

OPEN FORUM

Cora Calara, Social Research Center of the University of Sto Tomas:

I would like to direct my question to Dr. Magno. Are cooperatives part of civil society? I know for a fact that there are a lot of them in every municipality. If so, how do you assess the contribution or the role of cooperative members in more "participatory" communities, particularly in the planning and governance of LGUs?

Dr. Magno

That's a very good question, because when you talk of civil society it usually refers to the non-government, non-profit sectors. But there is a thin line that separates the two, because cooperatives also undertake economic activities. I guess what we need to emphasize would be how cooperatives engage in governance, since the role of government is to enable development. Therefore, cooperatives participate in the process of engaging government in development planning. In many instances, cooperatives are considered as part of civil society as well, because local development is, of course, a goal for so many cooperatives.

Beatrice Zaña, Philippine Congress House of Representatives, Committee on Higher & Technical Education:

Being a voting constituent of Mayor Jerry Calderon of Angono, I would like to address my reactions to Atty. Plata. Having come from the Philippine Congress, where I've been working for 18 years, it is well known that the crafting of laws emanates from people like us, the civil servants in the Batasan. You mention, Atty. Plata, that there is a major need to amend the Local Government Code of 1991. I wonder what level you have undergone, because at the House level we usually network among ourselves—the staff—to push for certain legislation.

You mention that in the matter of devolution, as called for by the law, all the functions are decentralized, but not the more important and practical part of governance.

We hear the same (remarks) as we go around the country. Our committee, the Committee on Higher & Technical Education, has this mandate to visit tertiary or post-secondary schools around the country. We also attend board meetings because our Chair of the Committee has this mandate as an ex-officio member of all the 111 nationwide (boards). We also have this ongoing inquiry, because there's this issue about the congressmen becoming involved in the case of nursing schools that are being shut down by CHED through the Board of Nursing. The point of the congressmen here is whether their constituents are affected. If there are very rigid requirements for a nursing school to have an accredited tertiary hospital on a 1 to 1 ratio, the congressmen feel these should be set aside. When you mention a tertiary hospital, this implies that there is state-of-the-art equipment, but it is a known fact that in the provinces, such hospitals do not exist. So this is what the congressmen are fighting for.

Sometimes when I attend fora where there is Congress-bashing—you know we hear of political dynasties, congressmen who eventually become mayors—we just sit here, but we're actually uptight. But it is incumbent upon us, the civil servants of the House of Representatives, to at least defend our institution. I don't mean to sound defensive, these are just factual statements.

On the matter of addressing women empowerment—we hear of battered women, etc.—we are pushing for this Distance Learning System concept, which we have institutionalized. We have a bill for the National Open University, which is intended for those who are not able to attend regular schools. This concept came about because in the congressmen's view, education is a better weapon for those who are not able to get quality education.

We also have this ongoing priority legislation to interface—meaning ladderized education. This will enable those who have taken technical-vocational courses to have them ladderized into degree courses.

Going back to my question, Atty. Plata, what stage are you at in your amendatory move?

Atty. Plata:

We in the League of Municipalities have a partnership with the LCP, the League of Cities of the Philippines, and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, which is the counterpart of LMP in Canada. The target of that partnership is the omnibus—not just piecemeal legislation or amendment to the Local Government Code. As you well know, you can amend the Local Government Code every five years, but up to now, since 1991, we have not seen any developments as to the amendments proposed by the Local Chief Executives, especially the Leagues, in Congress. Efforts toward local revenue generation, for instance, have yet to make progress. What we want is change in the system. The other mayors are proposing that since VAT has been extended, it should be the local government that makes the collections, and give a share to the national government, and not the reverse. These are the proposals that have been made. As they say, if you are a good leader, three years is not enough for you to serve in office, and if you are a bad leader, three years is too long a term. And whether we admit it or not, there are many local chief executives who do excellent work, but we can't say that all of them are good. We also have those who do not perform well, or would be liabilities if they were to stay on as leaders on the local stage.

With regard to what you mentioned earlier regarding the responses of the congressmen, yes, actually we are neither for or against. . .we don't want to play devil's advocate, it is not our intention to ruin the reputations of the congressmen by saying that they have been lax, just sitting around, because our congressmen have become mayors and we see them working. All we are saying, based on our observations, is that they should acknowledge those who are "below" them or their constituents, before they enact the laws. They should determine what the people's needs are at the local level before they act at the national level,

because they will have difficulty in implementing these laws. An example is, as I mentioned earlier, Republic Act 9003 which has a deadline set for next year. There are many mayors who will be affected by this law because they do not have the capability or funding or assistance coming from the national government. In their view there has not been enough consultation with them, because a deadline has been set but they have not been given sufficient resources for proper implementation. This is why we suggest that we be given technical assistance. We are willing to comply with the directive under the law—there are no exemptions. We just want to clarify that we are not being antagonistic, we are not enemies of Congress but rather allies in implementing the laws that they enact or legislate.

Leila Barbano, House of Representatives Committee on Social Services:

This is in reaction to what Atty. Plata said--that we do not consult the implementors. We *do*. We hold public hearings, so that we can get their views before we pass the bill at the Committee Level, but unfortunately, they do not come. One example is ULAP—we just had a meeting last Tuesday. I think it's already the umbrella organization of the Local Government Authority. They never came.

Atty. Plata:

As far as the League of Municipalities is concerned, we cannot speak for ULAP, that is a different organization, although we are part of it. All we are saying is that, although now we can see that there is participation among our local chief executives, among our leagues, they are at the forefront. Previously they were stagnant—they did not participate much. This is why what we are doing now is emphasizing that if this is not contributing or if it is contrary to the policies of the local chief executives, then we will really complain, we will submit position papers. We are not against the Reproductive Health Bill or Responsible Parenthood Bill. This is why we have programs like those at the DOH. If they have their "Ligtas Buntis" program, we at LMP have our own program, "Kung Maliit Ang Pamilya, Kayang-Kaya." We had a launching in Angono, Rizal last February 23, and we received a favorable response, although we are aware that there are attacks coming from the Church. We are not against the Church; we would just like to inform the public that there are choices with regard to Family Planning. "Kung maliit po yung pamilya nyo, mas maganda" (The smaller the family, the better), because there are more basic services to provide for all of the constituents of our mayors.

Leo, College of Forestry, UP Los Baños:

(To Dr. Magno) One of the problems that we encounter in our society is the presence of drug trafficking, drug pushing. In the course of your study, did you encounter the approaches of Local Government Units in helping or assisting to solve this problem? (To Atty. Plata) What are the programs and activities that the League of Municipalities is undertaking in order to solve this problem, in a participatory approach?

Dr. Magno:

Actually, the drug problem is a major one, especially in urban areas. One of the barangays we engage with in solving the problem is a barangay in Navotas. Based on community information, the barangay provides a good focal point, but it has to be in partnership with the police—that's one of the areas that they're really engaged in, community participation in providing information. But in terms of apprehension—because this is the real thing, people with guns and the fire power—what they're doing is making representations with the police forces, enhancing community peace and order. I suppose it has to be some kind of a partnership with the different Local Government Units, and also in conjunction with the efforts of the police force.

Atty. Plata:

We are aware that there is a proliferation of drugs. It's a national concern, not just a local concern. So just like the proposals submitted to the Senate, to Congress, what happens is there is a two-level policy with the police. Previously, jurisdiction or control or supervision over the police was in the hands of the mayors, the local chief executives, but right now, under the present Local Government Code, the mayors have been "demoted," and the police are under the jurisdiction of the Department of Internal Local Government or DILG. The mayors now only hold a supervisory position, but they cannot direct the police themselves since they have a different "boss." The majors cannot direct the course of the law enforcement units in the localities, the LGUs. This is why one solution we have seen would be to give the authority over the police back to the mayors, in order to enforce the law and to safeguard the constituents. It is the mayors and their constituents who are most familiar with their localities, they know where the drug operations would be, where they are manufactured, where they are stored. If this authority is not given back to them, it will result in bigger problems later on.

Pia, Department of Social Welfare and Development:

I am studying Women Development at the University of the Philippines. I would like to ask both speakers about the issue of women. My question is, how do women's concerns fit into Participatory Local Governance as discussed by Dr. Magno, and Secondary Organizations as discussed by Dr. Javier. What contributions do these projects make towards the issue of women? They have mentioned that the state of women, together with other factors, reflects the state of the nation. Since we are in academe, those of us here are educated, so I am interested in hearing what these studies have to say on this issue.

I would also like to share an insight that it is not enough for us to be educated. Our eyes should also be open to what is happening in society.

Dr. Lamberte

Perhaps we should also ask the KILOS representative what contributions these studies can make toward the conditions of women.

KILOS is actually an organized Women's Group of the urban poor community in Singalong. Its part of the La Sallian community extension services, managed collaboratively with the Center for Social Concern for Action (COSCA) and SDRC. But it is KILOS that is in charge of the project activities. They also have a cooperative.

Alice, KILOS:

Through our discussion it has become clear that there are ordinary housewives like ourselves who play a big role in the community. In our gatherings we discuss what we should do in order that we might prosper, since not all of us have had the chance to go to school. We ask our partners like COSCA and SDRC to educate us on what we should know, so that our skills may be enhanced, so that our lives will become easier.

Joey, Program Officer, Micro Finance Poverty Alleviation:

The researches have provided a good way of illustrating how to make use of this knowledge, practical ways of bringing this knowledge to the level of the community. Since we have already begun the discussion on this, and since COSCA is the implementing unit for the community development initiatives of the University, I would just like to ask Dr. Magno and Dr. Javier what concrete approaches they would suggest, based on the data they have gathered from the different areas, that we can do in order to enhance the participation of the faculty, of the student organizations, in the community development process within the University.

Dr. Chiong-Javier:

In response to what Pia has said, based on my studies, the contribution of the women organizations has been greater to the welfare of the urban poor. There was one federation I documented, Sama-Sama, at the Batasan in Quezon City. Its leaders are women, and they have really been the force behind the successes of this federation, the Federation of Urban Poor Organizations. So when this federation in the uplands was established, on natural resource governance, we also looked into what women's role was. But in general, the organized women's groups have accomplished more in the urban areas. One reason for this is probably the history of organizing in the Philippines. Organizing people, including women, was more intense in the urban poor sector during the Marcos era, to combat the demolitions in the communities. So the result was a very organized effort of people in urban areas, more than in rural areas. Even if the organizing activities have been going on in the rural areas for quite some time, the urbanized really have a different character, so it is easier to organize urban dwellers around certain issues that affect them. Their welfare seems to be more urgent—poverty, for example, is felt more acutely if you are living in an urban poor area that is under water three-fourths of the year, rather than if you are living in Aklan, right? For example, you can see that there are lots of trees,

even if there are no comfort rooms in Aklan, the whole forest is a comfort room. But in the urban areas, how will you survive without a comfort room? So you know, in terms of just that one necessity, you can immediately see that organization is quicker among urban people when it comes to the issues that concern them.

With regard to Joey's question of what can be done here on campus, I think that what you are doing is a move towards community development. You're talking about women's welfare, right? In my opinion, your project is one positive, concrete effort towards looking at how women can be harnessed. It is possible to involve women who have not yet been organized, for example the way some NGOs approach certain issues about women like domestic violence. It is not necessary to organize women in order to combat domestic violence, although there are certain attempts towards that area. Our observation is that it is not the women victims themselves that mobilize people to combat domestic violence. But with the other issues like poverty alleviation, it is easy to get women involved since these are things that are so integral to their lives. In the urban poor areas, with the women at home, they see the situation of their children, they see their situation in the community. As the leaders of Sama-Sama say, they have a lot of time on their hands to do these things.

But now, one issue that has developed among the second level generation, the children of the leaders, is how they can be encouraged to be as dedicated, or even to become leaders of their own organizations, when in fact the women themselves who are active in the organization would prefer that their children get an education so they can have a stable job and have a life that is different from theirs. This is precisely why the women have organized themselves, in order to address the poverty issue. If this poverty is no longer experienced, how will they be able to encourage the second level generation to be as active as their mothers are? This is the kind of issue that has also surfaced.

Dr. Magno:

My research has been on governance. What is governance? Three things, right? It's about learning, it's about values, it's about practice. So for example I have studied governance, there are theories about governance, but there have been developments in understanding the practice. So what we have done is, we go to the local governments, to civil society engaged in local governments, because that is your laboratory, that is where your learning intensifies. We have found that it is the community that has greater knowledge, they are the ones in the know. It is just that what they have is local knowledge, so in a way they also want to learn from us, from those in academe. They want explanations. Otherwise, if we are unable to enlighten them, we cannot make a contribution, because they are the practitioners. This is why it's a two way process—we learn, we theorize; they practice, they also learn. And we engage in the sharing of values. So in that way we are able to complete what is called the network of learning and practice. As Atty. Plata has said, using the example of the very sensitive issue of reproductive health, it is subject to discussion, and of course

there are lessons and practices that need to be shared. So there are many developments that can result from a combination of these three factors.