

Civil Society and Mindanao 2000

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Each administration, at one time or another, promised to give Mindanao either a long-overdue helping hand or a fair shake. So far the Filipinos down south are more inclined to bite hands, or shoot them off, if the secessionists were to have their way. The fall of the Marcos regime ended two decades of extreme neglect but gave way to two administrations' worth of relative neglect. To his credit, President Ramos took the concept a step further. His office even gave it a name: Mindanao 2000. Targeting sustainable development by the year 2010 consultations were held and opinions were heard from all political and social sectors during the 1992-1996 "summits." In an era of renewed participation from marginalized sectors, loudest voice came from the least marginalized source. It was loud enough to negate that of non-government (NGOs), peoples organizations (POs), cooperatives and the Mindanao population as a whole. The corporate lobby eased out Civil Society even before Mindanao 2000 could be finalized on paper.

Introduction

This study attempts to provide insights into the threats to and opportunities for state-civil society cooperation in Mindanao by providing an account of the experience of NGOs, POs and cooperatives in the formulation of the Ramos administration-initiated Mindanao 2000 development plan, referred to in this study as "the Plan."

To do this, the study examines the extent of involvement of key development actors in the island — government through the project coordinator, the Office of the President-Mindanao (Opamin); the business community through the different chambers of commerce and government "private sector" institutional mechanisms; and NGOs, POs and cooperatives of varying programmatic concerns and ideological influences — in the preparation of the Plan.

The study also examines the methodology used by Opamin as a consensus building mechanism for the plan. Were consultations or similar mechanisms used to get feedback and/or inputs for the Plan? Who took part in these consensus-building processes? How extensively did these actors involve themselves in these processes?

An even more significant area of inquiry is how these processes shaped the outcome of the plan, and to what degree the lobbying of involved actors could be credited to it. This is important in light of the often contending influences of business, on one hand, and of NGOs and POs, on the other. By examining the extent of their influence in shaping the Plan, we hope to gain insights on whose interests — business or the communities — the plan takes from.

As an additional indicator, key informants from selected NGOs and POs in several regions in Mindanao were made to react to key chapters of the Plan to see whether its goals, strategies, policy recommendations and action plans are reflective of the general social development aspirations of civil society.

The Development Plan

Mindanao 2000 is an island-wide intermediate growth plan which seeks to consolidate local development initiatives and provide a development direction for the island from 1995-2010. A variation of the medium-term Philippine Development Plan (Philippines 2000), the plan details the vision, mission, strategy and action agenda for the island economy through a “broad-based” approach with the agriculture and agro-industrial sectors as its “pillars” of economic growth.

The plan proceeds from the premise that Mindanao’s history of underdevelopment is rooted in the “backwater” role that it has played in the country’s economic development strategy — i.e., as “basically a food and raw material supplier of the National Capital Region (NCR) and other urban centers.” It assigns the blame on Manila-centered development strategies which “accentuated the dependent underdevelopment” of the rest of the regions, particularly Mindanao.

As a strategy, the plan seeks to maximize opportunities provided by a liberalized global trading environment brought about by the World Trade Organization (WTO) and regional trading arrangements like Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the East Asean Growth Area. It provides the policy environment that would encourage the private sector to enlarge market niches of “export winners” in agro-industries.

History

The Plan appears to have originated from previous initiatives of government line agencies and civil society actors at developing a development framework plan for Mindanao.

The first is a Mindanao development framework plan prepared by the National Economic Development Authority (Neda) regional offices (NROs) in 1990. Like Mindanao 2000, Neda's framework plan was developed based on existing local development plans at the time. And like Mindanao 2000, Neda's framework plan was based on the island's characteristics as an agri-based economy with emerging export-oriented industries.

Only in two areas did the two frameworks appear to differ. First, Neda's did not attempt to discourage the perpetuation of plantation enclaves and extractive industries in Mindanao, two economic forms which has come under heavy criticism in Mindanao 2000 for their unsustainability.

The second variance revolves around the levels of economic planning. While Neda's framework plan continued to operate from the premise of economic planning through existing political subdivisions, Mindanao 2000 pushed for planning based on identified area development zones (ADZs) and economic growth clusters (EGCs) based on sociocultural ties, shared markets infrastructure and common resource endowments.

The second initiative came in 1993 from the Mindanao Coalition of Development (Mincode) NGO networks, a network of 11 NGO networks all over Mindanao. During its first congress in July of 1993, Mincode presented a development agenda prepared by its consolidated member networks in an attempt to flesh out "community-centered" development principles on equity and sustainability.

Called the Basic Industrial Development Strategy (BIDS), the document sought to address the twin problems of backward agriculture and underdeveloped industry. On one hand, the document called for the enhancement of agricultural productivity, to ensure food security and provide a source of raw materials for industry, by seeking a wider coverage of the government's land reform program coupled by state assistance in

irrigation, market support and post-production. On the other hand, the BIDS pushed for the development of basic industries, such as integrated steel and petrochemicals, as key factors to modernize agriculture.

BIDS was a departure from the Neda framework in that it proposed to supplant the latter's agriculture-based industrialization strategy — e.g. agro-processing with one that sought the introduction of a rational mix of heavy, medium and light industries as a means to modernize agriculture to produce higher value-added to agricultural and fishery exports, and create a wider internal market in Mindanao.

While the BIDS study was partly funded by the then newly-created Opamin through its NGO desk, Opamin itself was not fully supportive of the development framework plan beyond expressing a willingness to “interface in certain areas” like in the upgrading of the steel industry.

The Process

In early 1994, Opamin formally started the Mindanao 2000 study by commissioning DMJM, an American consultancy firm, to draft an island-wide development plan with the help of key Opamin project consultants and the Agricultural Policy Research and Advocacy Program (Apraap) based in UP-Los Baños.

The draft was completed by the end of the third quarter, after which regional consultations were facilitated to generate ground level feedback. The participants in these consultations were regional development councils, local chambers of commerce and regional line agencies.

Most of the feedback generated by the draft dwelt on the fact that it remained largely a development framework plan similar to the Neda document in 1990. The participants recommended that the draft include an action plan which would seek to translate proposed development strategies into concrete policy recommendations and action plans.

Unhappy with DMJM's output, Opamin withdrew the consultancy firm from the project and assigned Apraap to complete it.

Apraap worked on the draft for another three months, all the while getting fresh inputs from task forces of regional development councils

(agriculture, sustainable development, infrastructure, energy, etc.), regional line agencies, working committees of the Mindanao Economic Development Council (Medco) and industry groups (i.e. tourism associations) to flesh out concrete recommendations in the plan's major sections as well as validate the accuracy of data so far gathered.

When the draft was finally completed mid-1995, no more consultations were made. The closest thing that resembled consultations were activities either sponsored or participated in by Opamin where the draft was presented as the Mindanao development plan. It appears that the "presentations" were facilitated as an implicit suggestion that the consultation process had likewise been completed. Early this year, the Growth with Equity Mindanao (GEM), Opamin's policy think tank, started turning out book-bound copies of the plan.

Civil Society Participation

No exact estimate could be made on the number of NGOs, POs and cooperatives who took part in the entire process. The difficulty rests on the fact that neither Opamin project consultants nor Apraap members who were privy to the entire project plan were available to shed light on the process.

But from what could be pieced together by related literature and secondary sources, the consultations directly related to the Plan which were initiated through DMJM, and later Apraap, represented but a small part of Opamin's "consultation process." The bulk of the consultations were actually in the nature of urban-based industry and social "summits" held between 1992 until early 1997, attended by a mixture of representations from government, business and NGOs and POs.

Among these were the Mindanao Agenda for Peace and Development, a series of consultations held beginning late 1996 up to 1997 in Zamboanga, Cagayan de Oro and General Santos; the Mindanao Energy Consultation in Iligan last March; the national anti-poverty summit and the regional anti-poverty consultations last year; and the various National Unification Commission (NUC) consultations held late 1992.

Without dispute, these consultations were broadly based in terms of Civil Society participation; most, if not all, social and political movements

of various ideological tendencies were represented in these consultations, if in varying degrees. For instance, the presence of POs and NGOs of the national democratic bloc, were significantly felt in NUC consultations in 1992; although it tapered off in the succeeding “summits” presumably in light of growing conservatism with the mainstream left movement as a consequence of the “RA-RJ” debate. Also, in several of these consultations, civil society representation was overwhelmingly larger than those coming from other private sector agro-commerce and socio-civic groups.

Civil society sources agreed that participation in these consultations were not tightly regulated, but tended to credit this more to the strong involvement of NGO representation in city development councils in handing out invitations to these affairs.

Likewise, they noted that the format of the agenda in these “summits” tended to be open-ended, affording a wide room for maneuver for NGO and PO representatives to lobby their respective agenda from a structural framework; they saw this as a departure from previous consultations where the format had been predetermined by the sponsoring government agency, which compelled NGOs and POs to work within the framework and in the process limiting their recommendations.

As a result, several major policy recommendations in these “summits” addressing a gamut of social development concerns like agrarian reform, food security, urban land reform, rural industrial development, local market development, and environmental protection — were the product of civil society representations. To this end, the “summits” were seen to be generally beneficial to the social development agenda of different political formations in civil society.

But, a question may be asked as to how the recommendations in these summits shaped the outcome of the Mindanao 2000 Plan relative to those generated from the DMJM and Apraap consultations. This is important in assessing the extent of civil society influence in the Plan because the latter consultations were largely dominated by representatives from the business community as well as LGU officials.

The content of the Plan would show that it does not really reflect the broad ranging recommendations of civil society in the “summits.” It will

be recalled that Apraap saw no need to challenge DMJM's development framework plan, which was itself a reproduction of Neda's 1990 framework plan battling for global competitiveness and developing external market niches.

This is in stark contrast to the recommendations "won" by NGO and PO representatives in the "summits" which was influenced by a sustainable development framework, indicating that their recommendations played little influence in shaping the outcome of Mindanao 2000. Respondents from several NGOs and POs (many of whom were able to take part in at least one of these "summits") asked to comment on the contents of the Plan also disagreed with substantive recommendations of Mindanao 2000.

Business community recommendations generated in the Apraap and DMJM consultations, in contrast, were strongly reflected in the Plan, notably on agriculture and agro-industry (chapter 5), physical Integration of Mindanao (chapter 8) and better governance (chapter 13).

And so, notwithstanding that civil society did play a crucial role in the consultation process, the degree to which their recommendations were carried in the Plan was clearly wanting. On the other hand, the influence of business groups, whose dominant involvement were noted mostly in the DMJM and Apraap consultations which were fewer in number, is substantially felt in the Plan.

This pattern suggests a manifestly corporate bias in developing the Plan, for while the participation of civil society and the business community was strictly confined to the consultations, and only Opamin had control over the preparation and completion of the entire project, the overarching interests of business are the ones ultimately served in the Plan.

The Mindanao 2000 planning project had been exclusively an Opamin turf from the start, a factor which would largely influence the way that the whole planning and consultation process developed to the general exclusion of civil society actors.

As proponent/coordinator, only Opamin had control over each phase of the entire project, from the pre-planning to the validation phase. While

a steering committee, composed of representatives from the funding source (USAID) and the local private sector, was in place, its role was confined to evaluating the plan's implications to the East Asean Growth Area. Opamin, in contrast, was responsible for determining the development framework, the project's work flow and timetable, the criteria for the selection of participants to the consultations, as well as the methodology of the consultations. The nominal involvement of other government development agencies like Neda and Medco attest to this fact.

Created March 19, 1992 by virtue of Executive Order 512, Medco antedates the appointment of Presidential Assistant Paul Dominguez by one year. The Council is to be composed of the chair and co-chair of the four Regional Development Councils, the chair and vice-chair of the Regional Planning and Development Board of the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao, two private sector representatives from each region (chosen through RDCs and the RPDB), two congressmen from each region, the president of the Mindanao Confederation of Governors and Mayors, and the administrator of the Southern Philippines Development Authority.

While the EO explicitly authorizes it to "formulate development plans for the agricultural and industrial development of Mindanao as a single integrated economy" (Sec. 3, a) and "coordinate the integration of the Regional Development Plans into a Mindanao Development Plan" (b), preliminary findings suggest that Medco had no major hand in the project either as proponent, consultant, planner or as validator.

So far, the only confirmed involvement of Medco in the project is the participation of its technical working groups (TWGs) in several regional consultations presided over by Apraap before the completion of its draft. No details are so far available as to which areas of the plan's draft were tabled in the consultation, the TWGs' feedback and how these shaped the outcome of the succeeding draft. However, since the TWGs' mandate is strictly ministerial in nature, it should be safe to assume that the subject of the consultation was confined exclusively to the validation of data in the draft.

Four years since Medco was created, the Council still has to be convened. Neda XI, which acts as the Medco secretariat, had in fact

endorsed the Presidential Assistant in 1993 as chairman of the Council with the hope that this would hasten the convening of the body.

But instead of using this new mandate to authorize the immediate screening and selection of regional representatives to the Council so that the body may participate in the planning project as a joint undertaking with Opamin, the Presidential Assistant proceeded with the project alone.

A consultation with the Council's members could have broadened the subjects of the consultation process and widened the base of representation in the consultations since the Council has the mandate of regional development bodies and Mindanao congressmen.

The involvement of NROs in the planning was just as minimal, if not even less so. Despite the fact that it was the NROs which first came out with an island-wide development framework plan as far back as 1990, their participation in the Opamin project is summed up in Neda XI's exercise of secretariat functions in Medco-facilitated activities where the development plan was presented.

The process by which the project was carried out has given way to tensions between Neda XI and Opamin over variations in development concepts and the means of ratifying the document.

Neda is challenging the plan's concept of dividing economic planning levels into economic growth clusters (EGCs) and area development zones (ADZs). Neda feels that the plan's "clustering" concept, which bats for planning based on trade and sociocultural ties of contiguous urban and rural centers and shared resource endowments, would only disrupt the existing local economic planning arrangement which is determined by administrative boundaries.

The two agencies are likewise at odds over how the Plan is to be ratified. Opamin feels that once it has approved of the draft, it may then be immediately endorsed to the Office of the President for implementation. But Neda feels that the Medco must first be convened and the Plan ratified before it is endorsed to the Neda national board composed of cabinet secretaries and chaired by the President.

To date, no resolution has been made on how to reconcile Neda's recommendations with the ratification process contemplated by Opamin and the clustering concept spelled out by the Plan.

But assuming that Opamin involved Medco and Neda in the project, would this have resulted in a more dynamic participation of civil society actors in the process?

A more wide-ranging Mindanao consultation facilitated by Neda in 1990 on its development framework plan showed that few seats were allotted to NGOs, with none from POs and cooperatives.

Similarly, the composition of the Medco shows that civil society actors stand a chance to be represented only through allotted seats for "private sector representatives" in the RDCS, which invariably refer to the local business community through the chambers of commerce.

But the fact that parallel government agencies could be marginalized in what has been seen to be a purely government undertaking may provide insights into how lightly Opamin regards the consultation process as a consensus-building mechanism to generate a wide range of support for its development plan.

This takes on added meaning with the apparent change in the quality of consultation processes facilitated under DMJM on one hand and under Apraap on the other. While DMJM, by Opamin's account, had a poor output, its consultations was more broadly represented and the framework of the draft plan itself was tabled for discussion.

In contrast, the consultations facilitated by Apraap were held prior to the completion of the second draft, the participants were mostly members of task forces of RDCs and technical working groups of Medco, and were invited only based on their technical competence in areas tabled for discussion (task forces on infrastructure for the consultation on road networks, etc.).

While this provided more focus to the consultations and more substance to the policy recommendations and action plans in the second draft, the compartmentalization of the process also inhibited participants from discussing key refinements later introduced by Apraap in the

framework plan which would turn out to be controversial, such as its “clustering” concept.

Interesting, too, is the absence of a validation process which would have allowed consultation participants to check whether suggestions and recommendations were incorporated in the second draft.

Civil Society Reactions to the Plan

Selected NGO and PO respondents representing different networks, program orientations, sectoral concerns and territorial coverage were made to react to a prepared summary of key chapters in the Plan. These are the areas on Agriculture and Agro-industry, Managing the Environment and Social Reform Agenda for Mindanao.

The respondents represented were: the Mindanao secretariat office of a national NGO network; a Davao-based NGO network; two rival rural development NGOs based in Iligan City; an environment NGO and an NGO network based in Davao; and two rural development institutions and a peasant organization in South Cotabato.

The interview schedule was classified into four broad categories: the respondent organization’s development vision and principles; reactions to the Plan; the perceived implications of the Plan; and the role of civil society in development planning.

Development Vision

Respondents variously cited “broad-based,” “integrated human development,” and “growth with equity” as their development vision, and enumerated sustainability and environmental soundness, democracy and autonomy, and gender equity and social justice as guiding principles.

Agrarian reform/rural development, rural industrialization and community mobilization were identified as key strategies that are consistent with the aforementioned goals and principles.

Critique of Mindanao 2000

All respondents found the neo-liberal framework of the plan unacceptable because of its predisposition to rely much of the island's growth targets to the external market on agricultural exports.

Since the base of the island's "export winners" are too narrow, limited as they are to high-value added agricultural products, the respondents said Mindanao's growth could easily be imperiled by other countries with more competitive advantages in these crop products, raising questions as to the sustainability of growth.

Also, they see the Plan's identification of agriculture and agro-industry as the island's "growth engines" as further evidence of the little regard government gives to developing basic industries which could provide more depth to the local market by creating more jobs and, in the process increasing the residents' buying power.

Finally, the respondents see the neoliberal framework as a failure in terms of bringing a broad-based growth that would allow marginal sectors to directly benefit from them and enhance their involvement in state-led development initiatives.

Agriculture and Agro-industry

Persistent were criticisms on the Plan's silence over the questions on protecting food staples like rice and corn. The Plan, according to them, skirts the urgency of providing infrastructure facilities — farm-to-market roads, irrigation, post-harvest facilities, credit access, etc. — to rice and corn farmers and instead encourage them to shift to export crop production. Safety nets outlined in the program plans such as access to low-cost farm inputs and investment in post-harvest facilities, they added, does not refer to any particular crop product. This is important, they averred, for while safety nets contemplate support mechanisms even for "losers" like rice and corn, the Plan's obvious bias for "winners" like fruit crops, ornamental horticulture and selected vegetables like asparagus has made the future of rice production even more uncertain.

Also, they noted the classification of the agrarian reform program as a "threat" in the chapter's situation analysis, which they said suggested the Plan's bias towards entrenched agro-industrial interests. This

observation was reinforced as the respondents noted how the Plan encourages the utilization of new and “pro-big business” production arrangements like contract farming.

Managing the Environment

The respondents noted the silence of the Plan over competing upland tenurial claims between corporate and community interests. Competing claims, they said, have become common in many upland areas because even when organized communities lay claim to these areas by utilizing community-based upland tenurial instruments, rival claims by powerful corporate interests in logging and mining continue to be accommodated by government.

Also, they pointed to the failure of the Plan to reconcile its program plans for agriculture and agro-industry with environment-related issues that it enumerated like the use of unsustainable farming techniques, soil erosion and land degradation, land tenure and land conversion.

Finally, the respondents criticized the absence of a plan of action to follow through on the specific recommendations and proposed policy actions, which all conceded was generally “well-intended,” and therefore acceptable.

Social Reform Agenda for Mindanao

A running theme in the respondents’ critique of this chapter has to do with the absence of concrete policy intervention measures and a corresponding action plan.

All respondents agreed with the Plan’s characterization of poverty in Mindanao (lack of employment opportunities, limited access to assets and production resources, poor access to basic services, limited participation of the poor in the development process), as they did of its assessment of failed anti-poverty programs of the government in the past (lack of budget, slow or non-implementation, red tape, etc.) and identified intervention areas (access to quality basic services; access to productive and economic opportunities, institution-building and participation in governance), but could not understand why there were no concrete action plans to address poverty.

Most of them aired doubts about government's seriousness and ability to arrest poverty under the Mindanao 2000 framework, saying the Plan could not reconcile the sustainability of a purely social development component in this chapter against the "unsustainable" framework of global competitiveness. That there were no proposed intervention measures and action plan for the SRA only reinforces government's lack of resolve in this area, they said.

Social Implications of the Plan

The neoliberal framework, said the respondents, would widen the social cleavage, creating more wealth for corporations at the expense of marginal sectors, especially the rural folk. With a policy environment encouraging the use of more land to be devoted to export crops, traditional and emerging alike, more areas devoted to food staples like rice and corn are likely to be converted. Likewise, the Plan's call for competitiveness encourages foreign investors and local corporations to explore "flexible" labor-absorption arrangements like contractualization and casualization, which will further cheapen labor and destroy the workers' security of tenure.

Monocropping, in turn, would contribute to land degradation. The introduction of industrial tree plantation schemes like IFMA, which is promoted by the Plan, would destroy the biodiversity of the uplands because fast-growing tree species like mangium are not endemic to these environments.

Perceived Role of Civil Society in Development Planning

All respondents see NGOs and POs as organized expressions of grassroots development aspirations. On this basis, they argue that civil society is needed even in state-led policy initiatives as a democratizing mechanism to ensure that the interests of the community are represented. Any effort to exclude civil society in these fora, the respondents said, would only weaken the mandate of these initiatives and perpetuate iniquitous power relations.

But other respondents conceded that democratization and accountability remain at the tailend of the state's agenda, especially because many times, it considers these principles to work against big business-led growth targets. While advocacy for wider representation in

institutional planning mechanisms remains important, civil society actors can only do so through painstaking networking with other civil society actors, community organizing and capability building to strengthen their negotiating capability.

Conclusion

The shape and direction that development planning will take in Mindanao in the years to come may be said to have been determined this early by: a) the absence of a pluralist ethos in the preparation of Mindanao 2000; b) the narrow public base from which feedback and inputs were incorporated in the preparation of the Plan; and c) the selection of institutional players in spatial planning mechanisms.

Notwithstanding its pronouncements of growth with equity, the strategies and selection of development actors to be mobilized has been premised from the beginning by purely growth-centered indicators and goals. The Plan attempts to address the equity question simply in consideration of democratizing opportunities and benefits created by economic growth, short of democratizing even the manner and mechanism by which this growth may be gained.

This is evidenced by the Plan's identified guiding principles and premises (Chapter 4), where only factors for the island's economic transformations are enunciated. Also typical is its framework for a "people-centered development" (Goals, Chapter 4), whose outline for the "participation of each Mindanaoan" is confined to the distributive aspect of the benefits of growth.

Deliberate or not, the Plan's framework succeeded in obscuring the parameters of equity and in so doing, managed to dichotomize growth on one end, and democratization and accountability on the other. This schism would in turn shape Opamin's choice of "publics" from where feedback and inputs were generated to substantiate the plan.

Much of the recommendations reflected in the Plan can be credited to the corporate lobby through the different chambers of commerce and industry groups which invariably came from representation from the private sector in Opamin-initiated consultations. It may easily be assumed that growth targets outlined by the Plan made the business community

the hands down choice as the dominant bloc representing the private sector.

This had the effect of inhibiting opportunities for NGOs, POs, and cooperatives to have the people's agenda carried in the Plan to supplement its growth-oriented plan with a social development program.

Not surprisingly, the NGO respondents were generally critical of the Plan. The development frameworks they had articulated were widely divergent from that of the Plan, a fact which would be reflected even in their critique of its goals, strategies, policy recommendations and action plans. This severely compromised the mandate of Mindanao 2000 despite its wide-ranging implications to the future of grassroots communities, particularly those in the rural sector.

While development perspectives of NGOs are not likely to change relative to the growth-led vision of Mindanao 2000, their meaningful participation in the consultation process could have helped reconcile less controversial points, substantiate its social development component, provide a wider base of consensus and strengthen mechanisms for democratization and accountability.

As a consequence, many questions surrounding civil society's willingness and ability to engage the state in macro-development planning, as well as its appraisal of minimum and maximum goals in engagement, remains largely untested. This takes on even more significance in light of the absence of contentious deliberations in the special consultations regarding the Plan's framework, goals, strategies and programs. If civil society were more broadly represented in these consultations presided over by DMJM and Apraap, would the deliberations have resulted in the same manner?

More importantly, the nominal civil society participation in DMJM/ Apraap consultations left out opportunities to assess how prepared NGOs, POs and cooperatives are to temporarily set aside tensions arising from divergence in organizational orientation, ideological tendencies and program concerns, and to lay down a detailed minimum agenda for state engagement in development planning.

During the first congress of the Mindanao Coalition of Development NGO Networks in 1993, delegates had to postpone ratification of a proposed sustainable development framework plan, BIDS 2010, upon the instance of ND-led NGO delegates who found the document's proposition on the role of state, the private sector and foreign investments too controversial.

This, as well as similarly fated previous experiments at involving civil society in regional planning bodies like the Cagayan-Iligan-Corridor area development zone, were cited by a few respondents as "minor setbacks" in challenging elitist development models "in the bureaucracy's own turf." They argue that these "showcase of disunity only provided more grist for political leaders, technocrats and the business community to rationalize the further marginalization of civil society in policy-making.

But on the other hand, a cursory examination of the feedback by NGO respondents on the key points of Mindanao 2000 indicates an identity of development principles, vision and programs. The feedback also shows that the respondents, who represented varied ideological inclinations, in fact had a common critique of the plan.

Likewise, the previous failed experiments at coalition work did not account how political realignments (in the national democratic and social democratic camps), as well as experiences of modest successes of some NGO networks in state-NGO/PO cooperation, have over the years shaped prospects for civil society to start anew.

Consistent with its growth-centered framework, the plan extends the marginalization of civil society to its proposed institutional mechanisms for spatial planning under its concept of area development zones.

As things now stand, NGO representation through Medco, the regional development councils and the city/municipal development councils are minimal and hardly influential. Under the Plan, the proposed refinements in the composition and functions of these planning bodies have the effect of either retaining the status quo in so far as the NGOs' nominal role and influence is concerned, or further eroding them in proportion to the growing role it foresees for the business community.

For instance, the Plan proposes that the role of regional development bodies be enhanced to give special attention to identified area of development zones. This proposal suggests special terms of reference between local government officials and “private sector” (i.e. business) leaders within the project boards (PBs) and project management offices (PMOs) of these ADZs.

The Plan also seeks broader powers for Medco to allow it to have control over the implementation of its policy recommendations as well as the resources with which to finance proposed projects. Furthermore, the plan proposes to bestow the council with a corporate structure “following the Clark and Subic models” with a full-time appointed board from, again, the business community.

To its credit, the Plan also considers as yet another option, the reconstitution of Medco into the Mindanao Development Authority (still a congressional proposal), which explicitly provides for NGO representation in its Board; but it is doubtful whether the proposal could ever be enacted into law, considering that Neda has time and again registered its opposition to its creation as overlapping its own functions.

All these proposals have the effect, intended or otherwise, of further eroding the little room for maneuver now being enjoyed by a select number of civil society actors inside the Medco and RDC working committees as well as local development councils. ❁