

Highlights of Roundtable Discussions on Strategic Issues in the ARMM

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Six Issues Discussed

- ◆ ARMM and the GRP-MILF Peace Process
- ◆ Democratization in the ARMM
- ◆ Evolving an Effective ARMM Bureaucracy
- ◆ Corruption, Conflict and Culture
- ◆ The ARMM Regional Framework
- ◆ Federalism vs. Autonomy



ARMM and the GRP-MILF Peace Process

- ◆ Fresh hope in the resumption of peace talks between the GRP and the MILF
- ◆ Still, the road to peace will be difficult and tedious. The process will have to contend with constitutional issues, the Organic Law of the ARMM, the 1996 Peace Agreement with the MNLF, and existing political structures of autonomy.



- ◆ Exploring various options: enhanced autonomy; federalism; Islamic autonomous republic or state; independent Islamic state; another SPCPD-style body
- ◆ Wanted: a more creative and innovative solution to the complex problems of the *Bangsamoro*, the indigenous peoples, and all other peoples of Mindanao



- ◆ Required: serious introspection and self-criticism on the part of all stakeholders—GRP, the MILF, the MNLF, leaders of the ARMM and local government units, Christian leaders and peoples



Policy Recommendations

- ◆ Explore MNLF–MILF partnership and collaborative participation
- ◆ Ensure the comprehensive conduct and substance of the peace talks
- ◆ Vest real powers and authority on any prospective development body
- ◆ Include radical and bold measures for true and effective devolution of powers, fiscal autonomy, effective bureaucracy



- ◆ Ensure that the peace dividends benefit the greater mass of people and not just the leaders
- ◆ Include the *Lumad* agenda in the peace talks
- ◆ Enlist support through genuine grassroots consultation and participation

Democratization

- ◆ Islam and democracy are not incompatible. The spirit of democracy is enshrined in the Islamic faith.
- ◆ But the experience of Philippine-style democracy leads people, especially Philippine Muslims, to conclude that democracy and Islam do not go together, thus, the appeal of other options.





- ◆ ARMM's failure to deliver on its promises to the people.
- ◆ Some causes: structural defects; lack of resources; lack of knowledge capability; lack of real support from the national government; lack of effective and credible leaders



- ◆ A key issue: clarifying and straightening out the relationship between the national government and the regional autonomous government.
- ◆ An even more basic problem: lack of an effective, efficient, truly democratic electoral system.

- ◆ Needed: strong democratic institutions, esp. a united and assertive regional legislature
- ◆ Other hindering factors: personalistic, patronage-based, feudalistic type of politics; corruption; social, cultural, economic disempowerment





Policy Recommendations

- ◆ Re-think the very idea of the ARMM, explore other options.
- ◆ Demand that the national government should be the first to promote, rather than hinder, autonomy.
- ◆ Support and strengthen civil society participation.



- ◆ Evolve various modes of consultation and facilitate people's informed decision-making.
- ◆ Give priority to relevant and appropriate education.
- ◆ Facilitate cultural literacy, dialogue, and harmony.
- ◆ Study and promote Islamic and other values consistent with democracy.



Evolving an Effective ARMM Bureaucracy

- ◆ Bureaucracy as an inevitable form of organization designed to accomplish the goals of public administration in a way that is efficient, effective, economical.
- ◆ Structural characteristics of bureaucracy are also influenced by cultural values, politics, demands, responses, and limitations.

◆ Some ARMM governance issues:

Inadequate fiscal and administrative policies;

Inadequate implementation of operating systems and procedures;

Inefficiency in program/project/service delivery;





Changing priorities of leadership;
Inadequate managerial capacities
(values and competence) of officials;
Underdeveloped, underutilized,
unqualified human resources;
Dominance and power struggles
among diverse cultural groups;



Insufficient resources for services;

Lack of meaningful fiscal autonomy;

Absence of ICT program and facilities;

Unclear relationship between ARMM and the LGUs



Policy Recommendations

- ◆ Do an organizational analysis and correct the gaps.
- ◆ Review and strengthen devolved powers of agencies dealing directly with social services;
- ◆ Nurture positive attitudes and work values



- ◆ Enact crucial legislation: Regional Administrative Law; Regional Civil Service Law
- ◆ Promote community-level people's participation in governance

Corruption, Conflict, & Culture

- ◆ While corruption is pervasive in the whole country, the perception is that it is more systemic and entrenched in the ARMM.
- ◆ Such perception is fueled further by prejudice, bias, and stereotyping.





- ◆ Corruption issues: disallowance of cash advances; disregard of procurement processes; nepotism; loss of accountability because of absence of ownership of government; poverty; use of threat and force; judicial pay-offs; political cooptation and accommodation

- ◆ Corruption is embedded in culture.
- ◆ To fight it, values transformation and prosecution must go together.
- ◆ Key: nurturing the most crucial value of keeping one's word and fidelity to the oath of public office, while instituting structures of monitoring and prosecution





Policy Recommendations

- ◆ Strengthen the education in proper values—honesty, integrity, responsibility, accountability;
- ◆ Eliminate opportunities for exercise of discretion by public officials;
- ◆ Institutionalize and promote accountability and transparency;



- ◆ Strengthen system of reward and punishment;
- ◆ Strengthen the Ombudsman's role and capabilities;
- ◆ Promote Islam as the foundation of good government

The ARMM Regional Framework

- ◆ The ARMM Regional Framework as the Regional Executive Agenda for peace and development—peace and security; social and economic development; political and institutional reforms





- ◆ Issues and Concerns:

Lack of broad consultation in the plan formulation process owing to geographical difficulties and inadequacy of funds;

Infrastructure sector bias;

Geographical bias;



Lack of consultation and interface with national counterpart agencies;

No regular allocation of funds for planning activities;

Lack of appreciation of importance of planning and related activities among local leaders;



Non-devolution of basic services to the LGUs;

Strategic importance of Cotabato City and Zamboanga City;

Non-inclusion of the ARMM agenda in national programming; lack of coordination with donor agencies; inadequate budget allocation



Policy Recommendations

- ◆ Demand increase in equitable budgetary and capital outlay allocation from the national government.
- ◆ Demand true financial autonomy
- ◆ Transfer administration of ODA to the ARMM; ensure coordination of other donor-assisted programs with the regional government



- ◆ Push for national government counterpart funds for foreign-assisted capital investment projects;
- ◆ Ensure mainstreaming of the ARMM agenda in the national government investment programming and budgeting.



Federalism vs. Autonomy

Is Federalism the solution to the Bangsamoro problem?

What are the implications of the adoption of a national federal system to the ARMM?

How do we compare the powers and limitations of the proposed Bangsamoro state to the powers and authority of the present ARMM?

To what extent will a federal system bring about peace and development in Southern Philippines?

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- ◆ The present autonomy treats the ARMM as a mere local government unit supervised by the national government; in a federal system, the Bangsamoro state will be accountable to its own people.
 - ◆ Federalism will also break up the unitary system that breeds neo-colonialism and place the Bangsamoro state on equal footing with the rest of the country.



- ◆ Both autonomy and federalism are only frameworks. Shades, variations, and combinations of these models may play out in finding the appropriate formula for the Bangsamoro context.
- ◆ Initial comparison of legislative powers of the RLA in the ARMM with the proposed state assembly in the federal system reveals interesting insights on which offers a higher level of self-determination.



- ◆ This means that the frameworks of federalism and autonomy need to be subjected to more study and analysis relative to the problems of Mindanao.
- ◆ The shape of a Bangsamoro state in a federal system needs to be elucidated further. It will also be a challenge to self-sufficiency and efficiency in governance.



- ◆ Given the fact that the ARMM has not exactly been a success story in autonomy, can a Bangsamoro state be viable without this crucial experience?
- ◆ Furthermore, will one Bangsamoro state gloss over the ethnic diversity within Bangsamoro society itself?



♦Wanted: A new constitutional paradigm



Policy Recommendations

- ◆ Subject the details of a federal system in relation to a Bangsamoro state to more critical analysis and consultation.
- ◆ The Bangsamoro peoples themselves must organize its advocacy according to their needs and convictions.



- ◆ Bring into the GRP-MILF negotiations the discussion on a new constitutional paradigm that will take into account all possible options.
- ◆ Organize study groups to draft a constitution for the Bangsamoro state and amendments to the proposed Federal Constitution.



- ◆ In the meantime, strengthen the present ARMM as the only institution on which any political system in the future can be built on.

Thank You!

