workshop) of the CEP plan. The FDFI had to revise their first draft based on the workshop's discussions.

At the municipal level, Tambuyog and SAMAMAMU lobbied with local authorities for a more comprehensive review and discussion of the local policy framework on coastal management. The outcome of this advocacy was the creation of an inter-agency and multi-sectoral task force that would be responsible for reviewing and enforcing the municipal fishery code. The task force was also in-charge of formulating and implementing the municipality's coastal resource management plan. Tambuyog and SAMAMAMU became members of the group. The membership of Tambuyog and SAMAMAMU in the task force gave them a venue through which they were able to effectively advocate the inclusion of issues affecting the fishermen in the task force deliberations. It was also through their advocacy that the people's SCAD five-year plan was integrated in the final version of the municipal coastal management plan.

Ultimately, the plan was a fusion of the SCAD and CEP management plans.

This summary was adapted from a case study prepared by Quirino L. Dela Cruz and Rizalito Lopez (See reference list for complete bibliographic entry.)

Case No. 2

The Naga City Urban Poor Federation (NCUPF), a coalition of urban poor people's organizations, started with a group of urban poor residents who decided to come together one day to confront the many issues affecting the sector. From a succession of meetings, consultations and organizing among the urban poor across the different *barangays* (villages) in the city was formed an ad hoc body representing nine urban poor communities that later on would become the NCUPF.

In the first three years of its existence beginning August of 1986, NCUPF activities focused on participating in discussions and community organizing around issues that were national in character, though some of these had direct implications on them as a sector. These issues concerned the plebiscite on the 1987 Constitution, the proposed Urban Development and Housing Act, and the implementation of the community mortgage program.

When the newly installed President Aquino visited the city, the group presented their demand for the creation of local and national offices for the urban poor. It was by engaging in these political activities and analyzing the pro-urban poor provisions of the Constitution and the urban poor reform bill that they realized the importance of participating in the local policymaking process.

In 1989, the NCUPF successfully initiated the adoption of the community mortgage program by the city government and the creation of the Urban Poor Affairs Office. As of 1997, NCUPF was comprised of 59 local organizations and a member of the Bicol Urban Poor Coordinating Council. It has three representatives in the Urban Development and Housing Board. It is a member of the People's Council which sits in the local development council as member.

The NCUPF had used a variety of methods to make the local government listen to them and act on their demands. These included holding regular meetings and consultations among themselves to discuss their problems and actions, attending government-initiated fora on issues that directly concerned them, writing petitions to stop evictions, lobbying and initiating dialogues and negotiations with local authorities.

They also used election forums to compel candidates to support in writing urban poor programs. They also sought the legislative support of council members who were sympathetic to their cause.

The advocacy and organizing activities of the NCUPF have resulted in the implementation of pro-poor policies and ordinances in Naga City. Foremost of these were the resolution of land tenure problem of the urban poor, provision of basic services to the urban poor communities, cessation of arbitrary eviction and demolition, provision of resettlement sites, conversion of blighted areas into socialized housing, and representation of the urban poor in the local council. The NCUPF collaborated with other local organizations to form the People's Council. The people's council sits as member of the city council and participates and votes in its deliberations. In 1995, the Naga City council approved an ordinance that effectively institutionalized the participation of citizens' organizations in local government processes and activities.

The picture will not be complete without saying something about the city government. The local government that was installed after the EDSA people revolt was decidedly open to the participation of citizens in the local government programs and policies. The local mayor and progressive-minded councilors took concrete steps to encourage and institutionalize people's participation by creating venues and mechanisms through which the poor could have a say in policy and decision-making. Under the leadership of the local mayor, the Urban Poor Affairs Office was established to attend specifically to the needs of the sector. Local programs that were implemented installed consultative channels that institutionalized multi-sectoral and village level consultation meetings and discussions. The local development council and local special bodies had representatives from the non-government organizations and people's organizations. It implemented programs that functioned on the basis of partnership between the local government and NGOs and POs. All these concerted efforts between the local government, the NGOs and POS were institutionalized through the passage of the local ordinance called "An Ordinance Initiating a System for a Partnership in Local Governance between the City Government and the People of Naga."

This summary was written based on a case study prepared by Jocelyn Vicente Angeles. (See reference list for complete bibliographic entry.)

Concluding Remarks

The passage of the Local Government Code had created more opportunities than heretofore imagined for the participation of citizens and civil society organizations in local governance. The policy and legal framework for participatory and inclusive local governance has been set in place. It has opened up and provided multiple entry-points through which the citizens, POs and NGOs can take a share in the exercise of public power and control.

From the foregoing discussion here and extant literature, there is growing evidence that the democratic space opened up by the Local Government Code is decidedly being filled up by the engagement of NGOs and POs with their local government in charting their common future. Their engagement is seen in various aspects of local governance. They are able to get seats in the local governing bodies. Service delivery is another area where NGOs and POs are effectively engaged. Involvement in policy development is an important role that NGOs and POs are beginning to realize if they are to meaningfully influence local decision making.

There are positive signs of a greater awareness and action on the part of local governments on the need for involving the people in various aspects of local governance. The Galing Pook Award, for instance, confirms the many successful partnerships of local government authorities, NGOs and POs in undertaking local projects that redound to people's benefit and the greater community. The participation of the NGOs and POs ensures that community issues and concerns are brought into the agenda of local policymaking and are acted upon by the authorities.

The active participation of civil society, NGOs and POs in the process of governance is a positive trend that must be recognized and encouraged. If anything, civil society involvement in governance operationalizes the values of participation, transparency and accountability. In most general terms therefore, the fundamental strategy to further bring to life citizen engagement in the process of governance is to identify and nurture areas for meaningful partnership between civil society and government. These areas may range from forming local policies, identification and design of projects to their implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Joint service delivery with civil society playing a supplementary, complementary role, or even as alternative mechanisms altogether in the delivery of services may contribute to the general strategy of cementing the civil society-government partnership.

Looking back, it is inevitable that the transition from authoritarian regime to democratic system in the Philippines will ultimately result in giving back the power to where it rightfully belongs — the people. The Code has set the enabling framework for such process to take place. But ultimately, the fruition of this potential remains in the hands of those who will creatively and responsibly make democracy work — the local government and the citizens, POs and NGOs working in the communities. With local democracy evolving further, it behooves these actors from both ends to strengthen their interactions through the various modes initiated by the Code that ultimately can deepen democracy in the country. Where local

governments are concerned, the challenge is not only how it can further open up its governance structure and processes to the people but how to do it successfully and in a sustainable manner. An even bigger challenge perhaps for local politicians is acceptance of the diminution of local decision-making powers as they share these with the citizens, POs and NGOs. And for some of them, all these challenges may require developing new attitudes, learning new skills and becoming more accountable in their decisions and actions.

Some lingering issues remain to be addressed, too, with respect to NGO/PO effectiveness in the broader process of democratic governance. Among these are:

- *Developing and Strengthening Partnerships*

The direction towards developing and strengthening partnerships with local governments is important if only to overcome the traditional suspicion between government and non-government organizations. Both sectors must recognize the potentials of synergizing their efforts towards the general goal of development and democratic governance. This may necessitate in both sectors some "retooling" or "sensitizing" within the context of such partnership in order for both to recognize and appreciate the nuances of each other's unique systems.

At the level of inter-NGO relationships, the emerging problems with their rowing competition that results from zealotry to protect their own turf have to be addressed to maintain inter-NGO cooperation or at least minimize these problems to the level of healthy competition.

- *NGO bureaucratization*

The growing bureaucratization of NGOs spawns critical issues that may erode its original essence as a development catalyst and change agent. These issues include reduced flexibility, relative fast turnover of personnel, staff compensation, red tape, negation of NGO ethos, and even corruption.

- *Autonomy and Independence of NGOs*

NGOs have always prided themselves in their independence and they can get things done on their own with minimal or no interference by and assistance from the government. Their being *non-government* organizations frees them from the common problems encountered by the government bureaucracies such as red tape and even graft and corruption. The argument goes like this: if they participate in formal structure and mechanisms of government, will they not be compromising their independence and in effect be co-opted by the very structures they are wary of? Will not the use of resources made available by the government to NGOs compromise their autonomy and make them beholden to government authorities?

- *Deepening the Bench of NGO Leaders*

Deepening the bench of NGO leaders has become an imperative in the NGO community over recent years. A number of prominent and pioneer leaders in the NGO community have begun to move on: some have been recruited to leadership positions in government, a number of whom became cabinet

members during the Aquino, Ramos and Macapagal administrations. Some have retired from active involvement in civil society. Deepening the bench therefore involves recruitment and training of what has been called a "successor generation" to take on leadership and responsible positions in the movement.

Given the active involvement of civil society in governance processes, it is not inconceivable to see this trend continue with civil society serving as one of the major recruitment grounds for leaders and officials in government.

- *Dependence on External Donors*

Another major concern within the civil society community is sustainability vis-à-vis dependence and support of the donor community. In other words, this is mostly true for so-called "donor-driven" NGOs whose main source of support is the donor-community. The question is raised: what will happen when fund sources are withdrawn or dry up? Will the initiatives and advocacies of such NGOs be sustained and continued? Indeed, many civil society organizations have long been enjoying financial assistance from the international community.

Silliman (1998) however deems that the Philippine non-governmental organizations are facing a challenge that imperils their autonomy. Foreign financial assistance is the lifeblood of the NGO community, but ironically, grassroots support organizations face the dilemma that, while they are encouraging self-reliance among their beneficiary groups, they are themselves becoming more dependent on donor agencies in the developed countries. Additionally, the acceptance of grants from external donors carries with it a loss in program autonomy.

References

- Aldaba, Fernando T. (1993) "The Role of NGOs in Philippine Social Transformation," *Philippine Politics and Society*. (January): 2-57.
- Alegre, Alan (ed.) (1996) *Trends and Traditions, Challenges and Choices: A Strategic Study of Philippine NGOs*. Quezon City: Ateneo Center for Social Policy and Public Affairs.
- Brillantes, Alex B. Jr. (1998) "Dentralized Democratic Governance under the Local Government Code: A Governmental Perspective," *Philippine Journal of Public Administration*. 42 (1 & 2) (January-April) Quezon City: UPCA.
- Buendia, Emmanuel E. (2001) "People's Participation in Governance." Unpublished dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Public Administration. Quezon City: National College of Public Administration and Governance, University of the Philippines.
- Cariño, Ledivina V. (ed) (2002) *Between the State and the Market: The Nonprofit Sector and Civil Society in the Philippines*. Center for Leadership, Citizenship and Democracy, National College of Public Administration and Governance, University of the Philippines.
- Constantino-David, Karina (1998) "From the Present Looking Back: A History of Philippine NGOs" in G. Sidney Silliman and Lela Garner Noble (eds.) *Organizing for Democracy: NGOs, Civil Society, and the Philippine State*. Quezon City: Ateneo De Manila University Press.

- Galing Pook Foundation (2003) *Gawad Galing Pook: A Tribute to Innovation and Excellence in Local Governance*.
- George, Terrence R. (1998) "Local Governance: People Power in the Provinces?" in G. Sidney Silliman and Lela Garner Noble (eds.) *Organizing for Democracy: NGOs, Civil Society, and the Philippine State*. Quezon City: Ateneo De Manila University Press.
- Jocelyn Vicente Angeles (1997) "The Role of the Naga City Urban Poor Federation in the Passage of Pro-Poor Ordinances and Policies", Marlou A. Wui and Glenda S. Lopez (eds.) *State-Civil Society: Relations in Policy-Making* Quezon City: Third World Studies Center.
- National Economic and Development Authority, Republic of the Philippines. (1993) Medium Term Philippine Development Plan Quizon, Antonio B. (1989) "A Survey of Government Policies and Programmes on Non-Governmental Organizations in the Philippines," in Antonio B. Quizon and Rhoda U. Reyes (eds.) *A Strategic Assessment of Non-Governmental Organizations in the Philippines*. Manila: Asian Non-Governmental Organizations Coalition for Agrarian Reforms and Rural Development.
- Republic of the Philippines (1991) The Local Government Code, (1987) The 1987 Philippine Constitution.
- Rood, Steven. (1998) "An Assessment of the State of Knowledge Concerning Decentralized Governance under the Philippine 1991 Local Government Code," *Philippine Journal of Public Administration* (January-April) v. 42 nos. 1-2
- Silliman, G. Sidney and Lela Garner Noble (eds.) (1998) *Organizing for Democracy: NGOs, Civil Society, and the Philippine State*. Quezon City: Ateneo De Manila University Press.
- Silliman, G. Sidney and Lela Garner Noble (eds.) (1998) "Citizen Movements and Philippine Democracy," in G. Sidney Silliman and Lela Garner Noble (eds.) *Organizing for Democracy: NGOs, Civil Society and the Philippine State*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press.
- Victoria A. Bautista (1999) *Combating Poverty Through the Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services (CIDSS)*. Quezon City: UP-NCPAG

<http://www.dilg.gov.ph>

<http://www.galingpook.org/awardees.htm>

<http://www.gov.ph/aboutphil/general.asp>

<http://www.nscb.gov.ph>