



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.

Resource Persons are Ms. Baintan Ampatuan, Chief, MICAID, RPDO-ARMM, and Prof. Mario Antonio Lopez, of the Center for Development Management, Asian Institute of Management. This paper was written by Prof. Eva K. Tan, Consultant, LGSP-ARMM. The discussion was facilitated by Dean Benedicto R. Bacani, Executive Director of the Center for Autonomy and Governance. Lay-out by Grace S. delos Reyes

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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

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ARMM REGIONAL FRAMEWORK: ISSUES AND CONCERNS

INTRODUCTION

“Walking a tightrope between peace and development” - was an appropriate description given by an author to local governance in ARMM (Tumbaga, et.al, 2000). Although this was primarily to describe the efforts of foreign funding agencies assisting governance in ARMM, it also describes the efforts in the formulation and implementation of the ARMM Regional Development Framework.

The new ARMM Regional Framework puts on paper the aspirations of the new ARMM government headed by Regional Governor Dr. Parouk S. Hussin. The new set of ARMM officials was elected in November 2001, immediately after the ratification of Republic Act 9054 on September 2001. RA 9054 provided for the expanded ARMM comprising the provinces of Maguindanao, Lanao Sur, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, Basilan, and the City of Marawi.

In a paper presented by Bai Intan Ampatuan (who represented Dir. Diamadel Dumagay of the Regional Planning and Development Office) regarding the ARMM Development Framework, she explained that the framework “is essentially a Regional Executive Agenda for peace and development that address peace and security, social and economic development, political and institutional reforms”. It therefore contains the regional government’s vision, goals, and objectives for the next 3 years (2002-2004). It was formulated through a series of planning workshops, consultations and dialogues among the regional line agencies, the LGUs, NGOs, and civil society organizations who are stakeholders in ARMM.

The above paper was presented during the ARMM Roundtable Discussion on November 27, 2003 at the Tanghalang Michael Clark of Notre Dame University. This is the fifth in a series of discussion starting October of 2003 in which various strategic issues affecting ARMM were tackled. The results of the previous sessions proved to be useful in the discussion of the ARMM Regional Framework.

POLICIES AND PROGRAMS AFFECTING THE REGIONAL FRAMEWORK

The policies and programs of the ARMM at present are supportive of the implementation of the Regional Framework. According to Ms. Ampatuan, a number of these policies and programs are integral part of the framework, most important of which is the completion of the 1996 GRP-MNLF Peace Agreement, post conflict community reconstruction program, promotion of venues, process and mechanism for peace, unity and reconciliation, and the culture of peace program. Other policies and programs mentioned in connection with the Regional Framework are supportive of economic development, social development, infrastructure development, and development administration and finance.

However, Assemblyman Hatimil Hassan explained that there were problems with the implementation of the Regional Framework in general. He cited the lack of support from the national government to the implementation of the 1996 GRP-MNLF Peace Agreement, particularly in the post conflict community reconstruction program. Fortunately, a number of foreign funding agencies have come to the help of the MNLF ex-combatants and the war torn communities.

There are other institutional and sectoral policies, according to the presentation, which are supposed to contribute to the implementation of the framework. Most important is that transparency, efficiency, and accountability as guiding principles have been addressed. The following are provided for:

- The code of ethical standards to be adopted by all public servants in the ARMM, especially those holding high-ranking and executive positions;
- Restructuring and reorganizing the ARMM bureaucracy to create a more development-oriented, result driven, and service-conscious government machinery;
- Accelerating the implementation and improved use of ODA-funded projects focused on institutional and capacity building, human resource development, and governance.

Concern for the implementation of these policies has been extensively discussed in the previous roundtable discussions.

Ms. Ampatuan also mentioned that some policies, although present even before the formulation of the regional framework, have been implemented only under this new administration. For example, the Regional Planning and Development Board, which seldom met before, has now been meeting regularly. This augurs well for development because it is a sign that the ARMM Regional Government and the Local Government Units are now working together. Under the framework, the ARMM aims to “establish a mechanism for the effective sharing of responsibilities and decision-making processes within the regional government, and between the regional government and the constituent local government units”. Hopefully, this will change the attitude of LGUs who look at the ARG as another layer of bureaucracy.

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ISSUES AND CONCERNS: PLAN FORMULATION

The paper admitted that there was no broad consultation in the plan formulation processes, particularly at the local level. The geographic situation of the region and the inadequacy of funds to conduct comprehensive consultation limited the reach of the planning agency. There were however, funds provided for by the Local Government Support Program. This enabled the ARG to consult the different line agencies, and conduct provincial

consultation. During the refinement of the Regional Executive Agenda, the ARG was able to identify the desired outcomes and outputs from the line agencies, but was unable to convert these to measurable performance indicators. Other issues and concerns identified in relation to the planning process were given as follows:

- The tendency for sectoral bias in the identification of projects in favor of infrastructure sector at the expense of other sectors of the economy
- Some political leaders have the tendency to favor their areas in the allocation of resources without regards to technical criteria and standards and the priority thrusts of ARG
- Lack of consultation with the national counterparts agencies particularly on the investment programming activities. Hence, the regional investment program of ARMM is not link up to the Medium Term Public Investment Program of the National Agencies
- There is no regular allocation of funds from the DBM for planning activities of the REPDB unlike the RECs which have yearly budget from the DBM
- Lack of appreciation of the importance of regional planning and related activities from among political leaders particularly at the local level

Atty. Benedicto Bacani, however, noted that there are two other important issues that must be resolved by the planners: the issue of non-devolution of basic services to the Local Government Units, and the consideration that there are two cities which are not part of ARMM, but are of strategic importance to the development of ARMM – Cotabato City and Zamboanga City. It is important to consciously address these two issues in the regional framework.

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ISSUES AND CONCERNS: PROCESS OF IMPLEMENTATION

The most glaring bias against ARMM and its regional development framework is its inclusion as part and parcel of the overall program for Mindanao. According to Prof. Mario Lopez of AIM, the national government claims that it has spent a large amount of money for development in Mindanao, but a closer look shows that funds were channeled in areas other than the ARMM. This may have resulted because of the following issues and concerns, which were also mentioned, in the presentation of Ms. Ampatuan:

- The lopsided and inadequate budgetary allocation to ARMM
- National government agencies do not carry ARMM in their Regional National Programs and Projects.
- Non-implementation of the Provisions of RA 9054 on Annual assistance, re: Financing of the National Programs and Projects and Catch up budget for ARMM

If ever there were projects implemented in the ARMM, these were not responsive to the overall development framework. The fault lies in the appreciation of the regional framework. Even the top executives of the ARMM are said to bring with them a different package of projects in their fund sourcing activities. There were also instances when the ARMM Regional Government itself was not made aware of the projects’ implementation. The reasons for this are:

- Direct implementation of national programs and projects in ARMM by national agencies
- Lack of forum to link ARMM to the National Investment Programming
- Most Donor agencies do not coordinate with the regional government

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RECOMMENDATIONS

After a lot of discussions on the regional framework and the issues and concerns related to its planning and implementation, the group came up with recommendations (many of which were taken from the paper presented) to make the ARMM Regional Framework workable and effective:

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

- The National Government must, as far as practicable and consistent with RA 9054, increase budgetary allocation to the ARMM, particularly for development programs and projects. In addition, capital outlay allocation must be equitable among regions in the country. This will remove the bias against ARMM in the implementation of development projects in Mindanao. To ensure that this will happen, national agencies must include in their programs and activities the corresponding equitable and proportionate budget for programs and activities intended for the ARMM in consultation with the ARG. In this context, national funded programs and projects presently being undertaken within ARMM should also be transferred to and implemented by the ARG.
- In the spirit of true autonomy, there should be immediate devolution of financial institutions to the ARMM such as DOF, DBM, BIR, etc. The ARMM cannot exist without financial autonomy. It cannot forever be begging for a bigger budget from the national government, or wait for the very slow releases of its government appropriations. It should be noted that about P447 million for infrastructure projects provided under the GAA for 2003 has not been released. This has also been the case for previous years appropriation. With financial autonomy, the ARMM can be held responsible for its own development. RA 9054 mandates the institutionalization of a regional mechanism to accelerate the devolution of all agencies, offices, and institutions.
- Administration and management of all ODA should be transferred to the ARMM thru the appropriate agencies and offices. For foreign funded programs that cannot be channeled through government (only through NGOs), the ARG should be informed for better coordination and collaboration. The regional framework already provides for the institutionalization of a regional monitoring and evaluation system for all PAPs and ODA implementation in ARMM to provide timely feedback, and mechanism for the resolution of issues and concerns.
- The national government should provide counterpart funds to foreign assisted capital projects in the ARMM. A number of development projects for ARMM have not been implemented due to the inability of the national government to provide counterpart funds on time.
- Mainstream the ARG in the national investment programming and budgeting processes of the national government agencies to ensure that the region is not left out in the process.

The Center for Autonomy and Governance acknowledges the participation of the following in the roundtable discussion.

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