



The ARMM Roundtable Series brings together academics and leaders in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao to a discussion and analysis of critical issues in the autonomous region. This paper builds on the output of the discussions. Views expressed in this paper do not necessarily reflect those of Notre Dame University and the Konrad Adenauer-Stiftung.

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Established in 2001, the Center for Autonomy and Governance seeks to provide research, training and technical assistance to promote meaningful autonomy and governance in Southern Philippines. The Center is in the College of Law, Notre Dame University, Notre Dame Avenue, 9600, Cotabato City, Philippines. Tel. (63) (64) 421-2654 Loc. 321; Fax. (63) (64) 421-4312; E-mail. cag@ndu.edu.ph

CONTENTS

- 3 Socio-Economic Realities in the ARMM
- 3 Major Issues and Concerns Affecting Effective Delivery of Basic Services in the ARMM Areas
- 4 Other Issues in ARMM Bureaucracy
- 4 Structural Changes/Reforms Needed to Make the ARMM Bureaucracy Effective
- 5 Conclusion

Dr. Norma T. Gomez

EVOLVING AN EFFECTIVE ARMM BUREAUCRACY

INTRODUCTION

In modern society, bureaucracy has become the dominant form of organization designed to accomplish large-scale administration tasks by systematically coordinating the work of many individuals (Leveriza, 1990). In public administration, bureaucracy is inevitable. The government is expected to attain efficiency, economy and greater reliability for its performance, through delineation of functions.

The government organization exhibits characteristics that bureaucracy offers both an efficient mechanisms for reaching institutional goals and the danger of allowing the mechanisms to appear more important than the service it is supposed to perform (Esperitu in Leveriza, 1990). These characteristics are: (a) positions and offices are clearly defined; (b) the hierarchical arrangement of authority, rights; and obligations are specifically drawn; (c) the personnel are selected on the basis of technical or professional qualifications; (d) there are defined rules governing officials behavior which involved maximum standardization of action to minimize personal prejudice, interest, preferences and subservience; and (e) security of tenure and the pursuit of a career with promotion in the hierarchy are assured. Division of labor and centralization of authority are present in the government bureaucracy. However, the structural characteristics of the government organization are determined largely by its cultural values, political practices, demands, responses and limitations.

The Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) is the only regional government in the Philippines with a unique system of governance. It has an executive branch (office of the Governor and the devolved national agencies), the Regional Legislative Assembly (RLA) with 21 elected regional assemblymen and Judiciary (Shariah Courts). At present, ARMM has 22 devolved line agencies, eight (8) undeveloped agencies but with field offices in the ARMM and nine (9) regionally created offices.

In terms of political subdivision, ARMM covers five (5) provinces, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Basilan with 98 municipalities and Marawi City.

The delivery of public goods and services in the ARMM is carried out by the Regional Government as stated in article III, section II of RA 9054.

The Regional Government shall provide, maintain and ensure the delivery of among other things, basic responsive health programs, quality education, appropriate services, livelihood opportunities, affordable and progressive housing projects, and water resource development. It shall maintain appropriate disaster-preparedness units for immediate and effective relief services to victims of natural and man-made calamity areas and victims of calamities.

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Pursuant to this mandate, the ARMM bureaucracy is expected to produce and deliver goods and services that would improve the socio-economic conditions of the people in the area of autonomy.

Tan (2001) described governance in the ARMM as follows: *Local governance in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao is covered by the “Rules and Regulations Implementing the Local Government Code of the ARMM” as provided for in Muslim Mindanao Autonomy Act No. 25. The guidelines provided for the functions of local governments at the regional, provincial, and municipal levels. Although basically the same as the Local Government Code for administrative regions, the ARMM Local Government Code provides for added powers and authority to its executive and legislative branches such as the power of taxation, and formulation of laws protecting the customs, beliefs, education, and other special needs of its inhabitants.*

Article 46 of the Muslim Mindanao Autonomy Act No. 25 also provides that “Consistent with the basic policy on local autonomy, the Regional Governor shall exercise general supervision over local government units in accordance with Section 18, Article VIII of RA 6734.” However, unlike the province and municipalities of the administrative regions, the provinces and municipalities of ARMM do not receive the additional budget for the decentralized functions from the national government. There is decentralization but not devolution of functions to provinces and municipalities. Instead, devolution is lodged in the regional government. Any assistance required by the LGUs in the implementation of these functions is also coursed through the Regional Government, which in turn brings up the matter with the national government. This, in effect, removes the responsibility of national line agencies to respond to requests for help from provinces and municipalities.

How effective is the present ARMM bureaucracy? How can efficiency and effective governance be further enhanced in the ARMM? What structural changes can be made to make ARMM bureaucracy more effective? What legislations can be enacted to promote efficiency in the ARMM bureaucracy? What is the state of the civil service in the ARMM? These basic questions guide the participants during the roundtable discussion held on November 18, 2003 at Notre Dame University. Resource persons in the discussions were Atty. Annabelle Piang of Civil Service Commission-ARMM and Prof. Manaros B. Boransing, Senior Consultant of the Department of Education- ARMM.

The Center for Autonomy and Governance is grateful to the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung for the grant in the conduct of the roundtable session and for the research and writing of this paper. It is hoped that the results of the discussion can contribute to the continuing efforts in evolving an effective bureaucracy in the ARMM.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC REALITIES IN THE ARMM

Fourteen (14) years of governance in the ARMM has not improved the socio-economic condition of the people in the area. The poverty incidence in the five (5) provinces has increased in 2002 compared to 1997 data (see Table below). These provinces are considered the poorest among the 77 provinces of the Philippines. These figures clearly reflect the dismal performance of the regional government to effectively deliver the basic services needed to uplift the socio-economic conditions of the people in the ARMM. Assemblyman Ala recognizes that the ARMM Legislative Department has not enacted sufficient laws to spur economic activities for poverty alleviation. It was noted that some members of the Regional Legislative Assembly (RLA) lack qualifications/ capabilities to perform their legislative functions while others have not yet attained political maturity.

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Table 1
Population and Poverty Incidence in ARMM
(1997 and 2000)

Provinces	Population (2000)	Poverty Incidence	
		1997	2000
Philippines	76,498,735	25.1	27.5
Metro Manila	9,932,260	3.5	5.6
Lanao Sur	669,072	40.8	48.1
Maguindanao	801,102	24.0	36.2
Sulu	619,668	87.5	92.0
Tawi-Tawi	322,317	52.1	75.3
Basilan	332,828	30.2	63.0

Source: 1997 and 2000 FIES in PHDR 2002

MAJOR ISSUES AND CONCERNS AFFECTING EFFECTIVE DELIVERY OF BASIC SERVICES IN THE ARMM AREAS

The following are important issues in ARMM governance which hamper the smooth delivery of public goods and services to the people:

- *Policy-Related*
Inadequate fiscal administrative policies
- *Systems and Procedures-Related*
Inadequate implementation of general operating systems and procedures
Inefficient system for program/project/service delivery
- *Human Resource-Related*
Changing priorities of leadership
Inadequate managerial capacities for both appointive and elective officials
(values and competence)
Underdeveloped, underutilized, unqualified pool of human resources due to political patronage
Diverse Culture and tribalism (dominance and power struggle)

- *Organization and Relationship-Related*
ARMM perceived by LGUs as another layer of bureaucracy-another red tape
- *Support Systems-Related*
Insufficient resources for the delivery
Programs/projects/services
Budget-related issues
 - Circuitous process resulting in delays
 - Meaningful fiscal autonomy
 - Restrictions in budget ceilings
 - Non-implementation of salary standardization law in some line agencies
 - No sufficient capital outlay
 Absence of Information, Communication, Technology (ICT)
Plan of activities and Support Facilities.
Inadequate support facilities/logistics in the ARMM such as:
 - Center/Regional Offices
 - Training Center
 - Response and Service
 - Vehicles in support of service delivery

ARMM is perceived as an additional layer in the already bloated government bureaucracy.

OTHER ISSUES IN ARMM BUREAUCRACY

- The Regional Governor holds office in the Manila Liaison Office. He only comes to ARMM Office to act as a tour guide for foreign visitors.
- Those who desire the signature of the Regional Governor has to spend a fortune in going to Manila
- Heads of agencies/departments are always traveling to Manila
- Overlapping of appointments
- Illegal termination under the guise of AWOL
- Difficulty in enforcing the contempt power of the Civil Service Commission
- Existence of “Floating” officials/employees
- Practices of “The Management take-over rule”
- Multiple positions being held by top officials of the ARMM
- High percentage of employees with administrative cases
- “DBM-approved plantilla positions –vs- the “locally created positions (appointment by political patronage)
- Poor records management
- Unstable Peace and order situation
- ARMM areas are widely dispersed and non-contiguous
- “Gerrymandering” practices
- Mismanagement of funds and resources
- Indiscriminate resort to the Ombudsman’s processes
- Many “15-30 employees”

Corpuz (Leveriza, 1990) has conducted a study on the characteristics of the actual operations of Philippine bureaucracy. His findings revealed the following:

- *Vulnerability to nepotism*
- *Perpetuation of the spoils system*
- *Apathetic public reaction to bureaucratic misconduct*
- *Availability of external peaceful means of correcting bureaucratic weaknesses*
- *Survival of historical Experience*

- *Non-special typing of bureaucrats*
- *Lack of independence from politics*
- *Essential instruments of social change*

These characteristics of the Philippine bureaucracy are also the same characteristics found in the ARMM political bureaucracy.

STRUCTURAL CHANGES/REFORMS NEEDED TO MAKE THE ARMM BUREAUCRACY EFFECTIVE

While most of the participants were not satisfied with the present state of bureaucracy in the ARMM, NGO participants believed that there are some tangible and visible gains in terms of community involvement in governance. Based on their experiences in the delivery of services in the pilot areas in the ARMM, the Community and Family Services International (CFSI) and Local Government Support Program (LGSP) stressed that people's participation in governance is crucial and vital. Hence, there is a need to understand "governance" at the level of the community people to increase their participation in governance.

There is a need to erect two crucial legislations: the Regional Administrative Law and the Regional Civil Service Law.

Some important points raised by the participants to make bureaucracy in the ARMM effective include the following:

- *There is a need to do organizational analysis. This will determine the strengths and weaknesses of present systems and procedures that hampered the effective and efficient delivery of services to the public.*
- *There is a need to review the devolved powers of the agencies particularly those in-charge of the social welfare of the community people (health, education, housing and the like).*
- *There is a need to devolve all necessary components of the devolved offices such as personnel, funds, programs and logistical support in order to effectively and efficiently perform their functions.*
- *There is a need to equip government workers including those in the RLA with necessary attitude and work values to effectively perform their duties and functions.*

Atty Bacani, Dean of the College of Law, Notre Dame University emphasized the need to enact two (2) very important laws that will provide directions to the ARMM bureaucracy namely the Regional Administrative law and the Regional Civil Service Law.

CONCLUSIONS

Prior to the creation of ARMM, people in this part of the region have been neglected in terms of development. The struggle for autonomy was believed to be the key to development and prosperity and that poverty would be eliminated in rural areas. Existing data have shown that after fourteen (14) years of ARMM existence, it did not bring much change in the socio-economic condition of the majority of the people in area. Many are still very poor and marginalized. This is reflected in the high poverty incidence rates in the five (5) provinces of the ARMM. The chronic poverty experienced by the majority is generally attributed to several factors such as the unstable peace and order in the areas; the lack of political will on the part of the executive branch of the ARMM government to institute necessary

reforms to make the ARMM bureaucracy efficient and effective; and the absence of administrative and civil service laws in support of the ARMM framework of development.

The challenge for officials of the ARMM is to evolve an efficient and effective bureaucracy. The bureaucracy exists to create not merely to provide jobs. It is not an employment agency for the unskilled and unqualified whose ticket to employment is pedigree or connections to the people in power. The success and failure of the autonomous region will largely depend on the capacity of its leaders to rise above personal, clan and partisan interests and to appoint in office persons who are committed to excellence and effective governance.

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ROUNDTABLE SERIES SCHEDULE

- **“ARMM and the GRP-MILF Peace Process”**, October 6, 2003, 8:00-12:00 noon, NDU College of Law, Cotabato City
- **“Democratization in the ARMM”**, October 29, 2003, 1:30-5:00 P.M., NDU College of Law, Cotabato City
- **“Evolving an Effective ARMM Bureaucracy”**, November 13, 2003, 1:30-5:00 P.M., NDU College of Law, Cotabato City
- **“Corruption, Culture and Conflict”**, November 18, 2003, 1:30-5:00 P.M. NDU College of Law, Cotabato City.
- **“ARMM Development Framework: Issues and Concerns”**, November 27, 2003, 1:30-5:00 PM, NDU College of Law, Cotabato City.
- **“Federalism vs. Autonomy: Roadmaps to Peace”**, December 10, 2003, 1:30-5:00 P.M., NDU College of Law, Cotabato City