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Philippine technocracy and politico-administrative realities during the martial law period (1972–1986): decentralization, local governance and autonomy concerns of prescient technocrats

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Decentralization and local governance in the Philippines have taken big strides since the passage of the Local Government Code of 1991. This article argues that the seeds and ideas were in existence prior to this period, as evidenced by discerning and forward-looking technocrats who saw that decentralization should be incorporated in the broader development strategies of the country. However, since the technocrats then were widely perceived to be mostly concerned with the administration's economic and development policies, their thoughts on local autonomy and decentralization have not been given much attention by scholars. Based on original material gathered from interviews with key technocrats, the article concludes that a number of the fundamental principles pertaining to decentralization initiatives had been articulated in the Philippines as much as two decades before being meaningfully implemented by the Local Government Code in 1991. These basic decentralization tenets include the following: (1) decentralization of governance should focus on the countryside to bring about development; (2) deconcentration should be adopted to deepen decentralization under an authoritarian regime; (3) the implementation of decentralized structures and processes should be accompanied by changes in paradigms and mindsets of stakeholders; (4) doubts about the capacities of sub-national governments exist, hence impeding decentralization; (5) decentralization requires working with local leaders; (6) decentralization requires engaging with and working with local communities; and (7) decentralization and local governance require local governments to work together.

Keywords: technocracy; technocrats; decentralization; local autonomy; deconcentration; devolution

Introduction

This article is part of a broader research project that examines the role, perspectives and influence of technocrats during the authoritarian regime of President Marcos, who ruled the country under martial law from 1972 to 1986.¹ A number of studies on decentralization and devolution in the Philippines have been conducted, and many papers published, but based on the authors' own review, none of these has approached decentralization with the argument that some of the seeds for the adoption of decentralization in the Philippines may be found in the direct and indirect advocacies of the technocrats during the Marcos dictatorship. It is within this context that the perspectives of Marcos technocrats – who with their expertise occupied key positions and exerted considerable influence in policymaking – on decentralization, local autonomy and local governance are explored in this article. The article argues that, while decentralization and local governance indeed

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took a dramatic and even revolutionary turn in transforming the politico-administrative system with the passage of the Local Government Code (RA 7160) in 1991, the imperatives for decentralization and local autonomy had been recognized and articulated earlier by some forward-looking technocrats under the authoritarian regime. Significantly, many of the fundamental principles associated with the successful implementation of decentralization had been pointed out by these technocrats two decades before meaningful decentralization was enacted in 1991. The level of this consciousness varies, however, as revealed in the interviews with technocrats as they share their thoughts on their experiences in policymaking and implementation.

Methodologically, this article uses as its basis the original transcripts of interviews with technocrats who played a key role during the Marcos administration, conducted under the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) three-year project, “Economic Policymaking and the Philippine Development Experience, 1960–1985: An Oral History Project.”² These technocrats include Finance and Prime Minister Cesar Virata, Armand Fabella, Vicente Paterno and Jose Conrado Benitez. Others interviewed by the team of writers in the JSPS project included Sixto K. Roxas, a noted technocrat during the previous Diosdado Macapagal administration, and Jose Almonte, national security adviser during the administration of former president Fidel V. Ramos.

This article re-examines the contents of these interviews and extracts and analyzes references – and inferences – to local governance suggesting that the discourse on local autonomy and decentralization (whether for or against) may have also been a concern of the technocrats during the period of authoritarian rule. It will be recalled that the adoption of a centralized authoritarian regime by the dictatorship was justified to “save the republic and reform society” (Marcos 1972). Toward the objective of reforming society, Marcos issued Presidential Decree No. 1, the Integrated Reorganization Plan, long pending in Congress, which gave a thrust for a massive reorganization of the country’s bureaucracy and public administration. This included, among other things, paradoxically, the decentralization of the Philippine administrative system. After all, decentralization and local autonomy may also be framed as approaches to public management to enhance the delivery of services and promote responsive governance. It is within this context that the article focuses on how decentralization, as a policy pronouncement, was addressed by the highly centralized Marcos dictatorship, specifically by its technocrats who played a key role in the policymaking processes during that period.

Technocracy and technocrats

One of the major features of the authoritarian regime was the prominent role given to technocrats in running the government. Because of their specialized and managerial expertise and skills, and supposed apolitical nature, they were expected to perform their jobs and achieve the objectives given them. Technocrats were recruited for their expertise, especially in economic issues and the development planning concerns of the administration. Technocrats are “persons equipped with specialized competence or professional skills which are the principal reason for their employment” (Dubsky 1993, 18). These skills cover organizational and management problems and technocrats occupy positions that involve decision making.

Technocracy is “the possession of technical knowledge which would serve as the base of power, with education and training providing credentials for access to it” (Fischer 1990, 18). Considering the role and positions these technocrats held during the time of the Marcos administration, their expertise would also include application and adaptation to

governance tasks. With their highly specialized skills, they have been perceived as professionals and experts, apolitical and even non-partisan.³

Technocracy, as described in various studies in Southeast Asian countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand, would pertain to a system of governance in which technocrats, for their technical expertise and training, occupy key economic and policymaking positions in government and enjoy the support of the governing elite (Dubsky 1993, 145; Tadem 2012, 100; Akira 2014, 310; Khalid and Abdin 2014, 387).

Technocracy has been associated with technical planning done from above by experts, employing macro models as well as rational approaches (Dubsky 1993, 166). Its nature is actually compatible with an authoritarian administration since this type of planning enhances state control and ignores local interests and values, focusing more on efficiency and rationality. Comprehensive planning is also favored. This was evident in the important role that the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) played and was affirmed by the technocrats during the interviews on which this article is based.

Technocrats were known as transnationalists who advocated the liberalization of import restrictions and promotion of export-oriented industrialization (Dubsky 1993, 151). Their influence was present not only in policymaking but also in planning, mostly in congruence with the World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF), institutions that heavily influenced the economic policies of the Marcos regime. Most technocrats were educated in American institutions with economics or business as their fields of specialization.

When asked about the role of technocrats in the administration and their link with international institutions such as the IMF and WB, Cesar Virata said in one of the interviews conducted by the JSPS technocracy project team:

As far as the technocrats are concerned, we have no match for these [IMF and WB] people, they had direct access to the president. They have their power base ... I think international institutions have better two-way communications with the technocrats.⁴

A review of the transcripts of interviews conducted by the research team of Paderanga, Katayama and Tadem covering issues and concerns pertaining to development strategies, underdevelopment, politics, economics, authoritarianism and the role of international financial institutions such as the WB, the IMF and the Asian Development Bank, shows that references were made to the role played by sub-national units, especially local governments. The interviews included direct and indirect references to decentralization, local governance and autonomy.

It will be recalled that President Marcos himself signed into law Batas Pambansa Blg. 337 (BP 337), the Local Government Code passed during his period of authoritarian rule.⁵ The said law provided the following:

The State shall guarantee and promote the authority of local government units to ensure their fullest development as self reliant communities and make them more effective partners in the pursuit of national development and social progress. To this end, the State shall constantly find and effectuate ways of enhancing their capabilities in discharging their responsibilities through a system of decentralization whereby local governments shall be given more powers, responsibilities and resources.

To a certain extent, decentralization and local autonomy were almost seen as oxymoronic under authoritarian rule. It has been asked: how can power be decentralized under an authoritarian ruler when power is concentrated in the ruler? Decentralization, on

the other hand, implies either deconcentration or devolution of powers and functions to local units, allowing direct contact with the people and directly addressing the needs of the countryside.

Even with various statements of national leaders in support of enhanced local autonomy, there was still direct supervision of local activity (Dubsky 1993, 166). As pointed out by Dubsky, the authoritarian regime's rhetoric and commitment to participation focused on centralization rather than enhancement of local autonomy. Consultations with the people were not to provide the people real with opportunity to influence the course of development. Rather, they were conducted to prevent complications in the implementation of policies. This focus on the design and the perceived disregard for social and cultural values is characteristic of a technocracy. Technocrats' emphasis was on technological ideas of progress and values are excluded from policy design (Dubsky 1993, 163). Technocrats' focus was on "implementation and planning rather than identification of social conflicts" (Simpas and Mariano 1978, 236). The technocrats' roles were characterized by attempts to rationalize systems, which explains why reforms of institutions and processes during the Marcos regime consisted mostly of organizational and structural reforms.⁶

Decentralization and local autonomy: a historical context

Decentralization is a process to hasten decision making, increase citizen participation and design and develop programs and policies relevant to local needs (Brillantes 1986). Local government units, considered to be more in touch with the needs of the people within their jurisdiction, are expected to be more responsive in addressing these needs. The decentralization process can be effected through deconcentration, devolution or debureaucratization. Deconcentration pertains to the transfer of functions to lower-level administrative units while devolution includes transfer of powers and authorities to lower-level political units or local government units. The first covers administrative concerns while the latter takes a more political nature. Debureaucratization is a variation of decentralization that engages the private sector, business organizations and non-government organizations (NGOs) in the delivery of services.

Decentralization remains an ongoing issue in the Philippines, where a centralized government has long been entrenched. Even during the Spanish era, the entire archipelago was ruled from "imperial" Manila. The existence of centralized administrative and bureaucratic structures and processes perpetuated this set-up. It is within this context that changing mindsets and paradigms steeped in centralization after more than five centuries becomes a gargantuan task. It is not a surprise that even with the passage of various laws over the years, ostensibly to recognize autonomy and effect decentralized structures, the highly centralized government and dependence on the national government has prevailed.

Even prior to the colonizers' efforts to promote local governments, local autonomy already existed. According to Senator Jose P. Laurel, "local villages or barangays" of the Philippine archipelago were existent even before the arrival of the Spanish colonizers (Brillantes 2003, 4). They were to all intents and purposes autonomous territorial and political units headed by a monarchical chieftain called the *datu*, *pangino* or *pangulo* (Brillantes 2003, 4).

The effort toward decentralization continued during the American period but the politico-administrative structure was highly centralized for security reasons (1902–1935). In 1959, the Local Autonomy Act (RA 2264) was passed, which vested greater fiscal, planning and regulatory powers to cities and municipalities. This was followed by the

Barrio Charter Act, which aimed to convert barrios into quasi-municipal corporations. In 1967, the Decentralization Act (RA 5185) not only increased local government resources but also widened administrative decision-making powers. Section 2 of the law declares as its purpose:

to grant to local governments greater freedom and ampler means to respond to the needs of their people and promote their prosperity and happiness and to effect a more equitable and systematic distribution of governmental powers and resources. To this end, local governments henceforth shall be entrusted with the performance of those functions that are more properly administered in the local level and shall be granted with as much autonomous powers and financial resources as are required in the more effective discharge of these responsibilities (Decentralization Act 1967).

Moves toward decentralization were stunted during the martial law period, when the power to select and appoint local officials was vested with the president (Brillantes 2003, 6). The presidency was then the center or highest source of political power (Sosmeña 1980, 182). Various policies were issued to promote local autonomy, touching on all aspects of local administration, generally aimed at enhancing the administrative and fiscal capabilities of local governments. However, these were rendered ineffective not only through implementation but also by conflicting policy issuances. In the case of the Ministry of Finance, provincial and city treasurers are designated as concurrent regional directors for the Ministry (Sosmeña 1980, 194). In the case of P.D. 477, which introduced fiscal administration, decisional areas of local executives and local councils were restricted. It would appear that despite the passage of Presidential Decrees (PDs) and Letters of Instructions (LOIs) intended to effect decentralization and increase local government capacity, the contrary appears as these issuances create conflicting results (Sosmeña 1980, 193). During the Marcos regime, central supervision and control was highly visible. Evident too were presidential power over local officials, supervision over local administration and financial affairs as well as centralized personal administration. There was apparent contradiction considering the policy pronouncement toward local autonomy and the opposing political environment of a highly centralized government in an authoritarian regime. Noted public administration scholar Raul P. de Guzman explained the seeming contradiction thus: political power that was concentrated in the dictator/authoritarian ruling the country under martial law while administrative powers were transferred to the sub-national units of the government. There was deconcentration or administrative decentralization, which is a form of decentralization in contrast to the other major form of decentralization: devolution or political decentralization. In numerous public lectures and presentations, de Guzman used [Figure 1](#) to illustrate the contradiction.

Under martial law, what the Philippines had was mostly administrative decentralization. This was also referred to as “deconcentration.” This was operationalized by dividing the country initially into 12 administrative regions, which became the basis for planning. Each region had a Regional Development Council (RDC) with the Regional NEDA Office (NRO) serving as the secretariat for the region’s planning body.

While a Local Government Code was passed in 1983 that provided for a system of devolution, because of its inherently authoritarian nature the government continued to be politically centralized, with local governments essentially under the control of the national government. It is also ironic that it was in 1972 that the Integrated Reorganization Plan was adopted, dividing the country into administrative regions (Brillantes 1980, 70).

Under Marcos, the direction of policy reforms pointed toward both centralization and decentralization (Sosmeña 1980, 193). Among the other policy reforms that sought to promote decentralization were the creation of the Department of Local Government

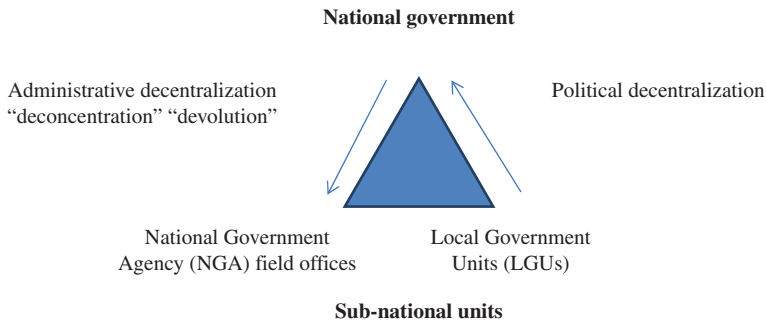


Figure 1. Administrative decentralization vs. political decentralization.

Source: Drawn from the many lectures of Raul de Guzman (c. 1979–1980) that Brillantes had the privilege of attending as de Guzman’s research assistant.

and Community Development, the passage of Presidential Decree No. 684 involving the youth in government affairs through the *Kabataang Barangay* and the creation of the Metropolitan Manila Commission (Tapales 1978, 313). However, the fact remained that because these were operating under an authoritarian regime, they continued to be dominated by the central government.

After the Marcos dictatorship was ousted in 1986 by the historic people power revolution, a new constitution was promulgated by the government of Mrs. Corazon Aquino. Local autonomy and decentralization were among the policies enunciated in the constitution. More specifically, the 1987 constitution provided:

Section 3. The Congress shall enact a local government code which shall provide for a more responsive and accountable local government structure instituted through a system of decentralization with effective mechanisms of recall, initiative, and referendum, allocate among the different local government units their powers, responsibilities, and resources, and provide for the qualifications, election, appointment and removal, term, salaries, powers and functions and duties of local officials, and all other matters relating to the organization and operation of the local units. (Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines 1987)

Section 4, Article X clearly provides for general supervision by the president over local governments and for provinces to ensure that the acts of their component units are within the scope of their prescribed powers and functions. The administration of President Corazon Aquino explicitly departed from the control and supervision powers exercised by the president over local government units practiced under the previous authoritarian regime. The constitutional pronouncement effectively broadens the powers of the local government units and allows them greater participation in national development.

This pronouncement and state policy was further strengthened by the passage of the Local Government Code of 1991. The Code devolved to local governments the responsibility for delivery of basic services, such as health, social services, public works and education, which used to rest with the national government. Their financial resources capabilities also included broadening of taxing powers, a share from the use of national wealth exploited in their areas and a share in national taxes, as in the case of Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA).

Under the enhanced and favorable environment, local government units (LGUs) became more empowered and incurred notable achievements. These achievements can be seen in the *Galing Pook Awards*,⁷ which recognizes best practices in local governance.

Another key sector that has emerged over the years are the leagues of local governments themselves who have been in the frontlines in advocating meaningful decentralization and devolution and have protected the autonomy of local governments. Various leagues of governments emerged under the present Code and played a big role in advocating local autonomy. These are the League of Provinces, the League of Cities, League Municipalities and *Liga ng mga Barangay*. This trend continued with the formation of the League of Vice-Governors, the Vice-Mayors' League, the Philippine Councilors' League and the Provincial Board Members' League, which not only supported the development efforts of LGUs but also proposed appropriate reform measures. An umbrella organization of the various leagues of local governments is the Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines, which has consistently protected the interests of the local governments.

Decentralization and local autonomy: the Marcos technocrats' perspectives

This section focuses on the thoughts and perspectives on decentralization and local autonomy as articulated by the technocrats of the Marcos regime. It seeks out references by technocrats to local governments and places them within the context of the current realities of local governance. To a certain extent, the thoughts and perspectives on decentralization and local autonomy continue as imperatives for contemporary local governance.

One of the most interesting aspects in studying the history and evolution of decentralization in the Philippines during the authoritarian regime of Marcos pertains to the fact that decentralization at its very core suggests the dispersal of power away from the center (hence "de-center") within the context of enabling more participation of lower-level units. Obviously dispersing – and lessening – power is against the very nature of authoritarianism, which suggests the concentration of power in the center. However, this seemingly oxymoronic and awkward situation may be better understood when we deconstruct and nuance the notion of decentralization as shown by the Philippine experience in the 1970s. As illustrated earlier (Figure 1), the experience during the Marcos years showed that it is possible to have political decentralization simultaneously with administrative decentralization. More specifically, the best evidence of this was in the simultaneous implementation of political centralization and administrative decentralization. Political decentralization occurred when all local elections were abolished and all local government officials including governors and mayors were directly appointed by the president; simultaneously, administrative decentralization was implemented through the planning process when the country was divided into administrative regions that were the basis for regional planning.

Based on our reviews of the original transcripts of the in-depth interviews conducted by the JSPS technocracy project team for the broader research project described at the outset of this article, the perspectives and views of the technocrats under the authoritarian regime may be summarized as follows:⁸

1. Decentralization of government should focus on the countryside to bring about development.
2. Deconcentration should be adopted to deepen decentralization under the authoritarian regime.
3. The implementation of decentralized structures and processes should be accompanied by changes in paradigms and mindsets of the stakeholders.
4. Doubts about the capacities of sub-national government exist, hence impeding decentralization.

5. Decentralization requires working with local leaders.
6. Decentralization requires engaging with and working with local communities.
7. Decentralization and local governance may require local governments to work together.

The following section discusses each of these points, based on the perspectives of these technocrats.

Decentralize government and focus on the countryside for development

Among the technocrats interviewed by the team, it was Vicente Paterno who seemed to be most sensitive to the imperatives of decentralization and local autonomy if development was to be achieved. Paterno knew what he spoke about, having served as chairman of the Board of Investments and minister of public works under Marcos. He later served as secretary of trade and industry. According to Paterno:

My major concern at that time was the more equitable development of the regions, particularly Mindanao. Second, I was concerned about the imperialist Manila syndrome. Having traveled through quite a few portions of the country, whether as a BOI chairman or as a minister of industry or public highways, I saw the government's treatment of the region and Metro Manila. One thing that stuck in my mind was the question of one Muslim *datu* in Mindanao, "*Minister, can you please tell me why is it that in Manila, you build bridges even without rivers and here we have so many rivers but no bridges?*"⁹

Paterno also noted that the government was not reaching the people, especially during the time when he was still minister of public highways, when a *barangay* council would hand him a petition for a road construction on one of his visits to the provinces. He said, "it was probably true then because government was really very authoritarian and government people were not subject to popular pressure."¹⁰

The need to focus on countryside development and balancing centralized planning was also evident in the transcript of the interview with Jose Conrado Benitez. As he talked about programs and strategies to achieve human-centered development, he asked about the meaning of central authority in terms of countryside development, poverty alleviation, education and resource mobilization.¹¹ According to him, it was within the context of generating wealth in the countryside through decentralization that the Technology Resource Center was created, in response to the question of what technologies for adaptation and development can be utilized in various areas.

In the case of agriculture, Virata revealed how they strategized and brought main agricultural crops to areas less affected by typhoons. He also pointed out the imperatives of investing in the development of Mindanao in order to have alternative sources of agricultural supplies independent of other northern provinces.¹²

This illustrates how highly centralized planning and development policymaking and implementation were conducted under the Marcos regime despite policy pronouncements in the Local Government Code of 1983 and LOIs and PDs issued. Inherent under an authoritarian government is the concentration of power at the center, with the local units merely conforming to national development policy directions in this case.

As early as 1972, before the enactment of the Local Government Code, the technocrats pointed out that decentralization is an imperative for countryside development. More than two decades later, government initiatives to attain countryside development through local government units were provided with the Local Government Code of 1991 as an enabling framework. The Code deviates from the usual government-centric delivery of services as it allows collaboration with NGOs. This takes on the debureaucratization mode under the

concept of decentralization where it involves the transfer of focus and authorities to units not within the purview of government, such as NGOs, people's organizations (POs) or the civil society on more general terms (Brillantes 1996).

The Code speaks of the role of POs and NGOs as active partners of LGUs in the pursuit of local autonomy. It likewise allows LGUs to enter into joint ventures and other cooperative arrangements with POs and NGOs to engage in the delivery of certain basic services, capability building and livelihood projects. The collaboration may also include development of local enterprises, which will improve productivity and income, diversity agriculture, and spur rural industrialization. Their presence is also recognized in local health and school boards.

The role of NGOs in rural development is important considering their sensitivity to the needs of the rural population and the nature of their operation at the grassroots (Brillantes 2003). Their capacity to deliver services and help the rural poor to increase their choices and empower themselves can lead to rural development. With the push given under the Code, governance becomes more emphasized with the participation of NGOs and POs in areas traditionally relegated or assumed to belong only to the government.

Deconcentration as the first step to deepen decentralization

The deconcentration of national government should continue. Over-concentration of functions in national government agencies prevents local development. National government agencies should define and redefine their functions under a decentralized regime. This can include the provision of technical assistance and capacity building for sub-national units of government.

Under the authoritarian government of Marcos, most decision-making powers were concentrated in national government agencies. Even simple administrative matters that can be delegated – and deconcentrated – were still in the hands of the bureaucrats in the central office. Paterno cited a very telling example of how over-concentrated power functions were in Manila.

One time, somebody from Maguindanao or Lanao, a mayor, wanted so badly to see President Marcos. Marcos told me to attend to the fellow. He wanted to ask the president how to set up a factory to make durian candy. This should be attended to by somebody in the government who could give technical advice on such a simple thing and yet, he had to go to the president to find this out. What kind of service were we providing?¹³

As Virata spoke about strategizing agricultural crops in areas not affected by typhoons to ensure supply, the more we observed the thinking among the Marcos technocrats that decision making was concentrated at the national level. No local government participation was mentioned. Ideas of investing in areas other than the northern provinces and Baguio for agricultural crops were still brought up to the cabinet level and to the NEDA for evaluation and decision. The same was true when Virata spoke of the Magat or Chico dam.

So *we planned* the others like the Magat and Chico Dam. It would take about three or four years before each one of these could be constructed if they did it at the same time.¹⁴

This situation highlights the over-concentration of both planning and execution at the national level. Local development projects were still taken to the cabinet level for evaluation and decision. Even with the Local Government Code of 1983 and policy issuances purportedly to enhance local administration, central ministries or agencies supervise local administration and finances. The president exercises control over local units through the Ministry of Local Government while the Ministry of Budget oversees and evaluates the budget of these units (Sosmeña 1980, 187 and 189).

Decades after the passage of BP 337, within the nurturing environment provided by the Local Government Code of 1991 and other supporting laws executed by the concerned government units and agencies, efforts to deconcentrate national government functions became more evident. Under the Local Government Code of 1991, devolution and deconcentration of basic services such as health and education found a favorable environment. Providing an additional and more sustainable source of funding is the Special Education Fund (SEF), which comes from the additional 1% tax levy on real property tax stated in the Code.

Boosting decentralization of health and education services is the passage of RA 9155 and the recently enacted National Health Insurance Act of 2013. RA 9155 establishes a framework for governance for basic education and espouses the principle of shared governance where the role of every unit in the education bureaucracy is recognized. Under the new law, the regional-level office is mandated to define a regional educational policy framework and develop a regional basic education plan. The division office, on the other hand, is tasked to develop and implement education development plans and manage the efficient use of personnel, physical and fiscal resources.

As the title of the law implies, the direction of the policy addresses accountability, an important factor in successful decentralization efforts. Accountability should be seen as an integral part of gaining more democratic access to services, with decentralization necessarily bringing the government and services through the LGUs closer to the people.

The technocrats then recognized that deconcentration, also referred to as administrative decentralization, was needed as a first step to meaningful – and hence deeper – decentralization.

Decentralization and reforming mindsets of dependence

One of the major obstacles we have seen to successful decentralization is the mindset not only of national government officials but local government officials as well. The over-centralized nature of governance in the Philippines – under Spain, the US and, of course, under the dictatorship brought about by martial law – developed and perpetuated a paradigm of dependency among sub-national units of government. Technocrat Paterno pointed out a telling example of such:

And then of course, when I was minister of public highways, governors would bring me [to places] as if I were a prince of some sort. A governor would bring me somewhere and we would stop at the intersection of a highway to interior roads. He would ask me to stop. There would be a table (and a barangay council there) to give me their petitions for a road construction or maintenance. It showed me that government was not reaching the people. That was true, and it was more true then because government was really very authoritarian and government people were not subject to popular pressure. *That old mentality is still around.*¹⁵

The same issue of dependence remains a concern today, despite the more nurturing environment for decentralization.

The culture of dependence must be erased, especially as it tends to creep into some LGUs when both technical and financial capabilities run low. Efforts at decentralization have brought with them a need to increase the capabilities of the pool of human resources performing devolved functions at the local level. Efficient implementation of vital programs and even basic services would necessarily entail appropriate financial support.

Other LGUs, however, were able to utilize available support and enabling mechanisms under the present legal framework and in partnership with other government units and various agencies. Under the Marcos regime, local units were dependent on the central government for both policy directions and financial resources. Not only were they under

the supervision and control of the central ministries or agencies like the Ministries of Local Government and Budget; even the salary rates of local executives were set by the Joint Commission on Local Government Personnel Administration (Sosmeña 1980, 182).

At present, various entities have become active partners of local government units in enhancing local officials' and employees' capabilities – including transforming their mindsets and paradigms – such as the Center for Local and Regional Governance (CLRG) of the University of the Philippines, the Department of Interior and Local Government's (DILG's) Local Government Academy (LGA), Leagues of LGUs, the Development Academy of the Philippines (DAP) and the Philippines Society of Public Administration (PSPA), to name a few. In the case of the LGA, it provides training for local governments and designs study visits that encourage the adoption of valuable innovations and programs that can be adapted to their area. Good governance, through sharing and documenting best practices among LGUs, becomes emphasized. Various award programs have helped to spread this advocacy, such as the *Galing Pook* by the LGA, Clean and Green by the DILG and the Konrad Adenauer Medal of Excellence of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

The technocrats rightly pointed out that decentralization required changes in paradigms and perspectives, what Paterno referred to as old mentalities steeped in dependence upon central authorities. These mindsets have to be deconstructed if decentralization is to be advanced.

Doubts about the capacities of sub-national governments

There continues to be a lack of trust among national government agency officials in the capacities of local governments. This is precisely the mindset that can get in the way of successful implementation of decentralization policies.

Such a mindset is at the foundation of the lack of trust and confidence among national government officials in the judgment of local officials. This was reflected in the transcripts of the many interviews with Cesar Virata. He talked about how the design and implementation of many development programs and projects were to be led by national government agencies (especially NEDA) without making reference at all to the imperatives to consult local governments.

Local governments were essentially bypassed by national government agencies in the planning and implementation of projects. In one interview, Virata talked about how he consulted national government officials in the design and implementation of projects. No reference is made to local governments:

When I talked to our cabinet members, bureau directors, and staff then, they were so disappointed because very few of the projects that they presented could be implemented. They were asking what kind of projects were going to be presented before the consultative group meeting. I told them that the project proposals they should prepare should have calculated the return on investment (ROI) because they would be competing with other projects.¹⁶

Virata added:

It was NEDA's task to determine the priority projects ... I told them that if they prepared the proposals well, we would clinch the funds for implementation. Eventually project feasibility studies were prepared by various agencies. We got the help of NEDA. The regions responded so they started preparing project studies.¹⁷

Virata also articulated his suspicions of local governments potentially abusing their taxing powers.

And then I recommended to the president to amend a portion of the tax code where cities and municipalities were allowed to impose taxes. I was concerned that they might levy export tax on the movement of *palay* out of their province. I thought it would be an impediment to the flow of rice and other food items. Recently, Bohol proclaimed they would not allow the export of rice.¹⁸

Under the Marcos regime, policymaking was virtually integrated under the NEDA, considered as the crowning glory of technocrats and the premier policymaking body in the Philippines, with the president as the chairman of the board and with the secretaries of industry, finance, public works, labor and education as members (Simpas and Mariano 1978, 238). Even with the presence of these technocrats, the development model used tends to reduce political participation and public hearing in favor of efficiency and immediacy (Simpas and Mariano 1978, 251). Hence, with this structural set-up and development approach, there is no room to recognize or include the local units in policymaking. There is central supervision over local administration, finances and development planning (Sosmeña 1980, 200).

Misgivings about the capacities of local governments to perform the functions and responsibilities devolved to them continue today. It is within this context that a number of devolved agencies have actually asked that recentralization and even reversing some areas of devolution be considered. Going deeper into this, it can be surmised that misgivings may go beyond doubts about capacities of local governments. They may really be about power, and the hesitancy – or downright refusal – of national government agencies to give up power under a decentralized set-up. This was true before and remains true today.

More than two decades have elapsed since the passage of the current Local Government Code but central government still retains its hold on some vital services. In the case of health, the Department of Health (DOH) holds onto its responsibility of developing health plans and supervision of big specialty hospitals and the monitoring of health outcomes and disease outbreaks (Capuno 2008, 11). Compared with education, especially with the passage of RA 9155 where shared governance is specifically provided for, the DOH retains more health services than the Department of Education in education service delivery. The law acknowledges the role of every unit in the education bureaucracy. For example, the regional level is mandated to define a regional educational policy framework and develop a regional basic education plan and the division level, on the other hand, is to develop and implement education development plans as well as plan and manage efficient use of personnel, physical and fiscal resources.

At the core of successful decentralization are the capacities of the local governments to step up and meet the challenges under a decentralized set-up. The technocrats themselves recognized this and expressed some concerns – and doubts – about local capacities. Similar concerns continue to be articulated decades later.

The imperative to work with local leaders/local elites

The technocrats recognized the important and critical role of local leaders and elites as frontliners in the development process. This could work for or against decentralization and local autonomy. Under the authoritarian regime of Marcos, technocrat Cesar Virata pointed out that it was imperative and unavoidable to work with the local elites. Even under a regime of martial law, Virata expressed his wariness of the dominance of elites in local governance, especially in Mindanao. Referring to the implementation of projects in Mindanao, Virata expressed apprehensions and the need to deal with them:

During that time [under martial law], there were influential leaders like Dimaporo, Tamano and Pendatun. *We had to talk with them about problems and projects in respective areas.*¹⁹

Indeed, elite capture and dominance has always been a historical reality of Philippine politics. This was true during the martial law years as it continues to be true today. The issue of political dynasty remains at present but there have been debates about the so-called good and bad dynasty distinctions (Calica 2013; Mendez 2013; Ronda 2013). It is a political reality and a fact of life that many national political leaders have blood relatives in local government units and vice versa.

The technocrats then recognized the inevitability of having to work with local leaders – and even local elites – if nationally designed programs and projects were to be successful under a decentralized set-up.

The imperative to work with local communities and mobilize them

Related to the preceding emerging principle is another one articulated and re-articulated by technocrat Jose Conrado Benitez, who served under First Lady Imelda Marcos, who was then minister of human settlements. During the interviews, Benitez said that Marcos's authoritarian regime even studied Korea's *Saemaul Undong* movement, which is widely acknowledged to have played a key role in Korea's development process. People were mobilized toward a common goal. The authoritarian regime of Marcos tried to mobilize communities through the so-called KKK movement. In an interview in 2009, Benitez said:

When martial law was declared, there were programs and strategies that we had to do. We took on a human-centered development strategy, and tried to creatively set up all kinds of programs that would substantiate and give meaning to the centralized authoritarian government. But what does that mean in terms of development? What does central government mean or central authority in terms of countryside development: poverty alleviation, education, resource mobilization and generation? So those were the kinds of theoretical issues and concerns of development that we had to think about, organize and mobilize for, and that was where the whole barangay movement, the *kabisig* movement, all of these other strategies began to take place.²⁰

The idea of mobilizing local communities is only one aspect of local governance; the point being made by Benitez here is that the people were being mobilized to commit to the agenda of a central government. In other words, the people are mere subjects of central government intervention; there is no attempt to turn them into stakeholders.

Communities may also be mobilized by encouraging – and engaging – private sector participation in the local development processes. Benitez underscored private sector participation:

We were very self-centered and focused on the problem we were working on. One of the first things we did, for instance, was this whole housing and town planning that became the focus and concern. “How do you balance central government planning, state planning, with private sector participation and community mobilization?” Those were real issues we were addressing . . . we would create the technology resource center (now TLRC) in response to the question what technologies for adaption and development could we utilize in various areas. And those became the paramount issues and concerns, at least for us.²¹

Referring to Korea, Benitez continued:

We got to know about their new community development, the *saemaul* movement, but the KKK was brought about when Marcos said, “you cannot just promote housing. You have to promote livelihood.” . . . So Marcos said, when we were calling all the governors and mayors in Malacañang, he wanted to launch a nationwide livelihood program. He launched something

like the KKK because the KKK was the *Katipunan* . . . so we had this kilusan *sa kabuhayan sa kaunlaran*. In other words, a movement for livelihood and programs.²²

We organized the whole *kabisig* movement, thousands of people, the whole barangay brigades. It became a mass-based, grassroots, service-oriented, community development and mobilization effort. And Marcos felt at that time in 1978 to 1981 that the MHS [Ministry of Human Settlements] was taking care of the central program; the livelihood program was the main thing. We were once in the car from Malacañang and Marcos said, “I wish that when I declared martial law in 1972, this livelihood and community development strategy was effected.” Marcos was reminiscing that he had wished that those were the strategies and programs that were effected. Even MIT pointed out that what we did with regard to human settlements was ahead of and even more comprehensive than even what the UN had advocated. If you look at it now, the way *Gawad Kalinga* is moving, it really is a human settlements strategy.²³

It is interesting to note that Benitez referred to the *Gawad Kalinga* movement in the Philippines today that has become a symbol of citizen engagement and participation. The value of people’s participation in local development had been recognized – even at the level of rhetoric – by Benitez during the days of authoritarian rule. Today, a centerpiece of the Local Government Code of 1991 is the institutionalization of people’s participation in local governance in accordance with the 1987 constitution.

Under the Marcos regime, consultations with the people were to facilitate implementation of government policies determined by the central government rather than get the real sentiments of the people and afford them the chance to influence policies (Dubsky 1981, 56) through effective consultation and feedback if real decentralization was to be effected.

Gawad Kalinga (GK), which started in 1995 to rehabilitate juvenile gang members in *Bagong Silang*, Caloocan, later became a model community and was replicated throughout the country. GK then evolved into a movement for nation building that helps transform poverty-stricken areas into progressive communities. It is notable in that it was able to bring together government resources, business and civil society to address poverty issue. Its programs, which include shelter and site development, community health, education, livelihood, community organizing, culture and tourism and the environment, correspond with the community of nations concerns couched in the Millennium Development Goals. Its efforts have drawn support from the government, the academe and the international community.

Indeed, a fundamental principle for the success of decentralization is the imperative to work with the people. This is a fundamental tenet in the Local Government Code of 1991. Interestingly, technocrats then recognized this tenet: work with local communities and mobilize them.

Recognition of inter-local cooperation as a strategy for local development

In some of the interviews conducted, technocrats Fabella and Benitez pointed out that planning should cut across political boundaries. For instance, some of the strategies adopted then included planning for the regions through the RDC, and integrated development (IAD). Efforts to plan across the formal political boundaries. Local government efforts to plan across the formal political boundaries that focused on, say, river basins, islands as a whole, ecologies, that adopted the integrated area development approach during the period of authoritarianism – were forerunners of what we have today as inter-local cooperation as provided by the Local Government Code.²⁴

Under the Marcos regime, policymaking was centralized, given the functions and structure of the NEDA as mentioned above, which basically comprises the ministry

secretaries and the president as the final approving authority of policy proposals. Local units were under the supervision of central agencies; even the automatic release of their funds was hindered by the need for prior approval from the national government upon compliance with certain conditions. These conditions hampered even their ability to explore inter-local government relations.

The current Local Government Code actually encourages local governments to enter into inter-local cooperation, with the planning and implementation of programs and projects cutting across political boundaries and instead addressing common problems and concerns, such as preservation of marine resources, watershed, pollution, solid waste management and so on.

Included in the clustering efforts initiated by the government through the DILG is the LGU Cluster Development Approach Program (LGU-CLAP), which intends to implement the growth center strategy for the region and help respond to the development needs of surrounding municipalities (Brillantes 2003). Other local government units that entered into cooperative arrangements with their neighbors are the Northern Luzon Quadrangle, the Metro Naga Development Area in Camarines Sur, CAMANAVA (Caloocan, Malabon, Navotas and Valenzuela) and BLIST (Baguio, La Trinidad, Itogon and Sablan) to pursue economic, ecological and developmental concerns. The Central Panay Economic Union comprised five upland municipalities in Capiz, and Aklan opened trade and market relations with other municipalities. The IBRA (Illana Bay Regional Alliance) 9 Program, composed of seven municipalities, a city and one province, sought to rehabilitate coastal natural resources in the region.

The territorial boundaries of local government units are politically administrative and do not recognize the ecological and natural geographical boundaries. It is within this context that LGUs should cooperate with neighboring LGUs to address common ecological concerns. The imperative to cooperate was recognized by the technocrats then and they advocated inter-local cooperation. Interestingly, cooperation among LGUs was to be a key feature of the Local Government Code two decades later.

Synthesis

Before the passage of the Local Government Code, there were indications that the consciousness of enhancing participation of local governments and development was already present even during the time of the authoritarian regime when government was highly centralized. Overall, the Marcos technocrats were not supportive of decentralization, which was understandable considering that they served under an authoritarian regime. An authoritarian regime necessarily favors greater state control and centralization, which creates a favorable environment for technocracy.

The technocrats' bias toward economic logic and efficiency was compatible with the authoritarian rule of Marcos. Technocratic planning, which shows a top to bottom direction, would necessarily negate greater participation by the people and local governments. Its nature is actually against democratic politics, where greater individual freedom is sought, there is high consideration for people's demands and efforts toward accountability are made. Technocracy, on the other hand, focuses on rationality, efficiency, value-free design and judgment. As seen from the Philippine experience, technocratic policymaking is also associated with multilateral agencies rather than the public at large to whom the elected in a republican democratic government are accountable.

However, some technocrats – notably Paterno – advocated decentralization and development of the local governments. His thoughts revealed a bias toward local

autonomy, contrary to the prevailing views of the other technocrats. He spoke of the need to distribute over-concentrated powers and functions resting in Manila and the national agencies as well as the necessity of increasing the capabilities of local government units.

What the above suggests is that the notion and strategy of decentralization for local governments was one that certainly did not begin in the 1990s with the Local Government Code. Regional development was also enunciated in the interviews. Considering that decentralization has become some kind of a universally accepted strategy to enhance development, it was already recognized during the period of authoritarian rule.²⁵ The transcripts of the interviews conducted by the team of Teresa Encarnacion Tadem et al. provide evidence of this.

Political contexts may differ: authoritarian rule in the 1970s and 1980s; democratic and participative governance from the 1990s until today. But the universal appreciation – and advocacy for decentralization and local autonomy, including people’s participation – remains.

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Notes

1. Marcos was first elected as president in 1965 and re-elected in 1969. His term was to end in 1972 when he imposed martial law, after which he ruled the country as a dictator until 1986, when he was deposed by the people power revolution.
2. This project was co-ordinated by Yutaka Katayama of Kobe University and Cayetano Paderanga Jr. of the School of Economics, University of the Philippines, Diliman. Teresa S. Encarnacion Tadem was a member of this project.
3. Put simplistically, their power (*kratos*) is in their skill or craft (*techne*).
4. Cesar Virata, interview by Cayetano Paderanga and Teresa Encarnacion Tadem, 16 June 2008, RCBC Plaza, Makati City.
5. BP 337 was passed on 10 February 1983 (see http://www.lawphil.net/statutes/batasbam/bp1983/bp_337_1983.html).
6. This was also accompanied by efforts to reform the mindsets of the bureaucracy and the citizenry, as reflected by the regime’s efforts to bombard the citizenry with slogans such as “*Sa ikauunland ng Bayan Disiplina ang Kailanan*” (“Discipline is needed if national development is to be achieved”).

7. Literally means “excellent local areas.” This program was launched by the Local Government Academy together with the Asian Institute of Management in 1993 and continues today. It recognizes outstanding good and best practices at the local level.
8. These may also be considered seeds and origins of some fundamental principles of decentralization that were presciently articulated by the technocrats a decade and a half before the advent of meaningful decentralization in the country.
9. Vicente T. Paterno, interview by Yutaka Katayama, Temario Rivera and Teresa S. Encarnacion Tadem, tape recording, 15 August 2008, 11th Floor, Columbia Tower, Ortigas Ave., Mandaluyong City, Philippines.
10. Paterno, interview.
11. Jose Conrado Benitez, interview by Yutaka Katayama and Teresa Encarnacion Tadem, 7 August 2008, Philippine Women’s University, 1743 Taft Avenue, Manila.
12. Cesar Virata, interview by Yutaka Katayama, Cayetano Paderanga Jr. and Teresa Encarnacion Tadem, 2 May 2008, RCBC Plaza, Makati City.
13. Paterno, interview.
14. Cesar Virata, interview by Cayetano Paderanga Jr., Temario Rivera and Teresa Encarnacion Tadem, 29 July 2008, RCBC Plaza, Makati City.
15. Paterno, interview.
16. Cesar Virata, interview by Cayetano Paderanga Jr. and Teresa S. Encarnacion Tadem, tape recording, 30 September 2008, RCBC Plaza, Makati City.
17. Virata, interview, 30 September 2008.
18. Virata, interview, 29 July 2008.
19. Cesar Virata, interview by Yutaka Katayama, Cayetano Paderanga Jr. and Teresa Encarnacion Tadem, 28 May 2008, RCBC Plaza, Makati City.
20. Benitez, interview.
21. Benitez, interview.
22. Benitez, interview.
23. Benitez, interview.
24. Benitez, interview, and Armand V. Fabella, interview by Yutaka Katayama, Cayetano Paderanga Jr., Temario Rivera, and Teresa S. Encarnacion Tadem, tape recording, 11 August 2008, Fabella Residence, Harvard St., Wack Wack Subdivision, Mandaluyong City, Philippines.
25. The contradiction is certainly not lost upon us: as we pointed out earlier in the article, what we had was political centralization accompanied by administrative decentralization under authoritarian rule. Today under the Local Government Code, decentralization partakes of the nature of both political (devolution) and administrative (deconcentration) decentralization coupled with debureaucratization.

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