

Decentralization and Development Administration in a Unitary State: Empowerment and Development for Whom?

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The concept of decentralization involves two features: political, whereby power and authority are devolved from the central government to the local governmental units (LGUs); and administrative, whereby functions of the national line agencies are deconcentrated to regional and field units. To date, decentralization has managed to find its place in the rhetorics of the Constitution. Its actual implementation, however, continues to face social, political and economic barriers inherent in a unitary, highly centralized, bureaucratic, and paternalistic government system. The existence of rigid national guidelines (i.e., planning and finance) and the subjection of LGUs to direct supervision from the central office, diminish the powers of local executives to initiate and implement programs needed by their units. The absence of genuine autonomy, therefore, hampers the purpose of this development strategy.

Introduction

Conceptually, decentralization involves two features: political and administrative. Political decentralization, sometimes referred to as the areal approach, focuses on the devolution of power and authority from the national or central government to the local government units (LGUs). On the other hand, administrative decentralization involves the deconcentration of functions and the delegation of appropriate authority from the national line agencies to the regional or field offices, thus, usually referred to as the sectoral approach to decentralization.

As a process, decentralization involves the identification of the subnational levels of government, field offices of national line departments, nongovernmental institutions and groups, as the primary actors in precipitating national development and growth. This process involves the delineation or the allocation of powers/functions between the central and lower levels of government and nongovernmental institutions in terms of planning and implementation of development programs and projects. Likewise, this requires the determination of whether the subnational governments have the adequate and necessary political, administrative, as well as financial capability to catalyze and engineer the development functions and responsibilities entrusted to them.

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By and large, decentralization as a term of rich conceptual and empirical meaning may refer to static or dynamic processes, to pure ideal types or moderate incremental changes (Baker n.d.:49). Broadly speaking, to decentralize is to locate public policymaking with a more subsystemic clientele. The greater the extent to which public policy process is located at the subsystem level, the more decentralized the political system is. However, such system has oftentimes been romanticized to the point of equating it with democracy, especially among public-choice theorists (Ostrom 1973:81). Evidently, this fails to recognize that democratic processes do not necessarily result from nor are democratic ideals necessarily maximized by decentralization. In fact, the opposite has often occurred when *political structures* have worked against democratic ideals (Hart 1972:605).

As Fesler (1965:537-8; 555-7) noted, decentralization can be especially complex if one takes into account the "illusory decentralization" which occurs when "formal powers or administrative arrangement are purportedly decentralized but politically controlled or influenced by the center."

Under the unitary system, the political subordination of subnational governments to the central government implies a particular kind of power relationship. Such relationship is largely characterized by political influence, if not complete dominance exerted by the latter to the former in view of the fact that the former is a political subdivision as well as the recipient of political power emanating from the latter. Subsequently, the exercise of the central government's policymaking power, referred to as "just power," carries the elements of finality and irresistibility, thereby conveying the notion of its capacity to inflict penalties through the concept of coercion (Brian 1976:12-25).

As the late Professor Dicey defines "unitarianism" to be "the habitual exercise of supreme authority by one central power," simply allows and legitimizes the central government's control over the political, economic, and cultural affairs of local governmental and administrative units. Inasmuch as the central authority has been the source of whatever powers possessed by the local units, it can equally modify or withdraw those powers without any restriction imposed by any law. The enormous powers and authority which have been inherent and reserved to the central government obviously emanate from the prevailing unitary political structure of the country.

In the Philippines, the institutionalization of the unitary political system can be traced to its colonial history. The highly-centralized state was an arbitrary creation of the succession of foreign powers that invaded these islands. The unitary system of government was unabatedly superimposed as an instrument of national subjugation serving the economic, political, and cultural interests of the colonial masters (Buendia 1989:121-41). It was the centralized governance carried over into more than four decades of "independent" existence, either by inertia or by force of habit, that provided the structural mechanism toward the undue accumulation of enormous power and

authority by the central government to institute policies which have been normally prejudicial to the interests of the majority. This political configuration made the central region (National Capital Region) unjustifiably richer and powerful compared to the peripheral regions which have continually languished in economic stagnation and powerlessness (Laurel 1988:7).

Apparently, the concentration of political power wielded by the national leaders in Manila basically remained unchanged since the first Spanish governor-general ruled from Malacañang. Yet, his power still imperial in this essence, "has not been exercised with commensurate responsibility, for the government's presence in many parts of the country has not been felt in terms of its duty to protect its citizens and to provide essential public services" (Enrile 1988).

This section shall try to show the praxis of decentralization as a policy of a unitary state working within the framework of the development administration model. It shall cover the following areas: local development finance; local development planning; and personnel development.

Local Development Finance and Decentralization

Economic impoverishment of our people in the provinces and component cities in the countryside, where about 75 percent of the national population live, pervades despite the presence of rich natural resources in their lands, waters, and forests. Their contribution to the economic process has been limited due to their lack of productive assets or control over natural resources and access to basic economic and social services (Abueva 1988:69).

The glaring disparity between Metro Manila and the rest of the regions has been confirmed by experts to be the result of combined effects of the urban bias in the allocation of financial, manpower, and physical resources. Macroeconomic policies adopted by the national government for the last few decades to correct the rural-urban imbalance, ironically contributed to and aggravated the uneven growth among and within regions. Statistics have shown that rather than spreading development where it is most needed, Metro Manila had been in control and accumulated much of the national wealth and income for the past decades and had accounted for the highest share of almost a third of the Gross Domestic Product (Abueva 1988:68-69).

Likewise, in a study conducted by Calaguio and Oamar (1985:16-25), it was revealed that in 1982, average revenues of provinces was ₱20 million; cities, ₱22 million; and municipalities, ₱1 million. On the other hand, each of the 17 local units in Metro Manila earned an average of ₱86 million in the same year, with the four cities averaging ₱253 million and the 13 municipalities/towns with ₱34 million. Given such situation, local governments remained to be dependent on national funds for their

local development. However, studies have shown that local income from national allotments, grants, aids, and specific tax allotments provided by the central government have not only declined over the years but their face value has been substantially eroded as a result of inflation (Ocampo and Panganiban 1985:33-38).

LGUs have found it difficult to generate their own revenues despite their broadened taxing powers vested by the national government, simply because of the narrow tax base prevailing in the local communities. City and municipal governments derive their main source of revenues from real property tax; business-related taxes; operation of public markets, slaughterhouses, and other local enterprises and utilities; and regulatory or user fees and charges. Provincial governments rely on the taxes imposed on the transfer of real property ownership, specified occupations, and places, and quarrying of sand and gravel apart from the share they get from municipal and city revenues out of the real property taxes (Ocampo and Panganiban 1985:34).

It is therefore comprehensible that local governments have been continually forced to seek financial assistance from the central government despite their "taxing powers." The exercise of the bestowed taxing powers is virtually impotent under circumstances of a narrow tax base, especially when the taxes being levied are shouldered by people whose incomes barely meet the necessities of survival.

The pauperization of the local governments is not only expressed in the lack of effective control of their respective productive assets and natural resources and inability to generate sufficient revenues for their own development. The national government has already preempted most of the productive revenue and tax sources in the local units. Local tax efforts have been militated with the tax exemptions for national government properties, government-owned and -controlled corporations, and certain industries. The limitations set by the national government over taxing authority of LGUs, (i.e., they are not allowed to impose taxes on income, estates, common carriers, etc.) frustrated the local units to take full advantage of the provisions of Sections 49 and 50 of the Tax Code.

Likewise, the prohibition by the national government to impose taxes on businesses of persons engaged in the printing and publication of papers, magazines, etc., appearing at regular intervals, franchise tax on broadcast stations and TV firms duly registered with the Broadcast Media Council, grantees of electric franchises and holders of franchise that contain a proviso that the national franchise tax "shall be in lieu of all other taxes" (Orendain 1983:16-17), practically left nothing for local units to impose tax on and made their taxing power under the Constitution totally ineffective.

Apart from the circumscriptions on the power of taxation, the national government maintains a leverage on local fiscal decisionmaking which is exercised through the reviews of local budgets and expenditures by the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) and Department of Finance (DOF), despite the authority and

power granted to local executives and local councils to determine, control, and have the *final* decision to approve local budgetary requirements (Orendain 1983:58). Control over local finance and management is exercised by the central government on two levels: one, through direct "supervision" via the appointment of local treasurers and assessors either by the President or the Secretary of Finance; and two, through indirect means via national guidelines, standard regulations and directives, and mandatory or statutory provisions on the allocation and expenditure of local incomes.

The appointment of national finance officers abdicates the fiscal autonomy which local governments should enjoy. The absence of local executives' effective control over the centrally-appointed officials has kept the former absolutely in the dark regarding the availability of funds. This situation consequently prevents the local executives to program, plan, and implement development projects for the community. In a recent study by Brillantes (1989:10), he contends that the ineffective control of local executives over centrally-appointed officials "is the height of administrative formalism ... wherein the local executive is reduced to a mere symbolic authority of the provinces or the municipality. He is the chief executive but with no power where it matters." The statement exudes the absurdity of fiscal autonomy in the unitary state.

The usual apprehension on possible abuses and graft that local officials may commit in the event that full financial independence is granted does not seem to be tenable. The operational failure of the principle of checks and balances under which the national and local governments are organized has been the underpinning reason for the abuse of power. It must be noted that the sharing of coequal powers in government between the executive, legislative, and judiciary has been the primary logic to avert the undue concentration and centralization of enormous powers to a single branch of government, much more to an individual. Conceivably, abuse of power happens only when there is the operational deinstitutionalization and mockery of the fundamental principles of checks and balances; and when the people allow it.

Just as the Marcos experience is a good model of illegitimate usurpation of power, the 1986 People Power Revolution equally served as the effective way of altering the same. The ultimate and most effective mechanism in checking such abuse lies in the strength of the peoples' organization and their determination to safeguard their rights and freedoms.

Moreover, the pernicious presence of political warlords in local governments who dominate local politics has never been subdued by the system of control established by the national government. In essence, abuse of power by local officials is no different from those committed by their counterparts in the central government, except for the magnitude and intensity of the crime.

The first congressional and local elections after the downfall of Marcos have shown how peoples' power, built within local communities, can check the normally

uncontested power of traditional politicians in the local polity. The politics of pluralism demonstrated in the EDSA Revolution resulted in the emergence of nontraditional politicians which upset the once undisputed power of local kingpins. Evidently, keeping a tight rein on local governments to preclude misuse of power cannot be judged as an effective measure.

Neither can control of the central government over the finances of local units prevent graft and corruption. Studies reviewed by Bautista (1982:235-270) on the nature and causes of graft and corruption in Philippine public offices indicate that these are caused by: economic difficulties of government employees; weak moral fiber among bureaucrats; deficiency in the bureaucratic apparatus that enables the bureaucrat to engage in graft behavior; and cumbersome and complicated administrative processes in government, thus forcing the general public to bribe government employees to facilitate their transactions which in turn is seldom denied by the latter. Likewise, corruption has been traced to the ethico-social culture which gives emphasis to the kinship network system or the norm that dictates individuals to give in to the wishes and favor of friends and relatives against the public interest. Apart from these practices as exemplified by the structural-functionalist model, the conflict-model identified the capitalist mode of production as the inherent cause of corruption among public servants.

Obviously, graft and corruption is something endemic and inherent in a social structure afflicted with economic inequalities, political elitism, and moral bankruptcy. Such problems are not limited to local governments. In fact, daily newspaper accounts have indicated the enormity of graft and corruption committed by public officials in the national government. Apparently, graft and corruption cannot be mitigated with the control of national officials over local finance. They have no *moral* authority to do so as they themselves cannot safeguard the legitimate use of national funds. The roots of corruption must be extirpated and weeded out, and not its mere effects.

The national government has also defined the manner in which local incomes should be allocated and spent. For instance, LGUs cannot spend more than 45 to 55 percent of their total income from regular sources on personnel and exemptions which shall have to be approved by the DBM. Other restrictions are as follows: statutory reserve (2 percent of estimated revenues from regular sources); election reserve (under the election code), contribution to election expenses (1/3 from the provincial government and 1/3 from the city or municipal government); infrastructure fund transfer (between 8-12 percent of annual net income in the general fund must be transferred to the infrastructure fund); barangay development fund (P500 per year from general fund of each province and city or municipality); and 20 percent development fund (20 percent of the Bureau of Internal Revenue allotment to the general fund shall be earmarked for projects). The prescriptions on local fund allocation contributed neither to local government development nor to the alleviation of poverty in the local communities.

As development administration is aimed at developing the financial capability and decentralization of financial resources to the lower levels of government, the unitary political structure in the Philippines not only frustrates the realization of financial autonomy of local governments. It debilitates their capabilities to meaningfully control their meager resources. The absence of fiscal powers and authority devolved to LGUs cannot be simply attributed to the inadequacy of laws and statutes promulgated to this effect or implementation gaps in policies. The inherent nature of a unitary system dictates the supremacy of the central government over the discretion in the allocation and utilization of the country's financial and economic resources. The disposition of such supreme powers, authority, and judgment is self-serving and is indiscriminately used to further concentration of power in the national government.

Local Development Planning and Decentralization

Local development planning in decentralized administration involves the power and autonomy of LGUs to identify priority areas for development and determine the implementation of development projects (Brillantes 1989:8 & 18). However, with the insignificant fiscal powers vested upon LGUs, planning for development becomes extremely difficult. Implementation of local projects, on the other hand, is constricted since it is contingent upon the availability of local funds.

Oftentimes, development projects funded by the national government (normally discretionary or pork barrel funds of district congressmen) goes implemented in the jurisdiction of local governments without the knowledge of local executives (Brillantes 1989). Apparently, they could not exercise their developmental role in planning change based on the peculiarities of their respective communities and makes local governments mere spectators to social transformation.

Similarly, national agency officials plan and implement local development projects with negligible participation of local officials. The Brillantes study shows that local officials were simply invited to attend ceremonies and accept the project in behalf of the municipality or province, thus, reducing their role as purely ceremonial and ministerial. With the function of development planning concentrated at the central government, projects and programs are skewed or off-tangent from economic and social needs of the area. On certain occasions, nationally-controlled projects overlap or duplicate existing ones, resulting in waste of resources.

With the sectoral organization of the Philippine bureaucracy and increasing specialization among government agencies, the deconcentration of administrative functions from the national to the local governmental units (regional and field levels) simply replicates the problem of duplication and overlapping of functions to the local units. Inadequate coordination among functional units in the national level has been

compounded by the administrative decentralization of programs and projects in the local governments.

This is not to suggest that administrative decentralization is improper. On the contrary, it is the most appropriate organizational arrangement in spreading and promoting development in the peripheral areas of the country. What is detestable is the espousal of decentralization while leaving the local executives with insignificant power and authority to plan and manage development programs/projects without interference from national agencies. The presence of two or more agencies involved in common functions performed in the local units only leads to confusion and conflict among local executives and field officers of national agencies. For instance, the Department of Agrarian Reform which functions as an area development agency with responsibilities for alienable and disposable land overlaps with the Bureau of Forest Development of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, which maintains jurisdiction over upland areas within rural lands.

The problem of coordination among these agencies has thwarted every attempt of LGUs to institute comprehensive and areal planning in the local communities as field offices have been zealously concerned with the narrow interest of their mother agencies. Under the present setup, what has been decentralized to the LGUs are not the powers of coordination and planning but problems of overlapping and duplication of functions prevailing at the national level. These problems have been spread over and magnified in the subnational governments of the country.

The planning approach as currently conceptualized and operationalized through the development councils from the regional down to the barangay levels has a major implication, working against the realization of autonomy in planning and self-reliance of local governments. This ensures the formulation of development plans, identification of projects, and utilization of National Assistance to Local Government Units (NALGU) conform with national objectives and goals.

The "assistory" function of the development councils has contributed not only to the smooth adoption of centrally-formulated plans but kept the local executives dependent on national government initiatives. This is not without saying that local executives are bereft of initiative or commitment. The issue is that the centralization of the planning function virtually left the LGUs with nothing to plan on, and it dampened the enthusiasm of local planners to work on their own development priorities.

Moreover, the creation of Cabinet Officer for Regional Development (CORD), the Cabinet Action Committee on Implementation Assistance (CACIA), and Project Facilitation Committee (PFC) at the national level may serve the Chief Executive in monitoring the direction and implementation of programs and projects in the country,

but on the other hand, hinders the evolvement of self-reliant local government units and promotes dependency. These executive bodies contribute to the complexity of coordination and overlapping of functions. The national government, rather than giving the LGUs utmost freedom and autonomy to chart their own future and development, further institutionalized limitations and control on the pretext of "supervision" and "regulation" in the latter's exercise of its governmental functions.

The Planning and Development Staff (PDS) of LGUs (province, city/municipality, and barangay) which serve as the planning arm of the local executives are not free from the interference of the national government. In fact, the PDSs are the conduits of national programs and projects, and their "successful" implementation in the local units assures them of continued financial support and technical assistance.

Conceivably, the centralized and service-delivery approach of local programs and projects are bereft of flexibility and responsiveness to the needs of the people and display serious lack in development orientation. Observers of bureaucratic behavior agree that "finding ways of inculcating the spirit of experimentation and creativity into hierarchical and control-oriented bureaucracies has been elusive" (Rondinelli 1982; Mathur 1986:34). The highly centralized character of the bureaucracy allows little room for the field staff to act with enough discretion. Rather than act and as a result get into trouble, the staff prefer to sit back and await orders from above. Oftentimes, it is felt that it is safer not to act than to act (Mathur 1986: 35).

If decentralization would achieve its developmental goals for the entire country, LGUs must be given substantial and real participation in planning their own future and not be simply relegated to participation in the implementation stage. The involvement of the people in the local communities is fundamental in the decentralization process. However, the vertical hierarchy of patron-client dependency has frustrated genuine deconcentration of power and authority. Bureaucratic paternalism has turned the LGUs into passive recipients of national government's assistance.

Paternalism has been expressed in the prevailing bureaucratic structures and manifests itself in the adverse attitudes and behavior of government officials toward power-sharing with LGUs. One fear that commonly grips bureaucracies is that, if lower level officials are given more functions and responsibility, things are bound to go wrong. Decisionmaking authorities at the higher level invariably view the officials lower down the hierarchy as lacking competence, and hence are untrustworthy. Decentralization is impossible to practice in such circumstances (Cheema and Rondinelli 1986:295-315; Mathur 1986:34).

Experience has shown that bureaucratic processes in large organizations have instilled in most government employees a respect for technocratic knowledge and expertise and a disdain for their clients' capabilities in conceptualizing, designing and implementing programs (Alfiler 1983:35). Bureaucrats, therefore, seriously believe

that they alone have answers to all problems faced by the poor and that they are the only ones who have a right to this knowledge. Indeed, one of the most serious obstacles to the implementation of decentralization programs arose from the discrepancies between national policy objectives and the behavior of central authorities. Despite the formal pronouncements on decentralization, the air of superiority of the national-based bureaucrats in dealing with the LGUs has put the sincerity of the latter in really implementing the policy into question. On the other hand, the centralist structure of government has been a convenient excuse to legitimize the superiority of national policies on development planning over local planning.

Capability Building and Personnel Development

Enhancing the administrative capability of government personnel is the heart of development administration. The attempts to decentralize development may be hampered where trained and competent personnel are not available in the subnational governmental units.

Gant (1979:234) qualifies that the personnel needed for development administration must not only be technical and scientific experts but also managers and entrepreneurs. They must likewise develop the capability of interacting with people and agencies whose participation is essential to the progress and success of the program.

Gant's concept of a development administrator seems to be more ideal rather than feasible and practicable in a Third World country like the Philippines. His standard of high caliber men and women "combining high intelligence, charisma, expressiveness and warmth, inherent ability for analysis, organization and self-confident, willing to make tough decisions" are much desired qualities. However, such species seem to be rare especially in the peripheral areas of the country. Gant himself in the end recognizes that this breed of men and women are born and not made.

A commitment to developmental processes and goals, in the final analysis, is a commitment to the peoples' welfare. In a UN meeting of experts on development administration in 1981, it was observed that:

The manager of public development programmes is expected to be highly sensitive to the needs of the people and, therefore, capable of gearing his operations to provide for an effective, efficient and equitable delivery system especially *where the needs of the people are concerned* (Bentil 1981:2) (Italics supplied).

In the pursuit of this concern, development administration experts were urged that "the international development strategy for the Third United Nations Develop-

ment Decade should draw the attention of developing countries to the urgency of enhancing their institutional and managerial capabilities to meet the challenges of development in the 1980s and beyond" (Development Administration Newsletter 1980:11).

Discussions in international fora are full of indications of the need to train government officials for their enlarged role as development administrators. However, training by itself will not shape the development process unless the work environment rewards and compels new forms of behavior. In other words, training will be effective only when several other factors, outside its ken, are supportive of what it is striving to achieve. Factors external to training, influence its outcome far more than is ordinarily imagined. More important than formal training are changes in the environment (Esman 1979:69). For instance, the delegation of authority and power to governmental personnel in the field to undertake the task of local development cannot be effected simply because management training programs have been conducted to junior administrators. The prospect of catalyzing national development through deconcentration and devolution of powers to subnational agencies and local governments would be an elusive reality unless the organization structure, which hitherto has strongly favored centralization of all powers, itself undergoes a change toward structural decentralization. Management training is unlikely to produce any effect in this direction.

Where bureaucracy is opposed to structural change, underdevelopment and low administrative capability of government personnel cannot be ascribed to lack of training. If the national government subscribes to *status quo* and sees it best to suit its interest, no matter how many intensive and extensive training programs are implemented will make no difference to the development situation. It has been correctly observed that training programs "do not solve such administrative deficiencies as defective administrative structures, cumbersome rules and procedures, lack of resources, and so forth" (Ramos 1979:234).

An important challenge to development administration is to seek to reorient the role of central bureaucracies from one of domination and control of development programs to one of facilitation and support for decentralized operations. This does not, however, mean that policies should be aimed at weakening or dismantling central government departments and bureaucracies. Administrative procedures and mechanisms that rely on less central control but give local units more latitude in formulating and implementing development programs should be identified and tested.

Apart from the limitations of training in developing competence among personnel at subnational levels of government, Chambers and Belshaw concluded from their experience with the management of rural development programs that:

... in designing management procedures, the temptation is to introduce more and more requirements and measures, more and more complicated techniques and more and more elaborate relationships. But such an approach quickly leads to a drop in output and eventually to paralysis (Belshaw 1979:21-52).

The relative ambiguity in the administrative procedures and arrangement used to bring about decentralization normally lead to serious problems of implementation. Development administration as a field of intellectual and professional inquiry must therefore become more concerned with devising and testing the analytical procedures needed for implementation and planning and for dealing with the complexities of program administration.

The concept must be less concerned with grand schemes for administrative reform or the transfer of techniques and institutions from industrialized nations and more with increasing the analytical ability of planners and managers to assess and cope with the administrative and environmental complexities of setting and achieving policy goals (Rondinelli and Ingle 1981:15).

In a study conducted by Ocampo and Panganiban (1985:46-47) on Local Government System, an observation was made that centrally-instituted prescribed formats, organizations, procedures, and data requirements were found by local governments to be confusing. Although local government personnel and officials have participated in national and regional planning processes and trainings, they have been subjected to the complications of planning, investment programming, and budgeting. These processes oftentimes only isolated the local governments from their own people.

Moreover, the intricacies involved in the performance of functions decentralized to local administrations necessitate the presence of sufficient resources, which, ironically are absent in most LGUs. For instance, the authority bestowed upon local governments to borrow money from national banks and foreign sources mediated by the central government. The apparent reluctance of LGUs to take this opportunity lies in the requirements involved in loan application, i.e., elaborate feasibility studies and enormous paperwork, costly consultancy services (for bigger loans), relatively high interest rates (14-18 percent per annum), and short amortization periods (maximum of 10 years) apart from the popular attitude against being in debt (Ocampo and Panganiban 1985:40).

With the recent allocation of nearly 40 percent of the national budget to service interests on foreign loans, local borrowings of LGUs will be dampened. Evidently, the shortage of highly technical staff (competent and highly qualified experts and specialists are normally attracted to the opportunities present in the central offices) among LGUs leave them no other option but accumulate whatever surpluses they can muster for extraordinary expenditures rather than venture on projects which they

have no competence and be exposed to the risks of exploitation and deception by local and foreign consultants.

Likewise, the full utilization of the taxing powers granted to local governments requires substantial amounts of investment and technical expertise. For instance, in terms of real property taxes, local governments (specifically provinces) derive 20 percent of their aggregate income from this single source. This has been considered a substantial source of revenue. However, local units failed to fully tap this reservoir of revenue potential due to lack or absence of tax mapping and parcel indexing system and the inability of the same to transfer the information on tax maps to tax registries thereby effecting collections (Buendia 1986).

Such failure has been attributed to the financial constraint experienced by most local governments in installing a tax mapping system as it entails a substantial investment. One tax map alone will cost a local government at least ₱150,000 for 10,000 parcels of land (current price in 1980). Considering that the annual average income of a fifth class municipality is less than ₱300,000 (UPCPA 1982), it is no wonder that most local governments consider tax mapping a luxury.

The perennial problem of enhancing the technical expertise of local administrative staff and maintaining a sufficient supply of experts in various areas of development administration in the local units is directly related to the economic impoverishment and political paralysis of LGUs. The limited budget of local units make it difficult for them to offer salary levels that are high enough to attract qualified personnel. The level of technical know-how possessed by the available manpower in LGUs has been below par with their counterparts stationed in the metropolis and other urban centers in the country. It is a natural phenomenon for technically-trained local personnel to seek "greener pasture" in central offices in Manila and other highly-urbanized cities. The absence of strong economic base in most areas of jurisdiction of LGUs has been the logical explanation for their powerlessness and continued political dependence to the central government. On the other hand, solving the problem of economic impoverishment in the local units would require a substantial allocation of resources and powers to be devolved which, ironically, the national government is not readily willing to relinquish as long as the unitary political system remains intact.

Finally, the effort to decentralize development via the political and administrative institutions created by the central government displaced the traditional leaders among the cultural minorities. It destroyed indigenous institutions and authority which had been effective at mobilizing local resources for self-help projects. Such programs—construction of canals and irrigation; communal farming, fishing, and hunting; and settling of disputes and even tribal wars, can often be administered much more successfully where traditional leaders and groups can be convinced to participate and are given a meaningful role.

The goals of development policy for the Philippines have been clear—development must be equitable, participative, and effective in reaching the impoverished majority. While we can learn from the experiences and models of development from other countries, in the final analysis the administration of development to be truly meaningful must be done through our own efforts and not by expatriate experts.

Concluding Observation and Recommendation

The efforts of the Philippine unitary state to decentralize and allocate governmental functions and responsibility to the subnational levels continue to suffer from the following difficulties: (1) the problem of mobilization of local resources and participation of local institutions in the tasks of development; (2) the weakness in the coordination of planning and implementation of various sectoral programs, projects, and services which prevents areal integration; and (3) the imbalanced growth among regions and local areas which inhibits the delivery of services to those living in marginalized and depressed areas. These difficulties have been encountered as a result of excessive bureaucratization and centralization of authority and the process of decisionmaking, leading to delays and red tape and oftentimes the conception of programs which are unrelated to and divorced from the needs of the local communities.

The failure of development administration strategies has been a consequence of the incongruence between the rhetoric of “decentralization” and practice of the instrumentalities of the state to achieve it. The contradiction between development administration emphasizing mobilization and administrative development lies in the uncontested capacity of the unitary state for social, administrative, and political control—the core of the aforecited failure. The central government is almost totally responsible for mobilizing resources for services and for planning and managing delivery programs. Local governments either play an insignificant role in these activities or are entirely dependent on national agencies.

The responsibility for local and regional development refers mainly to the ability to control or influence decisions of institutions responsible for such development since this would bear directly on questions relating to the allocation of resources and the determination of priorities on the use of key resources for development. Unless local governments and subnational agencies of the national government are substantially provided with political and administrative freedom and independence in defining the goals and strategies of their own development, entrusting them with the responsibility of engineering development in their communities would be sheer hypocrisy.

As Iglesias put it:

The problems and issues in local and regional development stem from the failure and poverty of (the) centralist and bureaucratic approach to development.

A continuation of the incremental approach which saw the gradual transfer of central influence over local and regional development to local and regional institutions served as major obstacle in achieving accelerated growth and development.... This strategy will not achieve the objective of rapid and more lasting transformation of the local and regional areas into a modernized productive sector of development (Iglesias 1981:20) (Italics supplied).

As the national government continues to tinker with the unitary system and to come out with various political and administrative models of decentralization, evidence is strong that the incremental approaches and strategies of development administration have failed to substantially alter the relationship between the center and the subnational levels of governments. That is, there is the continuing dominance of central political and bureaucratic institutions in determining development priorities and allocation of resources through continuing control of personnel and use of funds. Essentially, it has promoted the dependency of local institutions on the central bureaucracy and has failed to create viable and self-sustaining local institutions and organizations.

Moreover, the unitary system of government could not solve the problem of unbalanced growth among regions and local areas within these regions. The centralization of powers and resources in the primate cities, especially in the area where the national center of power lies, has failed to abate the continuing exodus of the rural population to the urban centers, thus depriving the rural sector of the skilled manpower for development.

Finally, it has failed to achieve rapid dispersal of industries and services to the different regions and local areas outside the highly-urbanized cities. Major social services like education, health, housing, safety and welfare remain concentrated at the metropolis and prime urban areas serving the rich and privileged classes while the rural poor continue to languish in poverty, undernourishment, and ignorance. The basic and fundamental services which the least-advantaged segment of the population should have been provided remain inaccessible. The local governments, on the other hand, have been helpless in responding to these needs of survival as they themselves have been dependent upon the charity of the national government.

The bureaucratic type of "decentralization" in a highly unified and centralized system of government had inveighed heavily against the growth of local political and administrative organizations and institutions over the years. As Iglesias aptly observed:

This (political arrangement) has also retarded, even stunted, the growth of local and regional institutions and their capability to develop areas under their responsibility. Even integrated area development schemes and integrated rural and intersectoral approaches suffered from this structural defect of extending bureaucratic or administrative power to the subnational level and

the failure of local level institutions to perform the integrating area manager functions (Iglesias 1981:21).

The Philippine experience for the past decades has indicated that political and administrative decentralization as an approach to development administration failed to achieve the targeted goals of national development. The unitary governmental setup remains the structural impediment for an authentic and operationally-viable system of local autonomy.

The commitment to redress social inequity and wider participation of the disadvantaged sectors of the national population in matters which concern their well-being must be matched by the central authorities with the painful decision against the perpetuation of centralized control over the local areas. And such commitment to genuine autonomy and decentralization of governmental functions to subnational political units must be expressed no less than by the fundamental transformation and restructuring of the present unitary system. A federal political setup or a commonwealth of state governments where each can exercise autonomy and self-determination as well as close cooperation under the Federal Republic of the Philippines is the alternative to the present system. Evidently, anything less than the creation of state governments along the lines of federalism will simply be a reenactment of the tragic performance of national centralism over the past four decades.

The substantive issues of public policy and political economy will be virtually identical with the issues of development which the country must face. The task of development has something to do with answering the problems of hunger, scarcity of economic resources, unemployment, and powerlessness of the greater majority. The challenge of creating and managing new domestic order—economic, social, and political, will be a monumental and interdependent cooperative task. The central government, with its enormous political powers and economic resources, failed to answer the challenge of national development and progress. Obviously, these cannot be solved in a narrow and centralized development framework as unilaterally conceived by the central government.

The conception that there is "one right way" must be superseded. The diversity and possibility of more than one valid policy on any issue of concern are the values which must be respected. Choosing a particular and single path toward development does not preclude trying out alternative paths as well. Beyond a pluralism of approaches, a pluralism of outcomes must likewise be sought. There is no necessity for conformity of approaches between regions and in different townships, much less between cultures. Governing should no longer be conceived as a process of seeking one "truth," but of choosing some among many "truths" for simultaneous implementation. The extent that diversity is both perceived and implemented goal on a number of

development issues, and policies will be characterized by a plurality of outcomes rather than merely a plurality of proposals.

As the unitary structure of government constricts a genuine interdependent cooperative system in tackling the multifarious problems of development, as power remains concentrated at the center, federalism speaks of *one* governmental system whose power is broadly diffused. This gives each unit in the federal system the utmost freedom, power, and authority to decide and implement programs and projects it deems necessary to answer local issues and problems of development. Decisions on community problems made at the community level are potentially better than those made at the national level. The object of the federal government must therefore be to realize the superior potential of the community-level processes.

Apart from the needs of accelerating national development, the unique historical and cultural setting of the country—the diversities within each of the Philippine societies (Cordilleran, Moslem, and Christian societies), powerful desires to be united for certain purposes or to be organized under autonomous regional governments, and contrasting ways of life or the desire to protect divergent interest—makes federalism not only the most appropriate political structure, but an imperative whereby a relative balance or equilibrium between the duality of demands for union and autonomy is achieved. It endeavors to square unity with diversity.

Federalism is inseparable from liberal democracy. It is the concrete manifestation of political democracy expressed in a governmental structure. The unitary system remains the political mechanism of a government which forces unity and imposes uniformity and homogenization. Extreme centralism is no different from political authoritarianism.

Only in an environment where democracy is threatened will federalism fail.

Final Note

The issue on the most appropriate political structure for the country's national development remains a continuing question. The attempt to propel and spread economic growth and development of the nation under a unitary political system has simply brought about the concentration of wealth and prosperity among the major urban centers. On the other hand, the peripheral areas continue to be soaked in abject poverty and underdevelopment. Metro Manila, where the seat of political power rests, has undoubtedly been the ultimate beneficiary of "national growth and development" with its enormous political and economic resources in its disposal.

Evidently, the unitary structure of government has been a convenient mechanism used by the central authorities to assert their political supremacy over local

governmental units. LGUs, as creations of the national government, have to perform their governmental as well as proprietary functions within the limits and parameters defined by the unitary state. In spite of the national decentralization policy of the government and the constitutional mandate to devolve substantial political and administrative powers and resources to LGUs, the absence of real bargaining power in the hands of the latter has made local government autonomy an extremely difficult task if not an elusive dream.

As the government continues to translate the strategies of development administration in line with the country's development goals and objectives, experience toward this effort has not only been less satisfactory but dismal. With decentralization as the major policy requisite of development administration, the present political centralism inherent in a unitary system has frustrated the attempt toward the fullest democratization of political powers among subnational governments and mitigated the creation of self-reliant and self-sustaining local communities. Instead, such political arrangement has promoted the dependency of LGUs on the central government, obviously, an anathema in development administration.

Apart from the western-orientedness of development administration as a strategy in achieving national recovery and prosperity, the centralized governmental structure has circumscribed the enhancement of the country's enormous material and nonmaterial resources for the benefit of the Filipinos. The advocacy of decentralization as a policy while keeping the unitary structure intact will most likely bolster the present skewed and distorted realities of development. In simple terms, decentralization becomes a mockery of power distribution and democratized access to economic resources. In other words, the policy of decentralization without instituting the necessary restructuring of the unitary system will merely reinforce the existing political-economic and social structure.

As the debate continues on the issue of a better political and administrative arrangement which precipitates the attainment of the country's development goals, this paper attempts to contribute in its modest way toward the understanding of the current policy of decentralization within.

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