

Paving the Way for Philippine CSO Development Effectiveness Work

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Genuine development – a better quality of life, decent and regular work, access to education, health, housing, and other services – is every Filipino’s aspiration which has been articulated consistently by the progressive mass movement for decades. Expressing the higher form of this social and political goal is the struggle for structural and institutional reforms such as an end to the system of family dynasties, elite and patronage politics, plunder, as well as for social and economic reforms like genuine agrarian program, national industrialization, and so on.

In many respects, the broad, multi-sector progressive movement in the Philippines – including its network of NGO institutions - has been in the forefront of the struggle for real development. The dimensions of this struggle have included the advocacy and defense of human rights, militant calls for social, economic, and political reforms, the assertion of sovereignty and self-determination, denunciation of the anti-development neo-liberalism, as well as active engagement in people-centered lawmaking and policy reforms. This is thus to emphasize the fact that “CSO development effectiveness” breathes life in the Philippine non-State community - a principle that is at the heart of the enduring progressive movement for real growth, freedom, and democracy.

In the light of the window unveiled by the current administration and given the government peace process with the Left as well as with the Moro forces, we are faced with the following questions: How do NGO institutions and organizations involved in development make their mission effective as independent development initiators? What are the issues and challenges as well as external factors affecting CSO development effectiveness in the country, and how should the CSOs respond to these? Let me clarify at this point that in the framework of “CSO development effectiveness” these questions will continue to challenge us not only under the current political situation – because it may be changeable, shifty, and unpredictable – but even beyond it.

Real development is borne out of the people's long-drawn struggle for social change. Accordingly, development-oriented NGOs (or CSOs) function to help articulate this right in partnership with communities of people comprehensively and scientifically and come up with strategies and programs. Imperative is the need to expose and oppose the bankruptcy, myths, and anti-people orientation of the dominant neo-liberal model which is behind government's "development policies" that aggravate and perpetuate the complex social and economic burdens of the people. Without effective people participation, no development programs and projects ever succeed meaningfully. Progressive CSOs should continue to develop the capability of linking pressing political and social issues – such as illegal drugs, summary executions, and the like – to the failure to address holistically the institutional roots of poverty, social and economic inequities, flawed criminal justice system, and other woes. So-called anti-poverty or poverty reduction programs should be inextricably linked with building up capabilities for communities and the country as a sovereign nation. The peace talks between the Philippine Government and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) which represents the longest running insurgency in Asia – with a comprehensive agreement on socio-economic reforms as part of the core agenda - are substantive issues and resolutions that can help guide the content of development effectiveness work in the country.

Similarly, this issue challenges the CSOs as a priority task for development effectiveness to take a more active engagement in policy reforms and the projection of pro-people development paradigms even as we continue to act as street parliamentary players and stakeholders. For instance, in the ongoing peace process between the government and the Left the State should be challenged by the CSOs to make the forging of peace as a pre-condition for development so that in turn, people-centered development becomes the condition for a just and lasting peace. In a broad sense, development effectiveness embodies the end-goal of addressing the basic roots of armed conflict – poverty, social injustice, economic and political marginalization of the people, endemic unemployment, and so on.

Under the present political situation, "development effectiveness" also challenges CSOs to broaden, organize, strengthen, and mobilize development-driven partnership with the grassroots communities – including unorganized ones - especially the marginalized and at the local level. It is a given that development should be "participative" and "inclusive" but we do not hear of any success story of this kind especially at the LGU level where, for the past 26 years under the

Local Government Act, local development councils and dialogue mechanisms with people representation are either just pro forma or non-existing.

On the other hand, there are promising practices where people-centered development serves as a rallying call for CSOs to organize and expand effective partnership with the people. For example, in some regions perennially hit by natural- and man-made calamities, poor family victims of disasters organize themselves as the backbone for relief and the rebuilding of lives. CSOs which matter – those who desire and effect change – must consistently be in the forefront of change and innovations, creatively weaving out of perceived or real restrictions, even at the risk of safety in order to bring about desired outcomes. Success stories around the country show how pro-people or progressive CSOs demonstrate the limitless capacity of people to struggle and transcend beyond perceived limitations, draw lessons from practice, and move to a higher level of what development effectiveness should be with the Istanbul 8 Principles serving as one of the reference guides.

A most recent example – “Tabang Bikol” formed right after Super typhoon Niña last December 25 – reveals the potential of advocacy and leadership for development-oriented disaster response. Development-oriented disaster response served as a stimulus to form CSO-LGU partnerships, to establish the People’s Organization of Disaster Survivors (PODIS), to design people-centered development plans, and draw in the Regional Development Council (RDC Bikol) to support a development strategy for Resilient and Sustainable Communities in Bikol.

Mass-based CSOs like these serve as platforms for tackling development issues with short- and long-term strategies for rehabilitation toward effective development introduced. To gain access to public resources, accreditation is used and partnership with some line agencies is forged alongside setting up effective mechanisms for transparency, accountability, and a people’s watch to monitor resource allocations and for impact assessment of programs. The basic partnership of families through their CSOs enables them to enter into an engagement with LGUs and local line agencies as well as with other sectors like small- and medium-scale industry groups – without, however, succumbing into a relationship of dependency but determined to maintain themselves as independent and critical development players.

For all the initiatives undertaken toward development effectiveness, mass-based CSOs face many daunting issues and challenges. Foremost of these are

underlying political and cultural impediments which attest that for real development to take place CSOs must surmount the institutional obstacles posed by patronage politics (especially “*utang na loob*” or debt of gratitude), the tendency of LGUs and local politicians to use CSOs for their own purposes, corruption, bureaucratic red tapes, and many other issues. Patronage politics and the corruption that it breeds remains embedded in so-called development projects from the regional to barangay levels with billions of funds allocated year in and year out. Development projects are dictated by legislators, governors, and mayors so that public funds, resources, and foreign assistance support their own priority “development agenda.” In many provinces, their “development agenda” prioritizes commercial tourism over agricultural modernization, or extractive production for export as opposed to using raw materials for job-generating industries and sustainable development.

Another challenge for CSOs is how to mobilize mass communities particularly the marginalized and women along people-driven development as animated by progressive models and approaches that enable development to transition from short-term rebuilding and economism into the long-term program of multi-dimensional economic change. Under the present political situation, a strong partnership of CSOs and the people has the potential of blunting the neo-liberal bias of “public-private partnership” which favors the elite and their corporate interests and instead build a strong and broad people’s partnership for real development where collaboration with other progressive forces, development-oriented LGU elements, as well as the use of public resources can be ensured. People-centered development as espoused in the Istanbul 8 Principles for Development Effectiveness should necessarily go beyond the public-private dichotomy that is actually dominantly a government-business partnership for profit and corruption.

Similarly, development effectiveness must coalesce with other sectors including professionals, local scientists, inventors, and educators, as well as small entrepreneurs and producers. Drawing in these sectors to the platform of people-centered development effectiveness not only broadens partnerships but also, in the long run, helps enhance the capacity-building of CSOs in social investigation, scientific research, as well as in designing development strategies and policy reforms. People empowerment, rights-driven people’s struggles, and building coalitions of development activists are needed for development effectiveness. Instead of just being a short-term objective, development effectiveness is an end-goal that is served by the meticulous but participative process of education and training, capacity-building, and forming coalitions of development activists and

experts from various professions and endeavors like science and technology. Development effectiveness requires a progressive content – it is precisely this critical element that CSOs are able to expand and deepen the arena of progressive politics, network-building, organizing, and mobilization. In the Philippine context, it is about development toward national industrialization and agrarian reform with sustainable agriculture.

Moreover, people-to-people exchanges across regions and countries based on shared development goals through regional and international networking provides add-on value to development effectiveness. Respect for independent initiatives and right to self-determination should be a constant principle that should be integrated in the Istanbul Principles for development effectiveness. Effective CSOs – well-grounded, well-oriented, and capacitated which deliver concrete outcomes of the successes of people-driven development programs on the ground – are the motivators and catalysts for development effectiveness.

By building development partnerships and coalitions, capacity building, as well as launching programs whether post-disaster rebuilding, education and training, organic farming, or alternative health that have clear long-term perspectives, CSOs are also able to cope with other development obstacles especially in conflict areas like militarization, labelling, and other forms of harassment – as well as organizations fronting as NGOs to support counter-insurgency operations or to promote neo-liberal programs.

In the final analysis, CSO development effectiveness is measured by the capacity of the people to take development as their own, empowering themselves not only as critical yet independent stakeholders but also as political players who share common goals of institutional and structural reforms focused on equalizing social and economic opportunities and resources toward putting an end to oligarchic rule and democratizing government by placing it – with all its powers and resources - in the hands of the people.

Allow me to conclude my presentation by citing some of the key national issues that pose bigger challenges to – and will impact on – the work of Philippine CSOs in the next 5 years:

- 1) Peace process between the GPH and the NDFP and Bangsamoro groups
- 2) Looming constitutional change: Federalism, major changes in economic provisions, entrenchment of political dynasties

- 3) Impact of massive infrastructure projects: On IP communities, agricultural lands, environment
- 4) Gut issues related to agrarian reform, labor, urban poor
- 5) Human rights: “Oplan Kapayapaan”; summary executions, death penalty which can be used by some elements for narrow political ends
- 6) Maritime issues and foreign policy
- 7) Migration and OFWs