
Civil Society Engagements in Local Governance: The Case of the Philippines

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Introduction

This paper explores the engagements of Philippine civil society at the local (subnational) level of governance, primarily facilitated

by the advent of the decentralization law in the Philippines in 1991. In the process of negotiating spaces for intervention local engagements reveal nascent shifts in the role, stance and practice of state and civil society, as well as the dynamics between the two.

This study aims to trace these evolving engagements and map out the range of initiatives undertaken by civil society organizations as they continuously redefine the concept of governance. It is primarily a documentation of some key initiatives that have been raised in the literature and during interviews with major actors/organizations involved in local governance. By raising some issues, lessons and gaps that have been highlighted in over a decade of struggle at the local level, the paper seeks to provide initial handles that would facilitate the discourse.

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A Framework for Synergy

For many civil society organizations, the thrust towards local governance can be appreciated from various vantage points. To begin with, their entry into governance work reflects a long, on-going discourse on the nature and role of progressive groups and social move-

ments. At the same time, a decentralized system of governance has made the local government unit an important locus for political and institutional reform as it recognized that CSOs are partners in development and democratization.

With the transfer of vast amounts of power, authority, responsibility and resources to subnational units, CSO reform initiatives—of dismantling local structures and recalibrating power relations—could now be shifted to smaller, but equally crucial locales.



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As much as 40 percent of national revenues earmarked as Internal Revenue Allotment of LGUs, a substantial increase from the 11 percent they previously received. Also, 70,000 national government employees were transferred to LGUs, with the devolution of the delivery of some health, social welfare, and infrastructure services to the local level. More importantly, with the delegation of more responsibility, resources and labor power, LGUs have taken on greater control over the process of local planning¹ and improved discretion over the development thrust of their locality. As a result, the Philippine decentralization project has been cited the world over as ‘a revolution in governance,’ among the most remarkable and ambitious in the world.

Rood as well as other key figures in the Philippine decentralization experience attributes the Code’s passage to “a tide of democracy that followed the change of government in 1986.”² New spaces that had opened up with the change in the political landscape compelled politicians (both national and local) to explore various new structures of governance.³ This also allowed civil society actors to experiment with new forms of engagement.

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The fall of the dictatorship and ‘return to democracy’ undoubtedly played a key role in creating an environment for the significant changes that are in place today. Within this frame, important forces have put in their weight to shape the decentralization framework.

Rood underscores that local autonomy rhetoric had been present before the Aquino regime⁴ but identifies the ‘anti-Marcos sentiment after the overthrow of the dictatorship as the determinant that dismantled the mechanisms of central control,” ushering in the actual operationalization of decentralized governance. Decentralization in this sense was a post-authoritarian response, a restraint mechanism that prevented a return to any centralist-dictatorial regime.⁵ As a measure it diluted central reservoirs of power and resources that had made the previous authoritarian regime possible.

In effect, the Philippine decentralization framework sought to delegate power, authority, responsibilities as well as resources to: one, local officials at lower levels of government; and two, citizens groups and civil society actors. As a result, the framework established a push for better performance and ‘governance’ at two levels:

Local governments are evolving into a lobbying force to influence national government. Pressure is being exerted on national government agencies to take local governments into account. And the League of Provinces, League of Cities and League of Municipalities are not going to allow the Code to be significantly weakened during the ongoing discussion of amendments.

At the local level, governments are finding that the general citizenry is no longer accepting poor performance. In participatory planning sessions at the municipal and provincial level, citizens are included in the discussion of progress indicators and accomplishments. In Capiz, municipalities have opened up their operations to systematic evaluation by local citizens. Greater transparency means that citizens are more aware of local performance, and can compare their locality to neighboring communities. Now that local governments have more powers, local citizens seem poised to hold local officials accountable for performance. (Rood, 1998)

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More surprisingly, this new push was also accompanied and facilitated by greater openings for CSO participation in local governance. Aside from explicit provisions in the Code that encourage LGU support, including financial aid, to NGOs-POs, venues include representation in local special bodies, sectoral representation in local legislative councils, mandatory consultations on LGU projects, accountability mechanisms of recall, joint ventures, and people’s initiative, and referendum.

Box 1. Mechanisms for Citizens’ Participation under RA 7160 or the Local Government Code of 1991

1. Recall

- Provides for immediate accountability of both elective and appointive local officials whose tenure may be terminated by popular vote. Must be initiated by a Preparatory Recall Assembly, including elected officials
- Largely unused or operationalized by NGOs and POs, due to difficulties in enacting the process

2. People’s Initiative and Referendum

- People are given the right to legislate through ‘initiative and referendum’
- Institutionalizes people power, providing a means for people to pass key legislation directly rather than through local legislatures or Congress
- Largely unused by NGOs and POs; cumbersome process

3. Local Sectoral Representation

- Guarantees local sectoral representation in the local legislative assemblies (provincial, municipal and city councils)
- 3 seats reserved for marginal sectors
- still not implemented for lack of an enabling law

4. Local Special Bodies

- LSBs are tasked to formulate policy recommendation, develop plans, and propose measures to guide legislation and help steer local governments
- LSBs include: local health board, local peace and order councils, local school boards, local pre-qualification bids and awards committee and the local development council
- Not less than ¼ of the LDC should comprise of accredited NGO or PO representatives. Considered as key arena of advocacy for strengthening local government capacities
- The LDC is the most commonly used mechanism for citizens participation by NGOs and Pos

5. Mandatory Consultations and Public Hearings

- Public consultations mandatory in the planning and implementation of any project or program by government or private sector and in vital decisions undertaken by the LGU
- Not very effective no mandatory posting of public notices

6. Active Partnerships

- LGUs must promote/facilitate partnerships with Pos, NGOs and private sector in pursuit of local autonomy
- Joint undertakings and ventures and capability building
- Most utilised mechanism for participation

From Iszatt 2002; Estrella and Colpotura, 2002, Villarin 1996

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The inclusion of spaces for civil society intervention in the Code is mostly traced to then President Aquino’s ‘NGO bias.’ Cory Aquino was closely associated with the Church and other church-based groups, as well as some important actors in the social democratic movement, most of whom were important links forged during the middle class resistance ignited by the murder of her husband Ninoy in 1983.

It did not come as a surprise then that during her administration, the role and importance of ‘civil society’ in democracy and development was clearly emphasized. This created a promising political environment for the growth and strengthening of CSOs that was made operational with the financial support of international donors. Whether or not this was a conscious strategy to curb communist insurgency—that spilled over from the Marcos years despite the so-called restoration of democracy and fall of authoritarianism—has been a subject of important debate. In any case, SEC figures show a dramatic increase in the number of NGOs in the period 1986-1992—from 27,100 in 1986 to 50,800 in 1992.

The ‘civil society’ we know today has roots in the history of the anti-Marcos struggle, finally emerging in full force during the waning year of the Marcos regime. This early political stance is primarily characterized by a tradition of opposition shaped by the conditions during martial law. The elements of this political stance include⁶:

1. NGOs were oriented mainly towards changes in the national government, towards variations of the ‘seizure of state power’ paradigm. Working for change *within* government was not seen as important, except in purely utilitarian and tactical terms.
2. Mobilization and mass protest (also called the ‘parliament of the streets’, or pressure politics) are the preferred instrument. Some NGOs saw themselves as part of the ‘people’s war’ strategy of the armed underground. NGOs entered electoral politics hesitantly and with very few skills and resources for electoral struggle.

At this time, the mainframing of NGO work was seen as working from outside the centers of power for issue-based advocacy at national levels, a stance developed during the latter years of the dictatorship. This work was focused on ‘pressure politics’—

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..... demonstrations, strikes, well-publicized national conferences and conventions—to influence policy, methods that were shaped by conditions of authoritarianism.

While the organizing was done at the barrio level, NGOs saw this work as part of mobilization for national political goals. According to Rocamora, ‘for a long time, influencing local politics was seen as, at best, a secondary goal.’

As a result, between barrio organizing and national advocacies, there was very little NGO activity in intermediate level organizations. Even NGOs engaged in village level organizing in the provinces hardly interacted with political and economic activity at the level of towns and cities where they were located. Gradually, the pessimism that pervaded the progressive movement gave way to guarded optimism, with CSOs eventually exploring new openings for their involvement in various spheres of ‘formal’ political decision making. (Rocamora, 1994)

With the change in conditions after the fall of Marcos, it became necessary for CSOs to recalibrate their strategies. This changing stance and the subsequent creation of new avenues of engagement were facilitated by various factors such as a changing political economy of the Philippines (creating a larger middle class), the fall of important centers of global socialism, and the split in the biggest left movement, the NDF. It has been said that while the fall of Marcos created spaces for new political engagements, the NDF split gave many groups the freedom to explore these new arenas.

The new engagements included transitions from the ‘seizure of state power’ paradigm to a more reform-oriented stance, a shift which government and donors greatly supported and in part shaped. This stance was complemented with a greater interest in learning the language of policy, of the government and of the economy, which resulted in more nuanced positions, going beyond ‘opposing to proposing,’ and closer engagements with the state.

Many NGO-POs, however, are questioning the wisdom of working closely with government known for its corruption, patronage, violence, elitism and bureaucratic red tape—the very conditions that progressives are trying to overthrow—in an engagement that can be perceived as political sacrilege. On the other hand, the logic of engaging government, the institution that commands the most resources

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and decision-making power, has been considered by others as an important arena for intervention not to be missed. This re-orientation has been significantly influenced by global discourse, in the ‘decade of human development,’ which stresses the importance of participation and claiming spaces for intervention.

The bloodless ouster of President Ferdinand Marcos, in the renowned display of people power in 1986, has in some respect ushered civil society cum activist language and ethic into the ‘mainstream’ of socio-political discourse. This ethic and language (people power, people empowerment, participation, among others) have found their way into major legislation like the Local Government Code and even the Party List Law, significant national formations like the Social Reform Agenda and the National Anti-Poverty Commission, as well as important programs of foreign donors.

As seen here, the situation may be characterized as a convergence—of discourses, of forces, of interests. The strengthening and growth of civil society organizations, which include the gradual formation of POs and NGOs in communities in many parts of the archipelago, coincided with the opening up of pockets of intervention spaces at the local level as well as an influx of funds and support to facilitate the engagements.

Initial Map of Some Key Initiatives

Initially, it was feared that the new decentralized system would only strengthen and expand the powers of local elites, further trench the traditional local political system of patronage, and greatly impede any effort to democratize the local arena. The primary mood at the local level was that of ‘mutual suspicion, hostility and mistrust’ between LGUs and CSOs.

But the opening of spaces for intervention in communities brought about by the decentralization law made it harder for civil society organizations to ignore the local arena as a space for serious and significant intervention. CSO activities made use of various lanes and stages, with efforts at the national level down to the community level. Eventually, even local officials couldn’t disregard the important role of CSOs as a key player in local governance.

This shift can be gleaned early on, for instance from ‘governance’ oriented formations like the National Coordinating Council for Local

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cluding development NGOs, foundations, business and civic groups, the academe, among others. Among the groups that took part in the projects were CODE-NGO, PhilDHRRA, the Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP), the Evelio Javier Foundation, the Gerry Roxas Foundation, as well as the leagues of local governments.⁷

PhilDHRRA, a national network of NGOs in agrarian reform and rural development, played a major role in the early years of decentralization and became one of the key project holders of the Governance and Local Democracy Project of the USAID. In 1992, PhilDHRRA kicked off the Provincial Strategic Development Program (PSDP) as a response to the newly implemented Local Government Code. PSDP organized regional and provincial consultations on the LGC in order to gauge the acceptance of various civil society formations, starting in the provinces of Camarines Sur, Negros Oriental and South Cotabato. To sustain the gains of the PSDP, the program was expanded and continued as part of the GOLD Project's People Participation Support Component (PPSC).

The PPSC is the 'civil society component,' one of five major components of the GOLD Project. Covering nine provinces, two cities and 27 municipalities, the PPSC sought to 'catalyze a critical mass of NGOs, POs and the private sector groups to participate effectively in local governance.' (Lopez, 2000)

With activities in networking, information dissemination and capability building, the project became a major channel in raising CSO awareness regarding their need and right to participate in local governance, developing their capacity to participate, facilitating the creation of networks, as well as providing venues for these networks to develop engagement with their respective local government unit.

In 1997-1998, the campaign took on direct efforts to 'broaden [CSO] perspective and attitude towards government' and bring together CSOs and LGUs. This was seen as an important requirement to bring about meaningful participation via the NGO-PO-LGU interphase, since many organizations were still grappling with the idea of working with government. (Lopez, 2000)

Moreover, the GOLD-PPSC played a key role in building provincial, municipal, and even barangay linkups among the various NGOs and POs particularly in the cities of Naga and General Santos. Networking was a central mechanism for the project, as conduits for con-

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as close working relationship with the City Planning and Development Office and city councilors in identifying priorities and detailing management and operational plans. NCPC was involved in the Naga River Rehabilitation and Management Program, Solid Waste Management Program and the People’s Participation Program.

Similarly, one provincial network in Bulacan was chosen as main facilitator in all the barangay planning workshops of one municipality. In Cotabato, CSOs provided technical support to the LGU in assessing the status of local special bodies and their members’ performance.

Estrella and Colpotura (2002) summarize these various efforts in a map reproduced below.

Table 1

Key Arena of Intervention	Intervention strategies/Approaches
Participatory Dev’t Planning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Barangay and Municipal Development Plan ▪ Municipal Land Use Plans - CLUP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ← Local development plans ← BDP-PRA ← Municipal land use planning
Policy Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ← Participation in Local Special Bodies including local development councils ← Municipal Land Use Planning ← Pressure Politics ← Gender Advocacy ← Ballot Initiative (Naga Experience)
Local Finance/Budgeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ← Participatory budgeting ← Participatory resource mobilization—pledging sessions ← Technical Assistance for LGU Funds—fiscal spaces for raising revenue ← local enterprise development ← gender budget advocacy—maximizing GAD budgets
Local Justice Civil Society Capacity Building Government Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ← paralegal capacity building in local governance issues ← PO and NGO capacity building to participate/intervene in local special bodies ← exposing impact of LGU Borrowing ← participatory M&E—assessing local government performance and implementing of BDPs
Electoral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ← vying for elected office—civil society leaders run for office ← platform development/promotion of new politics by barangay and municipal/city electoral candidates ← Ballot initiative (Cabiao, NE)

Drawn from Estrella and Colpotura, 2002

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Still, the new openings like the LSBs proved difficult to resist, although most groups were there ‘to wait and see.’ Among the first groups to take part were national NGOs who did their job in ‘spreading the good word of participation.’ Using their networks as the main channel, they soon were able to elicit interest in local governance and engaging the state.

Engagement remained largely thematic and activities were limited to information and training activities on the new decentralized system. At this point, the local terrain was seen as simply another space to advocate sectoral concerns—of peasants, the urban poor, workers, etc.

For instance, one of the early ‘engagements’ was in fact resistance to Section 20 of the Code, coming from groups rooted in the struggle for agrarian-asset reform. Early on, the Code was perceived as a setback to gains in the armed resistance struggle, as it gave local governments—dominated by politicians who come from the landed elite classes—the power to classify land use.

In this regard, the first wave of engagements dealt mainly with the issues that came up with phasing in a new system. These engagements took on two tracks. The first one dealt with clarifying vague areas of the Code, especially those that were believed to overlap with previous legislation, such as the one mentioned earlier.

The other track attempted to identify important openings that a sector’s agenda could put to optimal use. This was translated into a guarded engagement that initially took the form of getting into local special bodies (LSBs). Such engagement required local POs and NGOs to establish networks to bolster their bid in the accreditation process and eventually entering the LSBs. For one thing, CSOs needed to negotiate their position in the burgeoning dynamic and establish their role as a new player to reckon with at the local arena, especially vis-à-vis the entrenched traditional system of local politics. At this stage, CSOs were constantly reminded of the fact that it takes more than just a piece of legislation for participation to take root.

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A GOLD Rapid Field Appraisal in 1996 revealed some notable insights regarding CSO involvement in local governance. Partly owing to a low level of awareness of the Code plus the lack of appropriate skills to maximize their representation, most NGOs felt that their participation in local governance was limited. While there were cases of successful LGU-NGO partnership and innovation, most NGOs believed that LGU recognition of NGO participation was largely token. More importantly, various bureaucratic and political factors hindered effective functioning of these bodies. The dissatisfaction with the LSBs was reflected in the noted decrease on NGOs-POs that applied and obtained accreditation in 1995, compared to 1992. (GOLD, 1996)

For CSOs coming from a sector-based thrust, engagement in special bodies like the LDC was further restricted, as they did not have skills for holistic and integrated planning that went beyond their sectors' concern. There is anecdotal evidence of the inability of NGOs-POs to create consensus with their co-representatives. Moreover, CSOs on the ground feared that their entry into bodies in local government may result in their co-optation and loss of autonomy, as well as in legitimizing local government action that they do not approve of.

Alongside

Gradually, there came a shift in orientation with respect to viewing LGUs and establishing partnerships with them. At the local level, there were more frequent, contacts between local officials and NGOs and POs. This accessibility made it easier to imagine and attempt some form of cooperation for an event or an activity, the success of which led to building confidence and establishing ties. Soriano lays out the discourse with respect to engaging government:

For people's organizations and NGOs the critical problem is framework. The successes enjoyed by POs and NGOs in their development efforts are precisely because of the failure of local governments. Corruption, patronage, and bureaucratic redtape, have blunted LGU efforts at development. Many NGOs and POs are thus questioning the wisdom of working closely with LGUs.

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At the same time, other NGOs and POs have argued that genuine development requires resources and political decisions. It is government, more than any other institution in society, that still commands the biggest resources and shapes political decision-making. Why wait for the long term “seizure of state power” when there are current opportunities confronting people’s organizations at the ground level. Besides, the building blocks for long-term visions are in successful efforts to transform power relations at the local level. (Soriano, 1992)

Not all efforts paid off. A lot of efforts to engage—whether or not enshrined in the Code—were met with resistance from local politicians. CSOs limited capacities rendered them vulnerable to maneuverings by local elites.

The experience of the Angeles City Women’s Coordinating Council (ACWCC)—a formation of various women’s organizations in Angeles City, Pampanga—illustrates this. The coalition was a conscious effort of 11 NGOs and 11 POs to create a body that would institutionalize and maximize Gender and Development (GAD) provisions as well as the earmarked five percent GAD budget—which amounted to around 15 million pesos at that time. This resulted in a series of planning workshops to identify the Angeles Gender program and set out the process by which this would be operationalized. The ACWCC’s efforts and legislative advocacy were successfully translated into legislation via the Angeles GAD ordinance, a pioneering effort in the country.

The 1998 elections that came between the plan, the ordinance and the implementation, significantly changed the thrust and the direction of GAD in Angeles, with the ‘changing of guards’ from a supportive and open mayor to a non-ally. This became a key turning point in momentum and direction. As a result, important provisions of the ordinance were amended, and the chairperson of the women’s committee was replaced by a male councilor allied with the new mayor. Moreover, the selection process of women representatives to the GAD council was maneuvered by the new administration. Today, the GAD Council is in place, with two ACWCC members, out of five women NGO representatives, continuing a proactive local struggle, despite the aforementioned setbacks, with support from the Coalition and some allies in the local government.

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At the national level, CSO networks, like the Local Governance Policy Forum (LGPF), and leagues of local officials found themselves working together in looking at possible amendments of the Code. There was also joint opposition to IRA cuts as well as moves to revert to a centralized government. In this regard, the formation of a national forum strengthened CSO voice and influence on policy.

CSOs used lessons from previous engagements and close encounters with local political dynamics to make subsequent engagements more critical, dynamic and meaningful. This time CSOs were enabled with a more nuanced attitude towards local officials, which proved valuable in reading the political terrain and identifying potential allies and champions within the local government structure.

Where the ‘political roadblocks’ were perceived too strong, CSOs managed to come up with innovative ways to get involved, coming up with non-Code mandated but Code-inspired, bodies—for fisheries, agrarian reform or agriculture—that have been able to harness community energy toward set goals. Practitioners on the ground report that LSBs and other ‘thematic based’ engagements have resulted in more significant interventions, in contrast to the Local Development Council which is perceived as unwieldy and rather powerless (purely recommendatory).

It should be noted, though, that there were a couple of LGUs that opened up to partnerships with CSOs—the most exemplary one being that of Naga City, Camarines Sur and the feisty Naga City People’s Council. Definitely, LGUs that encouraged and nurtured CSO participation are inspiring models of LGU-CSO partnerships.

Moreover, CSOs went through vital self-examination, a conscious assessment of not only the local political stumbling blocks but also their own shortcomings, and recalibrating their strategies and framing. The result, was a marked shift in the next phase from a sectoral approach towards a more integrated one. This is exemplified by the experience of the Barangay-Bayan Governance Consortium’s (popularly known as “BATMAN”) planning method of Barangay Development Planning through Participatory Resource Appraisal (BDP-PRA), which looks at the barangay, rather than a specific sector, as the locus of analysis and basis for program and policy direction.

The integrated approach was supplemented by an increased effort to learn the language of government and administration, as well

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as to improve the technical capacities of CSOs in terms of planning, project/program implementation, monitoring and assessment, research, budgeting, and resource mobilization. These strategies significantly improved the stance of CSO engagement with the local government. Many officials learned to appreciate the skills and potential inputs of CSOs to governance and consequently opened up their administration to more meaningful partnerships with CSOs.

Such has been the case in the municipality of Daraga in Albay, where the local NGO, Center for Advocacy and Participatory Governance, is playing an important role in Daraga’s development policy-making alongside the municipal government. One notable policy of Daraga is the *‘hating-kapatid’* approach to the local development fund—dividing funds equally among the 54 barangays—which has impinged on the patronage and politics in accessing funds from the municipal hall.

Inside

By investing more in other parallel strategies, such as participating in electoral politics, CSOs gradually changed the political terrain “from the inside.” This was primarily a response to non-meaningful or even confrontational engagements with the local government owing

to the presence of a non-friendly chief executive or local government as a whole. All local experiences identify the “openness” (*pagkabukas*) of the local government as the key factor for institutionalizing meaningful reform.

Of late, there has been a significant trend in CSO participation in local elections. For instance, the Barangay-Bayan Governance Consortium, made concrete attempts of translating its on-the-ground constituency to electoral votes and put in place progressive leaders of the barangay and municipal levels. This initiative was complemented

with participatory planning and budgeting tools to establish a new mode by which programs and projects were dispensed, veering away from purely patron-client relations.

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Entry into electoral strategies necessitated a broader ‘appreciation’ of local politics, especially in terms of understanding the motivations and interests of local politicians, the rules of the game of local politics, and the everyday appreciation of electoral politics by the vil-
lager. This appreciation, a notable shift from a mindset that used to refuse getting their hands soiled with ‘political dirty work,’ was done to facilitate more understanding of the new terrain they were entering and to locate progressives’ struggle within it, without alienating their grassroots constituencies who were part of the local political dynamic.

The barangay elections in 1997 had: a) the highest level of participation, with an average of 65 percent voter turnout compared to the previous average of 45 percent, and b) the highest number of candidacies filed, with an estimated one million candidates vying for barangay posts. Of these, approximately a thousand leaders from POs were elected, ‘a remarkable victory for progressives towards locating the place for elections and governance in the process of social transformation, democratization, and people’s empowerment in the communities.’⁸

It is important to note that there had been some experiments in electoral contests by progressive movements even before the Code. Yet, such electoral participation became an intensified strategy only in recent years.

The initial unease with electoral politics is definitely still a ground-hog issue, even as success in elections has provided CSOs with improved access to vital information, key decision-making, and resources to bolster their agenda in the locality. A lot of groups have raised the need for constant, conscious assessment especially with respect to identifying set minimums as they enter a terrain where the rules of the game are set by traditional political dynamics.

These new engagements need a whole new study to thresh out the issues and to cull important insights. For example, are reformers compromised because they need to play along the rules of the game set by traditional political dynamics? Or, as Patino puts it: Has new politics been diluted with traditional politics? Do we have to become traditional politicians to win elections and carry on with new politics only when we are in office? Do reformers in government actually perform better than their traditional counterparts?

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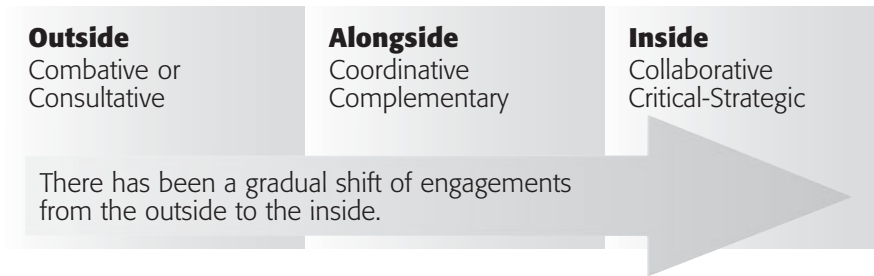
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Intervening in the Local

As illustrated above, there has been a marked shift in engagements from the *Outside* to working *Alongside* and eventually *Inside* local governments, making it necessary for civil society to take on multiple roles. In a sense, we can see a blurring of traditional boundaries, as expressed by Migdal, that demarcate where the state and where civil society lie. Moreover, it is interesting to note that the shift in engagements is in many respects a manifestation of an ongoing discourse among civil society actors. As they grapple with new openings provided by the Code (opportunities that reflect a thrust for greater state-civil society synergy), many groups have demonstrated a changing stance with respect to the state and developed an evolving definition of civil society, its role and its work. ‘Grassroots people’s organization and NGOs are in the midst of redefining and rearticulating the empowerment framework, where empowerment is not only seen as a long-term-vision-after-seizure-of-state-power, but also takes a contemporary and complementary form directed at transforming local power relations in the here and now.’ (Soriano, 1992)

While this typology—*Outside, Alongside, Inside*— may be useful in understanding the CSO experience, it is important to stress that these are not clear-cut. There are many instances where the phases cross-cut and converge. This typology can be made more meaningful if we incorporate a previous typology on levels of partnership between CSO and LGU outlined by UNDP and ANGOC:

- Levels of Partnership:** (from lowest to highest)
- Consultative Partnership:** information sharing and exchange
- Coordinative:** synchronization of separate initiatives to avoid duplication
- Complementary:** parallel initiatives with a common vision
- Collaborative:** common vision, objectives and programs
- Critical or strategic:** Long-term, high impact collaboration



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Seen from these lenses, outside engagements limit CSO participation at the margins of relevant programs and policies of the local government. These engagements are either confrontational or consultative in nature—primarily due to the cold treatment of one party by the other. The sharing of information may be done to comply with certain provisions, but as most LGUs still do not appreciate the role of CSOs (and vice-versa), involvement is more often than not limited or token.

Over time, engagement may shift to more meaningful partnerships with CSOs and LGUs working alongside each other, coordinating separate initiatives or even complementing each other’s initiatives towards one common vision. This requires levelling off of roles and interests as well as building confidence over time. The shift from working outside to working alongside is facilitated by more frequent face-to-face encounters between the various actors at the local level, where there is a likely chance of multiple relations between actors (they could be kin, neighbors or high school friends). At the community level, the perceived risks of attempting cooperation are lower because the other party is easily accessible, less intimidating, and can be made ‘accountable’ should they violate any agreements.⁹

Some CSO engagement may opt for initiatives that actually try to enter or work within government structures by actively supporting chosen leaders, taking important posts within the bureaucracy, or actually vying for local office. Together with long term engagements, this establishes a more collaborative and strategic partnership for both LGUs and CSOs as seen from experience in recent years. While ‘inside engagements’ have raised important questions on distinguishing the changing role of reformers in government and relations with POs-NGOs, entering this venue has given CSOs access to resources and decision-making where it matters.

It should be noted that the terms *Outside*, *Alongside*, and *Inside* do not only connote physical presence within or without the halls of power but, more importantly, attempt to capture the amount of influence CSOs may have on important decision-making and policies of the community. Since the framework of the Code puts forward a partnership between LGUs and CSOs as the main mode of participation, it became necessary for CSOs to work along these lines—in col-

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ENDNOTES

- 1 Whereas previously, local governments had to go through a maze of paperwork, just to get the signature of a national executive for the littlest detail, such as the purchase of parts for the repair of garbage trucks, the new system provides LGUs a freer hand and greater discretion to chart their development.
- 2 For further discussion please see Steven Rood's *Decentralization, Democracy and Development*, 2000.
- 3 The fact that the top post of the land was up for grabs again had undoubtedly been included in the political calculations of those who moved for the passage of the Code. According to Rood, "House Speaker Ramon Mitra appeared to believe that by shepherding the Code through the House of Representatives he would gain the support of local politicians in his bid to succeed President Aquino in 1992."
- 4 Both the Marcos era 1973 Constitution and the post-Marcos 1987 one had specific mandates for local autonomy
- 5 President Aquino consistently put the resources of her administration to institute meaningful decentralization as a bulwark against the reimposition of authoritarianism.
- 6 This is not to say that CSOs are homogenous. There are a lot of gradations in orientation, and CSOs come in different 'shapes and sizes' so to speak. This is not to discount though that during martial law the biggest and most influential block was the National Democratic Movement.
- 7 One GOLD Rapid Field Appraisals reveals that rather than NGOs and POs, there are more business and civic groups that are involved in the local special bodies, one aspect of participation that may have been influenced by the USAID frame.
- 8 For further discussion, see Patino, Has Traditional Politics Polluted New Politics? Or Alejo, [De]Scribing Elections
- 9 The other side of the coin may also be true— they are also less likely to violate agreements because they have relations to protect.

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