

Decentralization in the Philippines: An Overview

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Decentralization as a concept has two features: political and administrative. While political decentralization involves devolution of powers, administrative decentralization focuses on deconcentration of functions. Present trends seem to indicate the recognition of the regional level, not simply as an operational level for administrative decentralization, but as a separate level in Philippine local government.

Introduction

In most general terms, decentralization may be defined as a state or condition in a governmental system where there is dispersal of power or authority from the center. On the other hand, centralization is the condition where power and decision making are concentrated in the center.¹

There are several reasons why decentralization is adopted and applied as a tool of development administration. For one, it enables maximum participation of the people concerned in the decision making processes on issues that concern them directly. Decisions, aside from ensuring maximum citizen participation, are also more responsive to the needs of the people. Second, lower levels of government are encouraged, and trained, to be more self-reliant through decentralization. Third, it hastens the decision-making processes, doing away with traditional red tape of having to go all the way up to the central authorities for action or authority to perform appropriate actions, and then downwards. There is decentralization where decisions are made at the lower levels, with minimum participation (some prefer to use the term "interference") by the central authorities. Finally, decentralization decongests the central government of certain functions that could well be done at the lower levels.

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There are several modes by which the process of decentralization can be operationalized. These include: (1) devolution which essentially is the transfer of power for the performance of certain functions from the national or central authorities to the lower levels of governments, e.g., local governments; and (2) deconcentration which, essentially, is the process of delegating functions from the central government to lower levels or field (or regional) units. Other forms of decentralization have been identified by other authors. For instance, Rondinelli and Cheema² add "delegation to semi-autonomous or parastatal organizations" and "transfer of functions from government to nongovernment institutions" to the two major forms listed above. Others also include privatization in the list.

Two prevailing perceptions of decentralization must be differentiated. These are political decentralization, sometimes referred to as "devolution," and administrative decentralization, which some refer to as "deconcentration"³ In other words, the general concept of decentralization embraces both political decentralization (devolution of powers to local government units, the area approach), and administrative decentralization (deconcentration of functions from national line departments to their regional offices, the sectoral approach.) The following matrix will help conceptualize the broad idea of decentralization:

Decentralization	
Political decentralization	Administrative decentralization
Devolution of powers to local government units	Deconcentration of authority to regional units
Area approach	Sectoral approach

The administrative and political features of decentralization have been emphasized in many ways by various authors. One school of thought focuses on administrative decentralization focusing on transferring the planning and decision-making functions to the lower levels. For instance, the United Nations define it as "the transfer of authority on a geographic area by deconcentration (i.e., delegation) of authority to field units of the same department or level of government."⁴ Similarly, Rondinelli and Cheema define decentralization as the "the transfer of planning, decision-making, or administrative authority from the central government to its field organizations, local administrative units, semiautonomous and parastatal organizations, local governments, or nongovernmental organizations."⁵

The other school of thought focuses on the political aspect of decentralization emphasizing the devolution and local government aspect.

This is what others generally refer to as "local autonomy" that includes the decentralization of powers of the national government, e.g., taxation, to the local governments.

It will be within the general context described above that this paper will discuss the historical debate of decentralization in the Philippines.⁶

Political Decentralization

Sometimes referred to as the areal approach to decentralization, political decentralization focuses on the delegation of power and authority to local government units. It is this general approach to decentralization that is contemplated in the Constitution and various legal issuances or laws: the delegation of powers by the center to local government units. It is also within this context that the concept of autonomy is applied.

Local Autonomy

The concept of local autonomy has always been related to the general idea of decentralization. It should be emphasized, however, that as used in this paper, local autonomy is more specifically related to political decentralization than to administrative decentralization.⁷

Local autonomy is generally described as the ability of the local governments for self government — be it at the regional, provincial, city, municipal or barrio/barangay level. The following are the major criteria in determining local autonomy or self-government:

First, there should be a set of locally elected officials in the area, at least at the legislative level. In other words, the area of self government must elect at least a legislature that would be representative of the various geographic divisions, and if possible, sectors, in the area who would be responsible for promulgating laws relevant to the needs of the population.

Second, the area of autonomy or self government should have clearly defined areas of responsibility. For instance, the local unit could be specifically primarily responsible for the delivery of education and health services, and local infrastructure.

Third, the relationship between the national and the local levels should be clearly defined, and areas of primary responsibility clearly delineated. For instance, are local decisions considered more or less final, or are they subject to review? A distinction should be made between review and approval by the national government over the local level's decisions. Another example would pertain to the subject of budgets: would the local budget

be effective only upon approval by the national government, or are certain points subject for review/approval/supervision by the central government.

Finally, the area of self-government, or local autonomy, should be given some authority to generate local revenues through taxation. This would make the power of the area of autonomy more significant and meaningful.

History of Political Decentralization in the Philippines

The history of political decentralization in the Philippines may be divided into the following periods: (1) 1898 to 1902, under the first Philippine Republic and the Malolos Constitution; (2) 1902 to 1935 during the American regime; (3) 1935 to 1945 during the Philippine Commonwealth; (4) 1946 to 1972 during the Second Philippine Republic; (5) 1972 to 1986 during the Marcos regime; (6) 1986 to the present under President

Political Decentralization from 1898 to 1945. Efforts at political decentralization and local autonomy in the Philippines date back to first Philippine Republic that lasted from 1898 to 1902 with the reorganization, and Filipinization, by the central government of the country's provinces and municipalities. A basic criterion of local autonomy is the existence of a legislative body in the area: such legislative assemblies were organized at the municipal level. They were composed of delegates indirectly chosen by the people. The municipal captains, in turn, elected the officials that constituted the provincial assembly.⁸

Decentralization in the Malolos Constitution has been described as "the most ample decentralization" for local governments and for more popular and direct election of local officials.⁹ However, local governments were still subject to regulation based on several principles, including the "determination in their powers in matter of taxes, in order that the provincial and municipal taxation may never be antagonistic to the system of taxation of the State."¹⁰

With the arrival of the American colonialists, there emerged an opposite trend, this time it was towards centralization: all local governments were placed under military control primarily for control and security purposes, inspite of the rhetoric in favor of local autonomy.

During the Commonwealth, local governments were placed under the general supervision of the President. Specifically, Article VII, Section 11 provided that "The President shall. . . exercise general supervision over all local governments." This is in marked contrast to the preceding sentence which provided that the President shall exercise "control" over all the executive departments, bureaus or offices. According to Ocampo and

Panganiban¹¹ the use of the term "supervision" instead of "control" was a "compromise concept substituted for a stronger guarantee of autonomy sought by some constitutional convention delegates.

Political Decentralization: 1946-1972. Philippine political independence was granted by the Americans in 1946. However, the first local autonomy act was passed in 1959. It was Republic Act 2264 entitled "An Act Amending the Laws Governing Local Governments by Increasing their Autonomy and Reorganizing Provincial Governments." This Act vested in the city and municipal governments greater fiscal, planning and regulatory powers. For instance, it broadened the taxing powers of the cities and municipalities within the general framework of national tax laws. It likewise gave the cities and municipalities powers to adopt zoning and planning ordinances. It likewise granted the authority to provincial, city and municipal governments the authority to undertake and carry out any public works projects which the local government itself finances.

Republic Act 2370, entitled "An Act Granting Autonomy to the Barrios of the Philippines," more popularly known as the Barrio Charter Act was also passed in 1959 under the principal sponsorship of Senator Raul Manglapus. Specifically, it made the barrios quasi-municipal corporations vested with, among other things, taxing powers. Barrios were to be governed by an elective barrio council that included powers to enact barrio ordinances.

In 1967, Republic Act 5185, known as the "Decentralization Act of 1967" was enacted into law. It further increased the financial resources of the local governments broadening their decision-making latitude over fiscal, personnel and other substantive matters. The state's policy of political decentralization and autonomy was emphasized in order that local governments may be transformed into "effective instruments through which the people can, in a most genuine fashion, govern themselves and work out their own destinies." Indeed, political decentralization, in order to be effective, must enable the people to participate in the decision-making processes of the government, which is the logic of decentralization in the first place. RA 5185 loftily declared:

It is therefore, the purpose of this Act to grant local governments greater freedom and ampler means to respond to the needs of their people and promote 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.

As such, RA 5185 broadened the fiscal base of the local governments. For instance, provincial and city governments were allowed to retain some

amounts previously contributed to the national government. Appointments of provincial personnel, such as that of the provincial agriculturist were vested in the provincial governor. It also enumerated a number of "duties and powers of local chief executives not subject to direction or review by any national official." This included a number of administrative functions that were formerly subject to national approval.

Political Decentralization Under the Marcos Regime. Martial law was imposed in 1972. Like the experience during the American regime, political decentralization suffered a setback with the concentration of decision-making powers in the hands of Marcos. Marcos abolished congress and then went on to suspend national and local elections, arrogating unto himself the power to appoint local officials. Although elections for a national legislature were later held in 1978, and then local elections in 1980, these were never considered truly reflective of the people's will because of the prevailing conditions of dictatorship.

However, inspite of political centralization, the Marcos government, like the Americans half a century earlier, enunciated and enacted pro-decentralization policies and laws. For instance, among the declaration of policies in the 1973 Marcos Constitution was the promotion of local autonomy. Specifically, Article II, Section 10 provided: "The State shall guarantee and promote the autonomy of local government units, especially the barrio, to ensure their fullest development as self-reliant communities. Then, there was a specific article (Article XI) specifically on local governments. It identified the provinces, cities, municipalities and barrios as the political subdivisions of the Philippines. The document constitutionalized the taxing powers of local government units: "Each local government unit shall have the power to create its own sources of revenue and to levy taxes subject to limitations as may be provided by law."

Then came the promulgation of the Local Government Code by the Marcos dominated *Batasang Pambansa* (national legislature). It was passed in early February 1983 to give flesh to the 1973 Constitution's provisions on local government and autonomy. The Code reiterated the policy of the State to

guarantee and promote the autonomy of local government units to ensure their fullest development as self-reliant communities and make them effective partners in the pursuit of national development and progress.

As such, the Code manifested its bias for local autonomy. For instance, in cases of conflicting interpretations of the powers of the local government and the national government, the Code provided that "any power of a *barangay*, municipality, city or province shall be liberally construed in its favor. Any fair and reasonable doubt as to the existence of the power shall be interpreted in favor of the local government units concerned."

The Local Government Code likewise emphasized the corporate personality of local governments vested with accompanying corporate powers. The Code defined the relationship of the local governments with national ministries performing general developmental functions in the area including the Ministries of Education and Health. It provided for a relatively wide latitude of powers over local financial matters: "As a general rule, local governments shall be allowed as much authority and flexibility over the financial aspects of their operations which are consistent with such standards and guidelines as may be prescribed by competent authorities." The code standardized responsibilities, powers, and organization of the provinces, cities, municipalities and barangays.

However, one of the more significant provisions of the Code pertained to the relationship between the national government and the local government. It provided that the President would continue to exercise "general supervision over local governments to ensure that local affairs are administered according to law." General supervision included the power to "order an investigation of the conduct of local government officials" exercised through the Ministry of Local Government. It was through this general supervisory power that the central government continued to hold a tight rein over the local governments inspite of the autonomy provisions. Political decentralization was therefore operative within the confines of the prevailing authoritarian regime of Marcos. It should be remembered that included in the general supervisory function of the President was the power to appoint and replace local government officials.

Other political centralization tendencies of the Marcos government included the centralization of local police and fire protection services under a joint Philippine Constabulary/Integrated National Police structure. The central government continued to dominate local fiscal policy and administration. Although local governments were given more planning responsibilities, physical planning and regulatory functions have been recentralized in the Ministry of Human Settlements, particularly its regulatory commission, the HSRC.¹²

Thus, the gains of the generally pro-decentralization policies and laws were neutralized, sometimes even negated, by the authoritarian rule of Marcos that made a mockery of some of the basic principles of decentralization, namely people's participation in the selection of their own leaders, and accountability.

If anything, however, the authoritarian regime of Marcos can be credited for its efforts at *administrative* decentralization. This means that it emphasized the role of the regional units of the national line ministries to decongest the central government of many administrative functions.

(Administrative decentralization is discussed later.) Hence, decentralization under the Marcos government was subjected to contradicting yet coexisting tendencies: political centralization and administrative decentralization.

Political Decentralization Under the Aquino Government. The February 1986 political revolution marked the downfall of Marcos and the assumption of Corazon Aquino to the presidency of the Philippines. One of her first acts as president was the promulgation of the Freedom Constitution through Proclamation No. 3, that essentially contained many of the provisions of the 1973 Constitution, including the provision on local governments. However, the proclamation explicitly added the word "control" to the President's general supervisory functions over local governments. Specifically, Section 3 of Proclamation No. 3 provided: "The President shall have control of and exercise general supervision over all local governments." Consequently, Aquino, through her Minister of Local Governments, dismissed many local officials who did not pass the loyalty test and replaced them with "officers-in-charge" (OICs), many of whom were even worse and more incompetent than the officials they replaced. Such a move has given rise to numerous charges that the Aquino government is no different from the Marcos dictatorship, at least as far as political centralization tendencies were concerned.

A few months after her ascendancy to power, Aquino appointed a 48-person Constitutional Commission to draft a new constitution which was ratified in February 1987. Among the declaration of principles is Section 25 that declares that "the state shall ensure the autonomy of local governments." The first sections on the article on local government state:

The territorial political subdivisions of the Republic of the Philippines are the provinces, cities, municipalities, and barangays. There shall be autonomous regions in Muslim Mindanao and the Cordilleras as hereinafter provided.

The territorial and political subdivisions shall enjoy local autonomy.

Thus, the constitution identified the following as the areas of political decentralization in the Philippines: provinces, cities, municipalities and barangays. For the first time, however, the regional level of government (one between the provincial and the national) is recognized in the Constitution, by implication, as a political subdivision. However, only the autonomous regions in Muslim Mindanao and the Cordillera are cited.

As areas of autonomy, these political subdivisions are vested with powers to raise revenues in their area of operation, and entitled to a set of elective officials including and legislative body. Such provisions certainly add flesh to the spirit of autonomy, which some describe as a trend towards more "authentic local autonomy."

The concept of political decentralization can be distinguished from administrative decentralization only up to a certain point. Thus, the constitution also emphasized administrative decentralization, recognizing the role of the regional level, not only as a political subdivision as far as Muslim Mindanao and the Cordilleras are concerned, but also as levels of planning and implementation. The Constitution recognized that there must be a parallel movement of political and administrative decentralization if autonomy (some would even emphasize "authentic" autonomy) is to be meaningful.

Administrative Decentralization

Political decentralization focuses on the devolution of powers to specific local governmental units covering a specific area. This is the essence of autonomy. On the other hand, *administrative* decentralization focuses on the deconcentration of functions, and the delegation of appropriate authority from the national line ministries to the regional offices in order for them to be able to effectively carry out the functions decentralized, or deconcentrated, to them. Thus, administrative decentralization is more concerned with decentralization through sectors (e.g., health, education) than it is through specific geographical areas (e.g., specific local government units be it regional, provincial, city, municipal and barangay.) However, as suggested earlier, there is a necessary overlap in the operationalization of political and administrative decentralization.

Administrative Decentralization and Regionalization

Administrative decentralization as operationalized in the Philippines mostly includes the deconcentration of the national planning and administration functions to the regional level. This includes the division of the country into several regions, together with the organization of accompanying regional structures that would facilitate the decentralization of planning and administration at these levels. This is what many refer to as the general strategy of regionalization. It will be therefore within the general context of regionalization that this section will discuss administrative decentralization.

Administrative decentralization involves the organization of regional field units for the national ministries or departments that are, by nature, sector oriented. Thus, national departments such as the Department of Health, or Department of Education, have field or regional units located in various areas of the country as standardized by the government. The ultimate objective, of course, is to make them more responsive to the specific needs of the people in the area, hasten the decision-making processes in the department in relation to the field, and deconcentrate functions from the national government to the regional level.

The former Presidential Commission on Reorganization emphasized administrative decentralization in operationalizing regionalization. According to the PCR, "regionalization involves the development from major organizational units, such as ministries, of smaller field units with distinct and standard geographical coverages, primarily for administrative and planning purposes." They emphasized that it is "basically an administrative process intended to provide greater uniformity in the division of the country into standard areas with standard geographical boundaries, known as regions, with standard regional centers."¹³

History of Administrative Decentralization and Regionalization

Government efforts at administrative decentralization and regionalization can be divided into two major periods: before and after the promulgation of the Integrated Reorganization Plan (IRP) in 1972.

Administrative Decentralization Before the IRP. Government efforts to undertake regional development in the Philippines date back to 1950 when then President Elpidio Quirino signed Executive Order 367 establishing the National Planning Commission vested with regional planning functions, among other things. Specifically, the Commission was authorized to "prepare general plans for regional areas for the purpose of integrating and coordinating the various plans for the different urban areas within each region." Although plans for the physical development of certain urban areas have been prepared for the Commission, no general plans have been actually accomplished for the regional areas.

Efforts at administrative decentralization continued with the Government Survey and Reorganization Commission (GSRC). The GSRC was created in 1954 under RA 997 to conduct a thorough study of the executive branch of the government and to formulate recommendations to promote economy, efficiency and effectiveness of government. Among the 77 reorganization plans submitted by the GSRC was the Reorganization Plan 53-A on field operations. Approved by Congress in 1956, Plan 53-A, among other things, introduced the concept of dividing the country into several regions in order to provide greater uniformity and standardization in the decentralization of government functions. It recommended the division of the country into eight regions. These divisions, and the designated regional centers, were the following: Region I (Dagupan City); Region II (Tuguegarao, Cagayan); Region III (Manila); Region IV (Naga City); Region V (Iloilo City); Region VI (Cebu City); Region VII (Zamboanga City); and Region VIII (Davao City). However, the regional areas advocated by the GSRC were not strictly adhered to by the different agencies in their implementation of Plan 53-A:

More definite attempts at administrative decentralization and regional planning and development were made with the creation of development authorities and regional planning boards. Examples of such have been the Mindanao Development Authority and the Central Luzon Cagayan Valley Authority (both organized in 1961); the Hundred Islands Conservation and Development Authority (1963); the Panay Development Authority; the San Juanico Straits Tourist Development Authority; the Mountain Provinces Development Authority (all in 1964); the Mindoro Development Board, the Bicol Development Company, and the Catanduanes Development Authority (1965), and in 1966, the Laguna Lake Development Authority.

Administrative Decentralization Under the IRP. With the declaration of martial law, the Integrated Reorganization Plan (IRP) which was then pending before Congress, was decreed into law on September 21, 1972. Among the significant provisions of the IRP was the provision dividing the country into eleven (11) (later increased to twelve) regions, with each having a regional center. The following were designated as the regional centers under the IRP: Region I — San Fernando La Union; Region II — Tuguegarao, Cagayan; Region III — San Fernando, Pampanga; Region IV — Greater Manila Area; Region V — Legaspi City; Region VI — Iloilo City; Region VII — Cebu City; Region VIII — Tacloban City; Region IX — Zamboanga City; Region X — Cagayan de Oro City; Region XI — Davao City; and Region XII — Cotabato City. The Inter-Agency Committee that made the proposal tried to define relative homogenous areas, capable of stimulating and sustaining efforts, not only on the basis of administrative consideration, but also with respect to geographic, economic and cultural factors.

Regional Structures for Administrative Decentralization

The Integrated Reorganization Plan recommended that national line departments were to have regional offices that were to be "organized on a department-wide basis, with staff bureaus advising and assisting the office of the secretary on matters pertaining to their respective areas of specialization including the formulation of relevant plans, programs, and operating standards and methods."¹⁴ The IRP provided that this general pattern of administrative decentralization and regionalization need not be adopted by all departments. This was true for departments whose functions were difficult to integrate at a single regional offices. Hence, the IRP prescribed what may be referred to as either the "department model" or "bureau model" or administrative decentralization.¹⁵

The Department Model of Administrative Decentralization. The department model of decentralization is followed by agencies with "mini" department offices at the regional level. This model is similar to the integrated field service model which is used when a department or agency performs

primarily one major function. An example would be the Department of Education and Culture and Sports that provides primarily educational services. The Department of Health performs closely related functions, from medical services, environmental sanitation and other closely related functions, which can be integrated at a single regional office.

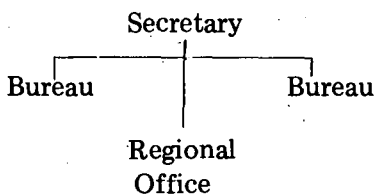
In an integrated setup, a regional office is functionally organized in a parallel fashion to the central office. The regional director is the department secretary's counterpart in the region, and the major units of the department — such as the bureaus — have their corresponding counterparts in the divisions of the regional office. A direct line of authority exists between the agency head (the department secretary) and the regional director. In line with the general spirit of decentralization primarily through deconcentration, the department head also delegates both substantive and administrative authority to the regional director in order to enable him to effectively implement agency programs in the region or field. The bureaus of the central office perform staff functions, at the same time providing technical advice to their regional counterparts, the divisions.

The Bureau Model of Administrative Decentralization. The regional offices, under the bureau model, are replicas of the bureaus rather than the department as a whole. This model most appropriate for departments performing a variety of functions, such as the Department of Natural Resources with four bureaus, each bureau taking charge of a specific function: mines regulation, fisheries, aquatic resources, and lands. All their varied functions are difficult to coordinate and integrate under a single regional office; hence they follow the bureau model of regionalization.

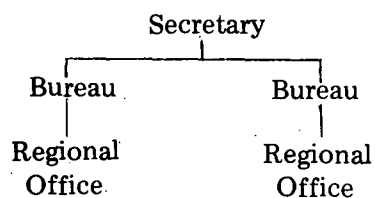
The bureau model is somewhat similar to the functional approach to administrative decentralization which involves strong and direct line of authority between major units or bureaus of the central office and the regional offices. The functional specialists at the center provide advice to their regional counterparts. The regional head becomes more of a coordinator, mediator, conciliator, or convenor and less a director.

The following would represent the basic charts of the department and the bureau models of administrative decentralization:

DEPARTMENT MODEL



BUREAU MODEL



To a certain extent, the department model of regionalization may be considered as an advance over the bureau model because in the case of the former, a single regional director heads a microcosm of his department at the regional level. As such, he is able to provide a unified direction over the different functions embodied in his office, a task that must be done at the central office for those that follow the bureau model of administrative decentralization. However, it must be reiterated that in the implementation of administrative decentralization, determining whether they follow the department or bureau model of regionalization depends upon the extent of homogeneity of interrelatedness among the sectoral functions performed by the department.

However, the IRP recognized that notwithstanding the general pattern of administrative decentralization, there were departments that could not follow the general pattern of administrative decentralization through the bureau or department model. This is particularly true for two departments that owing to their unique mission, either needed a more unique pattern of regionalization (like the Department of Defense) or obviously do not need an extensive network of regionalization (like the Department of Foreign Affairs).

In performing their tasks at the regional level, the IRP saw to it that certain administrative decisions and processes that did not have to be done at the central office could be delegated — or deconcentrated — to the lower levels. This included both substantive and administrative matters, i.e., those pertaining to the appointments of certain officials and employees of the regional office, or to the signing of contracts.

In order to further operationalize the delegation of authority to the regional levels, Marcos issued Letters of Instructions 447 (August 12, 1976), 448 (August 18, 1976), 895 (July 25, 1979) strengthening the administrative capacity of the regional offices by ordering the delegation of substantive and administrative authority to the regional offices. These various letters of instructions increased the authority of the regional directors which included, among other things the authority to sign contracts up to a certain level (up to P1 million), and hire personnel.

However, studies conducted at the University of the Philippines revealed disparity in the application of the delegated authority to the regional level. As far as substantive authority was concerned, a number of regional offices could approve purchases and sign contracts up to the maximum level of P1 million. But there were also some regional offices that still had to forward every purchase to Manila for approval. The same was true for administrative authority: some regional offices claimed that they could appoint up to the division chief level, while others claimed that

even the appointments of janitors had to be forwarded to Manila. The disparity in delegation of authority to the regional level, inspite of central government letters of instructions, continue to pose a problem for administrative decentralization. For indeed, how can the regional offices be expected to perform tasks assigned to them in a hasty and responsive manner if their central offices continued to be jealous of their authority and resisted delegating authority to the region? This problem continues to confront a number of regional offices, 1986 political revolution notwithstanding.

The Regional Development Council

A second major area significant to the general topic of administrative decentralization concerns the efforts to decentralize the planning process. This is the specifically the role of the Regional Development Councils as provided for in the IRP. The 1986 Constitution likewise reiterated the crucial role of the RDCs. Section 14 of the article on local government states:

The President shall provide for regional development councils or other similar bodies composed of local government officials, regional heads of departments and other government offices, and representatives from non-governmental organizations within the regions *for purposes of administrative decentralization* to strengthen the autonomy of the units therein and to accelerate the economic and social growth and development of the units in the region.

Indeed, as early as 1972 upon the promulgation of the IRP, the policy of the state to promote the socio-economic development of the regions by regional development and planning in the context of national and local planning was emphasized. It was in pursuance of this policy that the Regional Development Councils (RDC) and Regional Development Authorities (RDA) were to be created. However, only the RDCs were activated. Activation of the RDAs was postponed because there was a general feeling that such bodies did not have the administrative capability for operating as such. Additionally, and more importantly, the idea of regional planning has not yet institutionalized.

The RDC was described as the "formal administrative vehicle for regional planning and development". As an extension of the NEDA and as the planning body of the region, the RDC was responsible for the undertaking a "comprehensive and detailed survey of the resources and potentialities of the region" and for preparing, on the basis of such a survey "long-range and annual plans within the guidelines set by the NEDA."

The RDCs as operationalized have not yet fully evolved into the regional planning mechanisms that they were envisioned to be. At best, the RDCs performed, and continue to perform largely coordinative functions

since they are composed of all heads of local governments and all heads of national departments and agencies in the area. The RDC head has no line authority over its members, hence it is not taken seriously by some members. Some have dismissed them simply as talking forums. However, it should be emphasized that the RDC should not be taken lightly on account of these seeming weaknesses. It is in the RDCs that we can find the germ for eventual regional governments, definite political local government units recognized as intervening layers between the national and the provincial levels. Efforts should therefore be directed towards strengthening their role not only as coordinative bodies, but as serious planning, and more importantly, implementing bodies, complete with a regional executive and regional legislative assemblies. The new Constitution's provision on the RDCs augurs well for this development.

Administrative Decentralization: Other Approaches

Some sectors have observed that some regions as presently constituted are not suitable areas for planning, hence, sub-regional planning bodies were created for specific areas within the region. The sub-regional planning areas vary ranging from a river basin, an island, a province, to a grouping of municipalities within a province, applying the concept of Integrated Area Development (IAD) approach.

The 1986 constitution recognized the wisdom of sub-regional planning as an approach to administrative decentralization.¹⁵ Specifically, Section 13 of the article on local governments provides:

Local government units may group themselves, consolidate or coordinate their efforts, services, resources for purposes commonly beneficial to them in accordance with law.

Pursuant to the constitutional provision cited above, the following may be considered as methods by which local government units may come together and group themselves to achieve a common purpose. Planners have labelled this approach as the Integrated Area Development (IAD) approach, or Municipal Development Approach. In this approach, the basis of jurisdictional planning scheme was made possible through the grouping of different geographically contiguous and adjacent municipalities in order to facilitate the sharing, strengthening, and coordinating of plans, programs, and projects in the area. In Iloilo Province, for instance, the municipalities of Pavia, Legaes, Sta. Barbara, New Lucena, and Zarraga have agreed to initiate doing planning for the areas under their jurisdiction. Likewise, the adjacent municipalities of Camaligan, Canaman, Cainza, and Milaor to Naga City in Camarines Sur have also followed this approach.

Other approaches to subregional planning have also been tried in the Philippines in the recent past, still operating within the general spirit of

administrative decentralization and planning for a specific geographic area, such as:

The River Basin Approach. This approach takes cognizance of the presence of a major natural resource — water in the planning and development activities of certain areas. Within the Bicol Region, for example, is the Bicol River Basin covering two out of the six provinces within the region. Following the River Basin Approach, the Bicol River Basin Development Program (BRBDP) was established to plan and implement programs and projects in the two provinces under its jurisdiction. Other river basin IADs include the Leyte Sub-a River Basin and the Agusan River Basin Development Program.

Island Development Approach. This approach recognizes the archipelagic nature of the country as well as the consequent problems of transportation facilities and communication services. The islands in the central part of the Philippines have been considered as separate planning areas. Integrated Development Programs have been established for three islands: namely, Mindoro, Palawan, and Samar. The Samar Integrated Rural Development Project (SIRD), for example, is directed towards alleviating the island from inadequate linkages in agricultural services and infrastructure facilities. The overriding objective of this project is to promote and sustain the balanced development of the island-socially, economically, and physically

Provincial Development Approach. This approach takes into consideration the geographic territorial jurisdiction of the province as the main planning area for development programs and projects. One major government project, the Provincial Development Assistance Project, has focused on the province as the planning area. Many of the provinces in the country have been included in the PDAP.

Thus far, the regional development efforts at integrated area development approaches as applied in the Philippines during the past years were geared towards the rural sector. However in applying these approaches, many problems have been encountered and attempts have been made to remedy them with varying degrees of success and failure.

These problems which may also be shared by the RDCs include: (1) the issue of coordinating the multifarious activities that cut across all governmental sectors and agencies in the geographically delimited area; (2) the scarcity of resources — both capital and human; (3) the absence of strong grassroots organization; (4) the need of evolving an appropriate politico/administrative structure for the effective planning, monitoring, and implementing integrated area development programs and projects.

Concluding Remarks

This paper presented a background of the decentralization approaches in the Philippines. While there are many variations of decentralization, this paper focused on political decentralization and administrative decentralization. Philippine experience with political decentralization dates back all the way to the beginning of the century, coinciding with the developments towards autonomy of the local governments. There seems to be an emerging trend towards the eventual recognition of the regional level as a distinct and separate level of local government, and not simply as a level for the operationalization of administrative decentralization.

Administrative decentralization is a newer phenomenon, coinciding with the regionalization efforts of the Philippine government in the 1950s. However, a watershed in the history of administrative decentralization was the promulgation of the Integrated Reorganization Plan in 1972 that standardized the regional structures for administrative purposes. This was operationalized primarily through the department and bureau models of regionalization. The crucial role of the regional development councils in the decentralization of planning and administration should likewise be recognized. The value of sub-regional planning efforts should be appreciated in the general effort to attain effective administrative decentralization.

Endnotes

¹Raul P. de Guzman and Alex Brillantes, Jr., "Issues and Problems in Development Administration in the Philippines: Focus on Regionalization," paper presented at the Fifth Annual National Conference of the Philippine Political Science Association, Quezon City, October 1978.

²Dennis A. Rondinelli and G. Shabbir Cheema, "Implementing Decentralization Policies," *Decentralization and Development* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1983), pp. 18-25.

³Presidential Commission on Reorganization, *Organizing Government for Effective Development Administration* (Manila: PCR, 1984), p. 31.

⁴United Nations Technical Assistance Program, 1962, p. 208.

⁵Rondinelli and Cheema, *op. cit.*

⁶It should be emphasized that the implementation of decentralization – specifically political decentralization or autonomy – need not always be initiated by central authorities. There are, in fact, historical precedents that demonstrate otherwise. The experience of the Muslims in Southern Philippines, and the Cordillerans in Northern Philippines are best examples of locally initiated movements for autonomy. Other examples cited are the barangays and locally initiated vigilante movements such as the *Alsa Masa*, although the latter is still a debatable one.

⁷The discussion of the concept of autonomy is based on various lectures of Dr. Paul P. de Guzman, Chancellor of the University of the Philippines at Los Banos.

⁸Jose P. Laurel, *Local Government in the Philippine Islands* (Manila: La Pilarica Press, 1926), pp. 60-61. See also Romeo B. Ocampo and Elena Panganiban, "The Philippines," in Chung-Si Ahn, ed., *The Local Political System in Asia* (Seoul: Seoul National University Press, 1987), p. 90.

⁹*Malolos Constitution*, Title XI, Article II, Para. 5.

¹⁰Ocampo and Panganiban, *op. cit.*

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²Presidential Commission on Reorganization, *op. cit.*

¹³Integrated Reorganization Plan of 1972, p. 53.

¹⁴See Guzman, Ocampo, Mariano and Brillantes, "The Political/Administrative Aspects of Regionalization and Development in the Philippines: Issues, Problems and Prospects," *Philippine Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. 21, Nos. 3-4 (July-October 1977), pp. 354-358.

¹⁵Decentralization was also identified as one of the five guiding principles of the Presidential Commission on Government Reorganization (PCGR). See "Principles and Policy Proposals," *Provisional Report of the Presidential Commission on Government Reorganization*, June 11, 1986.