

The Development of Local Governments in the Philippines: A Structural Approach

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I do believe that in many cases, people from the central region which we call Metropolitan Manila have always been wanting to visit the regions outside. Yet oftentimes it is so hard to do so even just for a short vacation. And so, we are happy that we have been afforded this opportunity to come to you. And as the saying goes, at least among us at the University of the Philippines, if the people cannot come to the University of the Philippines at least part of the University comes to the people. We feel this occasion is one such opportunity.

The paper that I am going to present, as you see in the title, deals primarily with local government in the Philippines as a subsystem within the conceptual framework of political development of the Philippines, more specifically the Philippine political system in its national organization. Initially, we looked at the concept of political development as a goal. For the Philippines, like most of the Third World countries, that goal is the attainment and the sustenance of a viable democratic political system. But we have also come to realize as many of the developmentalists or political development theoreticians have, that the processes and changes which occur in trying to attain goals, are also integral components or parts of political development in general. Thus, we include: the changes which, by necessity, have to be made in the polity; the attempt to enhance or strengthen abilities and capabilities for effective government and rendering of public services; the building of new structures, both the general and special types, or the renovation of old ones in the framework of government. All these now belong to the concept of political development. These are required for the initiation of new policies and programs that are in response to the demands and needs of the polity. When successfully institutionalized, these patterns and structures are to afford to the

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members of the polity the widest possible avenues and scope for participation. Participation here means both in the inputs of planning and decision making, and in the maximum sharing and enjoyment of outputs, or, to put it in more up-to-date terms, the distribution of our resources and products as result of participant endeavors.

The study puts the spotlight on the subsystem of local government in the Philippines as the main instrument for attaining democratic viability under the aegis of granting greater autonomy through the changes in powers and responsibilities, as well as in the composition of the structures in the local level. These are expected to evolve into effective and capable instruments, particularly if there is a parallel growth and popular political representation and involvement or participation in the operation of the structures.

The preceding views of the researcher constitute the theoretical as well as the philosophical underpinnings of most of our country's efforts to introduce changes in the local government system. But one has to look at the subsystem as only one of the components interacting and interlocking with the others, within the greater political and social system. For example, the history and ecology, the demography, the socioeconomic and cultural components of the society are being influenced by the different components. It is along this vein that the analysis of local government structures and political participation in such structures are being presented. These are the two indicators which I would like to use in discussing this paper on political development of local government, a structural approach.

Local government in the Philippines, in a general way of describing or defining, refers to and includes all political units, subdivisions, and instrumentalities below the national level. This is an adaptation of the definition of Humes and Martin in their book *Local Government Throughout the World*. This term encompasses therefore, not only the organs of governments in the various local level such as regions, provinces, etc., but also those offices and positions which are located in the localities of local areas. The latter are actually the field offices or branches of the central government departments. Strictly speaking, these would be functionally called administrative services. Structurally however, they are part of the whole government organization for the localities and are thus included in the term local government.

Now, local government in the Philippines was neither a creation nor an innovation of the Western colonial powers. Its roots had long been embedded in the society which the Spaniards found upon their

arrival in the Archipelago. But the only type of organized political units found in the Philippines at that time was the barangay. However, to say that in our present system we are merely asserting our heritage by bringing back to our present society the institution of the pre-Spanish political structure is actually to romanticize. Except for the name, the pre-Spanish barangay is an entire different kind of "animal" or "organism" from our present one. If we look at the barangay at present, we see that in structure alone, the pre-Spanish barangays were independent communities, and if they were bigger communities, these would be in the form of confederations or loose associations with nothing really formal by way of creating a centralized form of government. If we look at the functions and operations also, we know that the people in the pre-Spanish barangays were really worried about the day to day economic and social living, not so much with the exercise of right because that was not heard of at that time. There were also other features such as how the ruler or the holders of governmental powers and authorities came to their positions, primarily by hereditary succession.

But let me just briefly go over the evolution of local government in the Philippines, not in a very detailed way but in a manner which I call "leaping and bounding through the centuries." In the pre-Spanish Philippines there was no central government. The *rajah* or *datu* got his position by heredity and if the line fizzled out the people could either choose or appoint or designate the oldest female. But then, that was a very, very rare instance in our history.

Each polity or political community at that time had its own structure, local dialects or languages, unique customs and tradition and beliefs, and particularly, social stratification and political values and attitudes. Though each varied from the other, there were several trends that ran through these various systems. If organized therefore beyond the confederation, there was a form of election or designation to designate the greater chief or as influenced by the Indian term, the *Majah-Rajah*, meaning big *rajah* or big *datu*, of a confederation of somewhat equal type of political entities. However, there were times when a shadowy type of vassalage and suzerainty relationship within a very limited territorial area occurred. Either it would be within an island or part of an island or neighboring island.

This situation was found by the Spaniards and immediately they sought to establish their own political system. In the early period, the Spaniards were preoccupied not so much with governing per se but "to Christianize the poor heathen souls." From their landing site they

spread northward. Why couldn't they spread southward? Because there was a very different kind of spirit there, as well as a political organization already long established. To make conquest easier and faster, they took care of the spirit first, but with the aid of the three G's. I do not know whether they employed goons, but certainly they had guns and God. Our own modern system is an adaptation of such style. So at the start of Spanish occupation, they christianized the communities and placed them "under the bells." In other words, the communities were to be administratively, socially, economically, and religiously organized "within the hearing of the tolls of the bells."

Elections for the Americans are very important as part of the institutional and procedural arrangements in a democracy. Again, elections were not new to the Filipinos except that this time under the American colonial government, election was more widespread. This is the reason why I have chosen the two indicators of development, the electoral or participatory scheme as well as the structural schemes in the local government unit.

Even with the institution of the Commonwealth period, the same pattern of provincial and municipal officials and provincial government and agencies was followed. There were elected officers, particularly those in the political positions such as the chief executive and members of the legislative bodies. But there were also those who were appointed directly by the national government. These were the field officers and administrative officials who although structurally part of the local government, were mainly responsible not to the local residents but to their national superiors. During this period, we see the emergence of a bigger number of chartered cities which presupposed a modicum of autonomy or self-government, separately organized from the regular political units. But then again, during this period the practice of governing the non-Christian people of the Philippines was continued. When the Japanese Regime came about, the reforms instituted were not in the form of more participation or in terms of elective officers. Rather, the polity retrogressed when many of the officials were appointed. When the normal constitutional government was restored, the government of the Republic of the Philippines especially in the immediate post World War II period, followed exactly the same kind of pattern as that of the Spanish and American periods. When we look at the structure that we have built through the centuries, some by the colonial powers and continued by the Filipinos after

independence, we find that we have a highly centralized political system. Of course we have the "fiction" of having elected political officials in the localities. However, the politics from the center has always been very influential. Although the "goodies" came from the local units, these have to be surrendered to the central government which in turn would distribute these goodies back if it so desires, to the local units. Thus the dependence on the national government for sustenance, for creation, and what have you has become institutionalized.

How about the chartered cities? Well, at the start there was an attempt to elect certain city officials. But there were very strategic political units among chartered cities where the mayors and some of the councilors had to be and were in fact appointed by the central government, primarily, of course, by the President because many appointments may or may not have been through the recommendation of the Representatives of Congress or the Legislature.

We have had several of these local so-called reforms, towards more autonomy. But such movement in the Philippines, cannot be primarily traced to the people or to popular demands. Rather it almost always starts from *politicos* in the local units who would like to strengthen their bailiwicks through more political powers.

We see for example that Rep. Act No. 528 of 1952 increased the local budgetary power. Those who were employed in the local units and whose pay were from local funds were to be appointed by the local executives. In 1954, other attempts were made with Rep. Act Nos. 1062 and 1063 which also gave additional budgetary powers. But in turn these gave politicians greater power to tax the local units. Then came the 1959 Rep. Act No. 2259 which made elective the officials, chartered cities, as well as the other regular units of local government. Rep. Act No. 2264 or the Local Autonomy Act, reorganized the provinces and increased their autonomy.

One of the milestone supposedly of the local autonomy movement, was the passage of Rep. Act No. 2570, otherwise known as the Barrio Charter Act of 1959. This was experimental actually. There were many problems that arose in its implementation so that by 1963 it was revised and amended by Rep. Act No. 3590.

The last before Martial Law was Rep. Act. No. 5185, which granted further autonomous powers to the local government. Upon the declaration of Martial Law there was supposed to be another

important act, the contents of which were incorporated in the proposed draft of the Local Government Code.

Now let us look at the changes after the proclamation of the state of Martial Law. One of the first accomplishments was the use of the localities or civic assemblies for the ratification of the Constitution. There were quite a lot of questions asked regarding the procedure followed. But what are the most important steps towards the restructuring or the reorganization of local government in the Philippines? We really did not touch the bigger units at all. We went all the way down to the lowest level, the basic units, through Presidential Decree Nos. 86 and 86-A, and incidentally there were also Presidential Decree Nos. 86-B, C and D which created and organized the citizen assemblies. Later on, these became known as barangays. So with Presidential Decree No. 557, all barrios in the Philippines were declared as barangays with the application of the revised Barrio Charter Act of 1963, as the basis for the set of guidelines to be followed. This later on had to be changed and now we have the Barangay Code or the Barangay Charter Act.

Now, let us look at the reorganization of the local units. In the lowest level we have the barangays with the different councils and the officers. These officers were supposed to have been elected way, way back. Many of us live in the barangay but we never remember having been asked to participate in the election of the Barangay Councilmen. So, we wonder, of course. At least they say they had been elected. We accept their word for it. Later on some vacancies were not filled, and so appointments, as prerogative of the Executive to fill the vacant positions in the lower or subordinate units were made. In fact, we have the Barangay Councils. But these councils are really just instruments of the Barangay Assembly. In the past, we had residents of the Barangay who were at least 18 years old who took part in the assembly discussions and deliberations and in the actual elections of the officers.

You remember that the election of the Barrio Council was held separately from the elections of officials for the regular local units. Now this has been changed under the new setup. We have also the youth taking part now through the institution of the Kabataang Barangay. They are also expected to have the same number of councilors, the KB council members, and the same number of committees, but an additional committee is the Committee on Sports and Youth. Automatically the Chairman of the Kabataang

Barangay Council is the Committee Chairman of Sports and Youth in the actual mother or parent barangay.

Let us look at the structure here. The Barangay Assembly members chose the Barangay Council which has a captain (formerly called Lieutenant), Council members, Barangay Treasurer and Secretary. At present, there are supposedly five committees in the structure. The Committee on Sports and Youth headed by the KB Chairman, the Committee on Finance, usually headed by the Barangay Captain, the Committee on Special and Cultural Affairs, the Committee on Community Beautification, the Committee on Public Health and Sanitation, and the Committee on Peace and Order chairmanned by the barangay councilors. There are also ad hoc committees as the need arises. If there is a new campaign, then somebody will be appointed as chairman of the Committee, for barangay implementation of the new program or policy. But a more important committee which is thus provided for in the existing laws today, is the Barangay Referendum or Election Committee. With the coming elections, they are going to be very vital in the implementation and operation of the electoral process.

How about in the various cities? Let me just point out for example, the structure of the Metropolitan Manila Commission, because this is an entirely different creation again. It defies stratification if we base it on the universal and accepted principles of local and metropolitan governments of the rest of the world.

How is the Metropolitan Manila Commission organized? Well, Presidential Decree No. 824, passed on November 7, 1975, created the MMC which includes, at least, territorially, the four cities of Quezon, Manila, Pasay, and Caloocan and the other municipalities in and around that area—Makati, Marikina, Las Piñas, Mandaluyong, Parañaque, Pasig, San Juan, Muntinlupa, Malabon, Navotas, Taguig, Valenzuela and Pateros. This means then that the immediately neighboring provinces were made smaller in terms of their political jurisdiction. Primarily affected of course are Bulacan and Rizal Provinces.

Let us look at the very setup of the entire political system of the Philippines as viewed in terms of the hierarchical components or structures. At the very top is the President-Prime Minister who is operating, first on the basis of the existing 1973 Constitution as well as the effects of the different referenda that had been held after 1973. The most important structure in the national level for local government is the Ministry of Local Government and Community

Development. Since we are involved in the barangay, the Barangay National Coordinating and Executive Secretariat is the primary agency that we are interested in here. Under this body are three National Secretaries. The National Secretariat for the Pambansang Kapisanan ng mga Sangguniang Bayan (PSKB); the Kabataang Barangay National Secretariat (PKB); and the National Secretariat for the Pambansang Katipunan ng mga Kabataang Barangay (PKKB). Immediately below are the ruling or governing councils of the National Federations. We have the Pambansang Katipunan ng mga Kabataang Barangay or the National Federation of Youth Assemblies, with their Sangguniang Bayan which are really under Pambansang Katipunan ng mga Barangay or the National Federation of Barangay. The Sangguniang Bayan office is supposedly the governing or ruling or policy-making body. Then of course we have the Sangguniang Pambansa later on renamed as the Batasang Bayan or the Legislative Advisory Council composed of Cabinet members, other members of cabinet rank, and the regional representatives.

In the Philippines, as I have pointed out, there are 13 regional units. For the regular provinces, they have been organized into 12 regions outside Metro Manila. They also have their Katipunan ng mga Barangay and Kabataang Barangay Pampook. Members of the National Interim Legislature will also represent the regions as well as their own localities. As an entirely separate unit, Metropolitan Manila has its own Katipunan ng mga Barangay and Katipunan ng mga Kabataang Barangay sa Metro Manila, or the Association of Barangays and KB's in Metro Manila.

Under the Metro Manila Commission, each of the chartered cities (four of them) and the 13 municipalities have their own assemblies as well as Sangguniang Panglungsod for the cities and Sangguniang Bayan for the municipalities. The 13 municipalities within Metro Manila follow the structures in the regular provinces and municipalities. The chartered cities of Metropolitan Manila have two additional levels: the zone with their own zone leaders and zone boards; and below the barangays are the *Pooks*, with their own *pook* leaders and *pook* councils.

We can see here that a whole series of interlocking structures have been created. And this is where we ask the question: Does the creation of new structures presuppose democratization? Greater participation? Greater local autonomy? More effective government?

Of course, we know that this is not possible unless the people will it, and the people do it in terms of activities and participation.

We have seen, for example, the rise of our electorate in terms of numbers or the growth from the mere 9 million to 29 million although I am not quite sure how they arrived at the figures, but you yourselves know because as young people you have been very much interested in political participation. The so-called instant registration could have caused duplication in various ways. Even before martial law we had our flying voters, not so much because they had wings but because they were mobile in their activities. But what is the reality of it?

Examine the regional units. You will find that although there is supposedly a decentralization of functions and responsibilities, the ultimate appointment, the ultimate money and source of funds will always come from the national government. With that money as the determinant factor over performance, it also becomes the ultimate in control over function and power.

Look at the members of the Sangguniang Bayans. How do they perform and when do they perform? Only when their appointments have been formalized by the President. Where, again, is local autonomy in terms of source of positions? Look at the power granted to them. Of course, they are provided for in the various laws, PD's and existing Republic Acts. But then, again, what is the catch there? For example, the budgets of the local units have to be approved by the next superior body or council, and the next, and the next, and the next. You have supposedly an input of planning, an input of suggestions, an input of demands. These are filtered all the way to the top. Okay, you can demand and put inputs until you are blue in the face. But what is determined up there, is what gets realized down here. And where is local autonomy in that sense?

Let's say that these are the structures we are going to build. Well, hopefully the catch here will be: you can only participate if you actually participate and put these laws into reality. But if we have that attitude of "*Ah!. Sila na lang!*" or "*Ah, kayo na lang! Maraming gawa ako,*" we do have the right, but we win by default, the opposite way. We win in terms of the curtailment of our own rights and prerogative simply because we chose not to participate. This is the important message, I guess, that we must know. Regardless of all these laws, beautiful as they are sketched, probably more autonomous than the most autonomous in other countries, there are some non-developmental traditions that we have which hinder

actual implementation. We have various customs—social, political, economic—that have developed and been institutionalized. Because of the values that we have placed in them, these really go against the so-called intended change that we would like to institutionalize.

For example, the concept of *hiya*. If we are ashamed, if we really succumb to that value of *hiya*, then in an assembly where there are quite a lot of elders, we think twice before we oppose or dispute the older person. On the other hand, the elders oftentimes are not willing to listen to the young for the simple reason that, to them these young people lack the experience.

There is another value which goes the other way around. Many of us do not want to get involved in *politika*. And we give a certain meaning to that. When a person for example is described as "*Ay, politikang masyado yan!*," it is really not a flattering description, is it? It simply implies that the person is either a hypocrite or will say nice things in your face but when you turn your back he tears you to pieces and stabs you. So not many would like to get involved, really be involved in active politics. Again, this is where we lose by default. Whatever political processes we are going through or we are going to go through in the offing is not only attributable to those who are knowledgeable but also to those who are able to feel they can live better without being involved in *politika*. It is really a rat race, a rough and tumble game, but this is one of our values.

The *utang na loob* is another of these values which prevents us from correcting someone even if we know he is a little off the legal path because after all "*may utang na loob siya sa akin.*" It is his duty to show his *pakikisama*, being one of us. It is part of the *bayanihan* spirit. This is also buttressed by the *compadre* system and our belief in "familism."

We are also confronted with so many programs that have come and gone. I do not know whether their disappearance can be called natural or artificial deaths, but it is probably because we have the *ningas-kugon* attitude. When new ideas are presented, people become cynical and say "*Ay, ningas-kugon lang 'yan. Kita mo, mamaya wala na 'yan.*" These are some of the values that are really non-developmental. Yet they could very well be used positively given the political will and the political activism that are expected of the members of society.

There are also other formalistic problems that we have in our system. For example, we have the tendencies to create new agencies especially in the politics of reorganization. If this person,

who is a very powerful political figure cannot head an agency because a more competent person has the ability and the background, then it would be easier and nicer not to hurt his feelings. Another similar but not quite the same type of agency would be created just so he could be accommodated in the bureaucracy or organization. If we look at the concept of political development, because political development is supposed to be the ability of a political system to create specialized and general structures to meet the demands and serve the needs of the people, we are really doing fine. We have quite a lot of them. But is it really political development in the sense of integration and penetration of services and effective government, or is it the basis of intramural fighting and competition for funds and influence? You see, it is useless if you are a technocrat with the best ability for the country but cannot compete along the same lines both in the aboveboard and under-the-toll tactics being used by your opponents and competitors. Then you lose out and the country loses that much of the talent for development.

Out of the profusion also of agencies are the problems of coordination, cooperation, and efficiency. The regions are supposed to help out now through the PROD, through the regional directors and the regional planning council. More power to them! But we are still in an inertia of political jealousies and suspicions. That so-and-so governor, "*mas malakas siya sa Malacañang.*" Therefore, he is being given favors even though, ideally, that is not supposed to be done right now according to the plan and program. One has also additional resources in terms of pipelines to the Metro Manila Commission and other similar agencies.

Another problem is that of dual responsibility. Many of the agencies are supposed to be agencies for the local units and should be responsible in the performance of their job to the constituents or to the inhabitants of the locality. But then the supervision, the money and appointments, come from the top. Well, you have to earn your livelihood. Your responsibility to the people is overshadowed by your responsibility to your immediate superiors and the national officials.

We have also another tradition of legalism. What is not provided for in the law, we dare not act out. Otherwise, "*mapapahiya lang tayo.*" That is often the reason of the subordinate for inaction. Let it be found in black and white in the law, otherwise, if I take on my initiative, if I create and innovate, what may happen will be either

"I'll be called down for doing this without authorization" or "that I have gone beyond my authority." This again, must be interpreted with a little bit more of flexibility.

Finally we have the problem of the local bureaucracy. For a long time public teachers have been the lowest paid government employees. It's all right if there is money and they are paid. Many times however, they live by "chits" alone with the expectations that the funds will be released and that the debtors and the creditors will be happy because they each get their own dues. As Tolentino has recently said: "Many of the so-called corruptions and bending of the laws in the past, have always been because the constituents demand them to be so." It is very easy to answer in a counter agreement. But if people get their positions due to voting, then this is where the *quid pro quo* comes in.

The above, plus the rural leadership patterns, are relective of our social values. We have the idea that positions must be personal. We do not think of the impersonalism of agencies and of government. The person who occupies the position makes the position. This thinking has given rise to what in other countries, they call "proctorianism" and "panguloism" (at least in our own version). "It's always the *pangulo* that can solve anything. It's always the *pangulo*, even if he is a one-man action team he will be the one ultimately left holding the bag." How about the others? Oh, they will say, "after all we are not part of this." This is where the message of local autonomy and local participation comes in. As I said we do have very good ideas, we have brilliant innovations, but many times we have returned to the *ningas kugon* trait, and we do not have what is known as the follow-through. So what is political development? For whom? The people themselves can answer that.