

Community-Based Organizations, Local Politics, and Shelter Delivery in Metro Manila

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Adequate housing has been a perennial problem in Metro Manila. The past three administrations failed to gain significant ground in solving this. Decentralization promised the more efficient delivery of basic services, particularly to illegal settlements existing in politically significant numbers in the employment-rich areas of Metro Manila. Meanwhile, community-based organizations (CBOs) have become important actors in community improvement efforts. Although successful in bargaining with government to prevent demolition and legalize land tenure, CBOs continue to face tremendous obstacles, including factionalism within the communities themselves and the controlling tendencies of non-government organizations, in confronting the housing problem. It does not help that local governments, often without the political will to commit necessary resources in finding solutions to the housing issues, perceive CBOs as counterproductive elements and not as organizations that represent citizens whose inadequate shelter are constantly under the threat of demolition. The author suggests a closer look at the decentralized system of addressing the housing needs of the urban poor as well as the role of civil society in bringing access to adequate housing closer to those who need it.

Over the past three decades, community-based organizations (CBOs)¹ in urban poor areas in the Philippines have increasingly been recognized as important actors in community improvement efforts. Particularly since the fall of the Marcos government in 1986, political reforms have institutionalized a role for CBOs in government programs and policies regarding informal settlements (settlements that are illegally located on government or private sector land), and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have exerted considerable effort in community organizing. Yet there is a striking disparity between the popular image of CBOs, as presented in the media, by the NGOs, and the academe, and the reality of organizing at the grassroots level.

In the popular image, CBOs are effectively mobilizing communities, and making consistent inroads in gaining access to decision-making in local government. They are supposedly achieving this through adherence to a participatory model of organizing that empowers community residents to make decisions and solve problems on their own. On the ground, however, the situation often appears somewhat different. CBO experiences in trying to influence government vary. They often receive only grudging

acknowledgment from local governments, and in some cases are treated with indifference or outright opposition. While NGOs proclaim their intention to make CBOs self-reliant, they often exercise more control than they acknowledge, and in fact CBO leaders themselves look to NGOs as critical sources of guidance and political influence. Finally, community solidarity is often considerably lower than is claimed by NGOs and CBO federations, and in some cases community organizers seem to hold organizations together by sheer force of will.

The reasons that people who work with the urban poor project an image of progress in community organizing are understandable and often justifiable — CBOs usually work for commendable goals in difficult circumstances, and leaders and community residents often make great sacrifices. Nevertheless, I believe that the gap between the ideal and the reality of CBO participation in government points to a need to reassess certain aspects of the approach to urban poor housing that has been adopted by government, and endorsed by many NGOs and aid organizations. This approach is premised on the assumption that the decentralization of authority from national and metropolitan government to city, municipal and barangay (neighborhood) governments will necessarily lead to housing programs and policies that will be more responsive to the needs of the urban poor. It is further premised on the assumption that CBOs have the capacity to successfully assert the interests of community residents in dealings with government. In fact CBOs face considerable constraints to their effectiveness in the current housing framework. The process of organizing communities itself often poses difficulties, as a variety of interests within communities must be accommodated. Even when they successfully organize residents, CBOs face significant structural constraints to influencing local governments, as local officials often have a vested interest in local land markets. In fact, I would argue that because of the existence of these vested interests, local governments are sometimes less responsive to the interests of the urban poor than are national or metro level governments. In sum, while providing for CBO participation in local government may be a necessary condition for community empowerment, it is not a sufficient condition.

Following a brief review of some theoretical trends on the role of government and civil society in shelter delivery, this paper will examine the impact of post-Marcos reforms in the area of urban management and on access to housing for the poor. First, it will examine the implications

of the retreat of Metro and national level government from land allocation and shelter delivery, and the devolution of authority to city and municipal level government, for relations between government and communities. Next, the paper will examine how recent political and economic changes have affected politics in Metro Manila's cities, and what this has meant for the urban poor. Finally, the paper will examine how political reforms have affected the nature and function of community organizing, and the role of NGOs and CBO federations in such organizing.

Urban Poor Organizing in the Philippines: Some Theoretical Points

Initial interest in CBOs grew out of the observation of researchers in the 1960s and 70s that such organizations tended to emerge in situations where the urban poor formed settlements outside of formal legal channels (Laquian 1971; Turner and Fichter 1972). Since that time, CBOs have become central to the literature on housing delivery for the urban poor. A major theme in this literature has been the critical role of these organizations in representing communities in relations with government, and in fostering resident participation in planning and implementing improvement efforts.

For the purposes of this paper, I will define CBOs as “arrangements and associations formed and located within the local space, or immediate residential surroundings of the actors” (Akin 1990). If one accepts this rather inclusive definition, CBOs may have a wide variety of organizational types. They may have a well-defined organizational structure with elected officers, or an informal set of recognized leaders. Furthermore they may have ties with government or NGOs, or operate independently. For the purposes of this study I am focusing specifically on what Berner calls “primary organization” — organizations that deal with land and housing issues and are the primary channel for interaction between the government and community residents (Berner 1997). Studies have shown that such organizations exist widely in informal settlements in Metro Manila.

No reliable data exist on the current extent of community organizing in urban poor areas in Metro Manila. As of June 1998 there were 906 organizations registered with the Presidential Commission on the Urban Poor, most of which represented communities of between 50 and 500 families (PCUP 1998). However, this likely represents only a small percentage of all community organizations in the city. A survey conducted

by the Urban Poor Associates in 1998 of all informal settlements in Metro Manila along the Pasig River indicated that 76% had some type of formal organization, while only 27% had been contacted by NGOs. Although we cannot assume that the Pasig River communities are indicative of the situation in Metro Manila as a whole, these numbers suggest that while most communities have a CBO, a considerable majority of informal settlements remain unaffected by NGO organizing.

I will not attempt a comprehensive review of the history of Metro Manila's CBOs here — excellent reviews of this history have been presented elsewhere (Honculada 1985; Karaos 1995; Carrol 1998). Suffice to say that community organizing is currently undergoing a paradigm shift in the city. During the Marcos regime, community organizers committed to a program of anti-authoritarianism and empowerment of the poor mobilized many communities to develop organizations that were autonomous of government to improve infrastructure and services, and lobby government for assistance in shelter improvement. These organizers were often aligned with or sympathetic to the National Democratic Front's (NDF) agenda for social change, although the degree to which the agenda of this political movement was understood and advocated by the broad mass of people in the communities is open to question (Karaos 1995). Nonetheless, the appeal of the struggle against authoritarianism, and disgust at the zealously anti-urban poor agenda of the Marcoses, galvanized a housing movement that was to become the strongest in Southeast Asia. Particularly in the Tondo Foreshore area, CBOs bargained with local authorities for protection from eviction, improvements in infrastructure and services, and in-city relocation projects (Ruland 1984).

The overthrow of the Marcos government and the ensuing political change has dramatically altered the environment in which organizers and CBOs operate. With the democratization of local government, housing the poor has become a populist political issue, thereby creating political space for NGOs, CBOs, and CBO federations to press their agendas. The Local Government Code of 1991 has devolved significant powers of planning, regulation, and revenue generation to local government, and has (at least in theory) institutionalized civil society participation in government through representation on decision-making bodies such as Local and Barangay Development Councils. More recently, the Urban Development and Housing Act (UDHA), which was passed in large part

due to lobbying by NGOs and CBO federations, has codified the rights of informal settlers. New housing initiatives have generally seen a move away from government's direct participation in the acquisition and distribution of land or the construction of housing for the poor. Rather, new programs emphasize government's role in facilitating civil society and private sector delivery of housing. For example, the Community Mortgage Program (CMP), currently the main initiative for delivering housing to poor families, provides government loans to CBOs to purchase land, usually from its private sector owner. The CBO then collects payments from individual residents to amortize the loan.

These developments in the Philippines are consistent with a worldwide paradigm shift in the role of government in urban management. Following the debt crisis in many developing countries in the 1970s and 80s, many governments were forced to undertake fiscal austerity programs in order to repay their debts. At the same time, government-sponsored housing and service delivery programs in urban areas in many countries came under increasing criticism for being inefficient and inequitable. Governments therefore sought ways to deliver housing and services while cutting government budgets. In this context, a new model of urban management emerged, under the sponsorship of international aid and lending organizations such as the World Bank, which emphasized an "enablement" role for government (Pugh 1994). This model is premised on the belief that governments should dramatically reduce their direct involvement in the delivery of goods and services, and rather act as a facilitator in "enabling" the private sector and civil society to deliver them. In order to do this, governments should take measures to ensure the stability and transparency of market mechanisms, privatize service delivery where possible, deregulate land markets and housing systems, and where necessary form public-private partnerships (World Bank 1993). CBOs play a key role in enablement policy as organizations that represent the interests of communities in relations with the private sector and government, and that foster participation of community members in order to reduce costs and ensure the sustainability of community improvement projects. Thus, from the enablement perspective, the reforms that have occurred in the Philippines provide an opportunity for CBOs to prevail upon local governments to implement a housing program that truly meets the needs and interests of the urban poor.

While few would argue with the idea that people should be able to participate in the decisions that directly affect them, or that centralized systems of government have often shown serious weaknesses, this new paradigm has come under increasing criticism in recent years. There are three main critiques of enablement theory. The first concerns the assumption that the liberalization of land markets will significantly enhance access to land for the poor (Baken and van der Linden 1993). There has been increasing recognition of what some have called the “metropolitan dilemma” — the phenomenon in developing countries in which a large low-wage workforce is required for the development of the urban economy, yet is unable to afford the high prices of land dictated by the for-profit private sector (Berner and Korff 1995). One consequence of this phenomenon is that, as long as wages remain low and land prices are determined by market forces, the urban poor will simply be bid out of legal access to land by higher value uses, and informal settlements will continue to be a major source of housing.

The second critique of enablement theory concerns its assumption that the relationship between government, CBOs and the private sector is largely non-conflictive, and that enlightened governments will endorse the empowerment of CBOs. Burgess et al (1997) state that:

(There is a) general lack of appreciation (in enablement theory) of the conflicts of interests between and within the state, the market and the community in the process of urban development. Moreover...community enablement policies can exacerbate these conflicts as well as generate new ones...A general question prompting analysis, then, is: Do community enablement policies reflect or transcend the conflicts of interest involved in urban growth and development?

In fact, urban poor communities are usually in competition with other land uses, including private sector and government uses, and governments often align themselves with the private sector in the interest of economic development. The resulting conflict of interest between communities and government can significantly constrain CBO dealings with government. This is particularly true in heavily urbanized areas, where there is intense developmental pressure on land, or where economic interests exercise a great deal of influence:

(G)overnments have been reluctant to empower grassroots organizations in inner city areas, because they create obstacles to the exercise of politically and economically sensitive planning powers...required to facilitate not the poor, but the commercial property interests linked to urban renewal, gentrification, and the conversion of residential to commercial and public land uses. (Burgess et al 1997)

This argument is particularly valid for local governments, which have a more direct interest in local land uses and economic development. Thus local governments may oppose the empowerment of CBOs. This contradicts the assumption inherent in many arguments for decentralization that local governments, being more directly accountable to local voters, are more responsive to local demands than are national governments (Brillantes 1998). Thus in general there is a need to understand relations between different actors in urban development, and how environmental factors such as the local economic base and the availability of land restrict or encourage the participation of CBOs in local politics.

The third critique of enablement theory concerns the assumption that encouraging popular participation in city government through civil society will necessarily lead to programs and policies that more accurately reflects the interests of urban residents (Schubeler 1996). Various commentators have noted that the accumulated individual demands of urban residents do not necessarily translate into an agenda for social change that is reflective of the interests of these individuals. Furthermore, the various organizations that make up "civil society" often pursue contradictory goals (Storper 1998; Abu-Lughod 1998). Abu-Lughod (1998) summarizes some of the contradictions in the role of civil society in governance as follows:

The trouble is: what the people "want" sometimes violates our values, and sometimes "the people," even within a small territory, disagree so violently or have such irreconcilable goals that we must take sides. Although "civil society as process" is now being looked at as a way out of this dilemma, I suggest that it cannot extricate us from the ends-means dilemma. (Abu-Lughod 1998)

She argues that urban planners and policy-makers, stung by accusations of ethnic and class bias, elitism, and professional arrogance, have sought refuge in a process-oriented system which precludes these

accusations by seeking solutions to problems directly from affected populations. Yet organizations of civil society may embody divisions in society along socioeconomic, ethnic, kinship, or political lines, and may therefore engage in activities that planners and policy-makers feel are inimical to the interests of the community or the larger society. She goes on to suggest that civil society can be a valuable part of governance only if urban planners and policy-makers remain conscious of its role and content. The implication is that they cannot forsake a normative framework for planning for a participatory mode of operation.

With these theoretical arguments as a starting point, this paper will critically examine three assumptions of the current framework for dealing with the problem of informal settlements in Metro Manila. The first assumption is that the lack of land for housing the poor, a problem that occurs at the metropolitan level, can be solved through intervention at the city and municipal levels. The second is the assumption that city governments will be more responsive to the urban poor than national or Metro level entities. The third is the assumption that the process of participation will necessarily lead to effective and sustainable solutions to housing problems in Metro Manila.

Informal Settlements: Metropolitan Problem, Municipal Solution?

The decentralization of government has generally been applauded in the Philippines as leading to programs and policy formation that is more responsive to the needs of people at the grassroots level. This popular image is expressed concisely by Brillantes (1997), who states that:

There are two major reasons why governments decentralize. First, decentralization hastens decision-making processes by decongesting central government and reducing red tape. Second, and perhaps more important, it increases citizen participation, and empowers them thereby leading to more open and democratic government.

According to this argument, decentralization leads to popular empowerment because local government officials are more knowledgeable about local conditions and respond to local pressures more directly, and because institutions of civil society have more opportunities to penetrate government decision-making at the local level.

A common critique of this view is that decentralization may lead to the entrenchment of powerful local economic and political actors who will thwart meaningful participation by the poor (Rocamora 1995). In other words, local government can be as tyrannous as national government. Specifically, some argue that there is a potential for the emergence of political bosses at the local level who rule through a combination of fear, coercion, and money politics, and that this will lead to increased marginalization of the urban poor (Sidel 1995). There is some validity to this argument, which will be discussed in greater detail in the next section. In addition, I argue that decentralization in a large metropolitan area like Metro Manila may in fact lead to a decrease in government responsiveness to the interests of the urban poor because the creation of a number of local government units governing one urban entity creates a collective action problem. This is because self-interested city leaders will not make the political or economic sacrifices necessary to solve the housing problem, because in doing so they will absorb a disproportionate amount of the costs while the benefits would be spread throughout the Metro area. While individual cities and municipalities benefit from the provision of housing for the poor because the poor play a vital role in the urban economy in providing labor, providing housing for the poor has political and economic costs. It has political costs, as it requires confronting powerful landowners, something local governments are often unwilling to do. It has economic costs because the urban poor pay less in business and property taxes than do high value industrial, commercial, and residential land uses. Any city or municipality that actively undertakes a program of housing provision and protection of the rights of informal settlers risks becoming a receptacle for the urban poor, yet may not receive the benefits as poor residents may work outside their jurisdictions. In fact, city and municipal governments often have an incentive to drive the urban poor out of their jurisdictions.

Of course, there are some exceptions to this rule. In some cases the sheer number of urban poor make them a political force that cannot be ignored, and populist political leaders attempt to turn their plight into political capital by making promises to assist them. This usually happens in cities on the urban fringe, such as Quezon City or Muntinlupa, where the urban poor constitute a potential source of critical votes, and there is some land available to accommodate their interests. Nevertheless, such relatively progressive local governments usually have a limited impact in improving housing among the poor. For example, as of June

1998 Quezon City government had originated 82 CMP loans, making it the second largest CMP originator after the National Housing Authority (NHMFC 1998). Yet the 3,993 families who benefited from these projects represent only about 2 percent of the informal settler population in the city.

In most cases, city governments publicly declare their sympathy with the plight of the urban poor and engage in token projects, while following a general policy of accommodating commercial, industrial, and high-value residential interests over the urban poor. Where relocation is necessary, local governments usually opt for projects outside their jurisdictions. Real estate speculators do a brisk business selling tracts of land in neighboring Bulacan and Rizal provinces to city and municipal governments for resettlement projects. Yet these projects often leave the urban poor far from sources of employment.

Governments in urbanized areas elsewhere in the country often perform better than Metro Manila local governments in dealing with urban poor housing. This is partially because, in smaller cities, the option of simply moving informal settlers across city borders is not as realistic, and competition over land is less intense. A program officer at one funding agency told the author that his organization prefers not to work with local governments in Metro Manila, because they have not displayed the capacity or inclination to deal with major issues, such as urban poor housing, that require Metro-level intervention. However, given the fact that a large proportion of the urban population of the Philippines lives in Metro Manila, often in appalling environmental conditions, disregarding Metro Manila is not a sustainable approach to take in the long term.

Thus CBOs and CBO federations face daunting obstacles to influencing local government for the benefit of the urban poor. Yet there has been a dearth of efforts to affect national or metro-level reform. A notable exception is the exemplary effort of the Urban Land Reform Task Force (ULR-TF) and other groups in lobbying for legislative change at the national level (Karaos et al 1995). Urban poor CBO federations and NGOs were critical in ensuring the passage of the Urban Development and Housing Act (UDHA), which codifies housing rights and outlines an agenda for housing provision for the poor, and the Comprehensive Integrated Shelter Financing Act (CISFA), which provides for funding for the implementation of UDHA. These laws have the potential to significantly

enhance the quality of housing available to the urban poor. Nevertheless, a major weakness of these laws has been the lack of adequate implementation mechanisms, and compliance by local governments has therefore emerged as a major issue. In general, CBOs and CBO federations have not had much success in getting Metro Manila local governments to undertake any major programs for legalization of tenure or shelter improvement. They have in some cases made significant progress in gaining some recognition from local governments, for example in forcing city governments to establish urban poor affairs offices with CBO and NGO representation, but this has yet to translate into major housing initiatives. I believe that the collective action problem described above is one reason for this. Another reason is the existence of powerful actors with a vested interest in land distribution systems at the local level. This topic will be discussed in the next section.

The New Transactional Politics: Are the Poor Being Shortchanged?

The decentralization and democratization of government in the Philippines is often characterized as having led to the emergence of a transactional form of local politics. In this view, local politicians must build coalitions in order to maintain power. They cultivate relationships with powerful economic interests to finance political campaigns and assist in the implementation of programs and projects, with civil society organizations to maintain contact with the electorate, and with other powerful political and social actors in order to run the government. In order to build these coalitions, politicians must make concessions to these actors in order to get their support. Thus business interests, wealthy and prominent citizens, landowners and others use their political, social and economic influence to bargain for concessions from government. In this view the urban poor also have a bargaining tool at their disposal, as their numbers make them an important source of votes. Thus, theoretically, the urban poor should be able to translate their potential as a vote base into demands on political figures for land tenure, housing and services.

There are two general versions of this theory of transactional politics. The first version resembles traditional pluralist theories of urban politics in seeing various interest groups as having relatively equal influence on government, and seeing government as mediating between various interests in a relatively even-handed manner as it attempts to maximize

resources. This view is similar to traditional patron-client frameworks, which state that as long as democratic processes allow for popular participation in politics “economic inequalities will be lessened in the long term through a process of bargaining and negotiation that is at work not only in the economy but in the political system” (Rocamora 1995). In this view, government in a transactional system is likely to be highly responsive to citizens, who will exercise considerable influence on decision-making (Sidel 1997). Adherents to this view see the greatest potential for increasing urban poor access to housing in training urban poor CBOs and local governments to better understand each others needs and work together more effectively.

The second version of the transactional politics framework gives greater recognition to the structural economic and social conditions that lead to the exclusions of the poor from legal land and housing delivery systems. Specifically, this view recognizes that “political power remains concentrated in the hands of a relatively few families” who, through their control of the agricultural, commercial and industrial sectors, “easily dominate the political system” (Siliman and Noble 1998). In the urban realm, this means that the interests of elites usually win out over the interests of the urban poor in the competition over scarce urban land. Nevertheless, this view sees the greatest potential for advancement of the interests of the urban poor in mobilizing civil society to take advantage of the political space offered by democratization and decentralization. It differs from the conventional pluralist view in its greater emphasis on political awareness building among the urban poor and consciousness-building in government, and its generally more antagonistic attitude towards government.

Both views see decentralization as an essentially progressive force because it has increased the space available for civil society participation in government. These perspectives have inspired numerous studies that have documented the increased role of CBOs in government in various contexts (Angeles 1997; Brillantes 1997). In these studies, the primary method used to measure the degree of local government openness and CBO influence is the case study, and the case studies overwhelmingly focus on the success stories. The implication of these studies is that the logical course of action for NGOs and CBOs is to learn what CBOs and government did right in these cases, and to emulate them. The conclusion is generally that the primary ways of doing so are to increase

training and consciousness building to enhance both of these entities' capacity to cooperate in program and project planning and implementation.

The transactional politics framework for understanding civil society participation in government provides important insights into the potential presented by the political space created by recent reforms. Yet I believe that this framework has two major flaws that limit its applicability in many circumstances. The first is that it does not address the disparity in local government resources under the current system of decentralization. Under the Local Government Code of 1991, the national government provides an allocation to city and municipal governments from national internal revenue taxes, and also provides local governments with the authority to raise revenue from local taxes and fees. While many local governments have been able to capitalize on these revenue-generating opportunities, others have had some difficulty. Cities and municipalities that do not have strong economies have a weak tax base. As a result, there is a significant disparity in financial resources among localities. In 1997, local government revenue per capita in Metro Manila ranged from P486 in Malabon to P7,656 in Makati (Department of Finance no date). Thus local governments with particularly low revenue, such as Malabon, Navotas, and Valenzuela, often have difficulty even maintaining the level of staffing necessary to carry out basic functions. This severely limits their ability to implement programs, or to tap into resources available at the national level. Thus even where there is some will on the part of local government to cooperate with civil society in housing improvement programs, they sometimes simply lack the resources to undertake planning and program development.

The second reason that a capacity-building approach is of limited utility is that such an approach does not acknowledge the great variations in political openness in localities to cooperation with organizations of civil society. The political openness of a local government is affected by a number of factors, including the development pressures an area is experiencing, the percentage of urban poor in the area and their degree of mobilization, the socioeconomic composition of the city or municipality, and the political history of the area, to name a few factors. These factors vary among cities. For example, many outlying areas of Metro Manila, such as Malabon, Valenzuela and Taguig, are experiencing rapid industrial development, while areas such as Mandaluyong and Makati have experienced rapid commercial development. Local governments have

increasingly vied for industrial, commercial, and high-value residential investment because of the importance of attracting economic activity in order to generate business and property taxes (the two most important sources of revenue for local governments in Metro Manila), and because of the opportunities for graft such economic activities creates for local politicians. In addition, in many cases economically powerful families with real estate interests, control key political positions or otherwise exercise influence in political decisions. As a result, land allocation is highly politicized, and developers, industrialists, and other economic interests have a great deal of political influence at the local level. This influence is particularly strong in cases where there is intense competition over land, and where control over the local economic base is concentrated in a few hands. Informal settlers have greater leverage where alternative sources of political power exist, where they represent a large percent of the city population, and where there is more land available, thereby creating greater potential for a variety of land uses to be accommodated.

In Quezon City, for example, informal settlers constitute more than half of the city's population, and they are highly organized due to the concentration of NGOs and universities in the area. In addition, there is a considerable amount of vacant land in the city to accommodate development pressures or serve as relocation sites. In this context, housing rights have become a favorite issue of populist politicians, who have often cooperated with CBOs and NGOs, and been supportive of in-city CMP projects and other relatively community-friendly measures. By way of contrast, in Navotas, a few wealthy families who control the fishing and related industries, the dominant industries in the area, dominate the political scene. Their personal economic interest in the locality restricts the political space for negotiation between informal settlers and government. Navotas is by far the most densely populated city in Metro Manila, so that the potential for in-city relocation is limited. The city government also lacks revenue to engage in large-scale political patronage. The result is a generally antagonistic relationship between the urban poor and government.

Currently the local government is pushing for a commercial and office space development on land to be reclaimed in Manila Bay that would displace thousands of families along the shoreline, yet the government has no concrete relocation plans for these families. In Makati, development pressures have led to a rapid increase in the price of land in recent years.

While the mayor tends to favor the politically influential developers in the city, he also cultivates an electoral base in urban poor areas by using the city's considerable financial resources for highly visible programs, such as health care provision, that benefit the poor (Gloria 1995). Nonetheless, the city has no urban poor affairs office, and generally deals directly with informal communities only when it has plans to demolish them.

In sum, local political economies may militate against cooperation between informal settlers and governments in finding solutions to the housing issues in poor communities. While it is in the interests of almost all politicians to project an image of city government as being sympathetic to the poor, governments often lack the will, means, or inclination to commit the necessary economic or political resources. In such circumstances, training and consciousness raising are may be worthwhile activities, but their impact will be muted.

An NGO leader interviewed by the author expressed the hope that a new generation of city leaders is emerging who are more professional and enlightened in their manner of dealing with the urban poor. However, it is not certain that such a trend exists, as recent elections have often seen old traditional political families come to power. Likewise, the background of a mayor does not necessarily dictate what their actions will be once in power. Jejomar Binay of Makati was a human rights lawyer before taking office, but soon learned the requirements of maintaining office in the high-stakes game of Makati politics and came to resemble a traditional patronage politician (Gloria 1995).

Theoretically, a space for civil society influence in decision-making has been institutionalized in legislation. The Local Government Code stipulates that CBOs and NGOs must comprise at least 25% of Local Development Councils (LDCs), the entity responsible for formulating local development plans (Nolleddo 1991). Yet in many cases this civil society component is taken up by upper-class groups, such as the Lion's Club or the Rotarians, who often have an interest in maintaining the status quo in property allocation systems. In addition, many community organizers who have been involved in organizing NGO and CBO participation in LDCs agree that in practice these bodies have little decision-making authority. Thus NGOs and CBOs must learn the game of backroom political deal cutting — an arena in which their influence is limited by the structural conditions discussed earlier.

In sum, while decentralization of authority from national to local government has led to some exemplary cases of local government-civil society cooperation, it has also led to a significant disparity in resources among localities, and to intractable barriers to meaningful participation in some cases. I hypothesize that CBO federations and NGOs that organize on a large scale tend to focus on those areas where there is a potential for success while generally paying less attention to areas where major obstacles exist. This is somewhat less true of socialist groups, which often capitalize on the frustration in such areas to build a mass base for leftist political movements. Thus focusing on success stories or 'best practices' leaves much of this story untold. A housing delivery system that depends primarily on cooperation between local government, civil society and the private sector is likely to experience the limitations described above, especially in light of the socioeconomic disparities in the Philippine context.

Process, Content, and 'Facipulation'

In the aftermath of the overthrow of the Marcos regime, the adoption of political reforms led to hopes that the opening of political space for demand-making would lead to the expansion of the urban poor movement (Karaos 1995). These expectations were partially met with the explosion of community organizing that occurred during the Aquino era, and with the passage of UDHA. Since then, however, I would argue that there has been no significant increase in the strength of urban poor organizing as a cohesive movement with a clear set of objectives. In fact, many who were involved in community organizing during the 1970s and 80s see a decline in the scale and quality of organizing in recent years. There are many reasons that the expected expansion of the urban poor movement did not materialize. Conflicts within the underground left, and its general decline since 1986, have resulted in its cessation of support to open urban organizing efforts. This has weakened the organizing infrastructure that existed during the martial law years. The increasing availability of funding for specific community improvement efforts, and the increased openness of government to such efforts, have led to the professionalization of NGOs. NGOs have subsequently decreased organizing oriented towards explicitly political goals.

In a very insightful volume published in 1980, Karina Constantino-David described, from an insider's perspective, some of the contradictions

faced by community organizers. She argued that an approach to organizing that focuses primarily on encouraging popular participation is flawed if it does not also pursue a well-defined agenda for social change.

Thus, the vagueness of the end goal of any organizing effort leads to process-centered activities which, if left unchecked, convert the organizing process into a fetish that exists as a goal in itself. This situation results in a never-ending cycle of learning experiences geared to the acquisition by the people of methods and skills which they are unable to use to tame an oppressive environment. (Constantino-David 1980)

Thus organizers should not privilege the process of participation over the content of the objective to be achieved. She further argues that, in order for organizers to succeed in overcoming barriers to participation, they must be conscious of a desired outcome to the organizing effort, and must steer organizations towards this outcome. She terms this steering process 'facipulation' — a combination of facilitation of community participation and manipulation of the process in the direction of predefined goals. Thus, ironically, community organizers must simultaneously espouse a form of participatory democracy while subtly undermining it where necessary. This is not always as cynical as it sounds. Studies in the Philippines and elsewhere tend to show that social ties are strongest at the level of the alley or street, where daily interaction foster a sense of kinship, and that organizing beyond that level is often difficult. Politicians and other vested interests in communities often develop alternative organizations to further their own goals. In addition, communities are divided along socioeconomic, kinship and other lines. Thus there is often factionalism within communities, and it is often difficult for them to move towards goals together, even where these goals might be mutually beneficial.

During the Marcos era the anti-authoritarian movement and the alternative political agenda represented by the NDF played a key role in holding together a broad-based anti-Marcos movement among the urban poor. The process was aided by the outrageous and demeaning rhetoric of the Marcoses proclaiming informal settlers as eyesores and criminals, and promising 'last campaigns' to eradicate them from the city. Such rhetoric generated fear and anger among the urban poor, and under these conditions NGOs were able to mobilize communities around the appeal of an alternative of protection of informal settler's from

eviction and assistance to them to build homes. Today, however, anti-government rhetoric is less effective as the government has adopted much of the rhetoric of democracy, decentralization, and participation that many NGOs have long espoused, while at the same time taking a far less visible role in housing. Thus insensitive national government programs and political repression are no longer the potent rallying cries they once were.

Today, CBO federations and NGOs pursue a variety of strategies in community organizing. Some organizations focus on project-oriented organizing, in order to implement specific community improvements or to participate in government programs such as the CMP. Some organizations focus on institutionalizing participation by CBOs in local government. Others use organizing as a means to build a basis for political movements. Finally, some focus on process-oriented organizing. In general, CBOs and NGOs are in a transitional period in which they are trying to take advantage of the political space provided by recent reforms. In the process of learning the limits and potentials of the current framework for housing the poor, the urban poor movement will continue to develop.

Conclusion

Reforms in urban governance in the post-Marcos era have in many cases significantly increased the ability of urban poor community residents in Metro Manila to influence decisions that affect them. CBOs have in some contexts successfully bargained with government to prevent demolitions, legalize land tenure, and improve services. However, CBOs continue to face significant obstacles in their efforts to improve their communities in the current housing framework. The continuing rapid rise of land prices means that urban land continues to be beyond the means of many Metro Manila families. Local governments often consider CBOs as hindrance to progress, rather than organizations that represent citizens whose needs must be addressed. The rapid pace of urban development means that the threat of demolition remains a menacing possibility for informal settlers. In this context, it is necessary to assess the overall impact of the current housing framework, which emphasizes decentralization and an increased role for civil society in urban government on the urban poor. The review presented here raises several questions regarding this framework. First, are city and municipal governments the

appropriate unit to address the housing needs of Metro Manila's poor? Would an enhanced role for Metro or national level authorities over urban development address some of the issues of spatial inequity and local politics discussed here? What is the feasibility of such an option? Finally, what agenda should NGOs and CBOs pursue in furthering the urban poor movement in the direction of greater access to housing for the poor? Addressing these questions requires a research agenda that examines the overall impact of the current housing framework on the extent and nature of community organizing, on land and housing markets, and on local politics. ❁

Endnote

- 1 I have chosen to use the term 'community-based organization' (CBO) rather than the term 'people's organization' (PO), which is more commonly used in the Philippines, for the organizations I am referring to. This is because the former allows me to differentiate more clearly between organizations that are made up of residents of a locality, and larger sectoral organizations, both of which would fall under the heading of people's organization.

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