

### Program 5 - Building the Capacity of Nations

Countries within the region are working to devolve political and economic power to involve more people in the development process.

Local government authorities in the Philippines are increasingly working with Non Government Organisations and the private sector to invigorate local communities.

In Indonesia, the development of civil society has become central to democratisation.

These experiences suggest that national governments need to shift their focus from political and economic control to capacity building at the local level.

#### NEWSCAST:

I sign the proclamation no. 1081 placing the entire Philippines under martial law.

#### JOHN WESTLAND:

Hello, I'm John Westland and welcome to Radio Australia's series: SHARING POWER ...

Today in A Share Of The Action, how people in developing countries like the Philippines are working to create systems of government to involve more people in the development process.

#### NEWS REPORT:

In 1986 hundreds of thousands of Filipinos from different social classes and various political persuasions marched arm in arm to put an end to the Marcos regime. EDSA became the site and seat of democratic power.

#### JOHN WESTLAND:

When People Power came to EDSA, one of Manila's main avenues, and brought down the authoritarian regime of President Marcos, the country had a highly centralised system of government.

#### PROFESSOR ALEX BRILLANTES:

Let me give you an example of how centralised our system of government was before. If you're familiar with the tricycles, these are the pedicabs. In Thailand they call them the tuk tuks, you know those small pedicabs out there. Before the local government code, do you know that it was the national government that had to register these simple tricycles?

JOHN WESTLAND:

Professor Alex Brillantes from the National College of Public Administration at the University of the Philippines, also one of the architects of the 1991 Local Government Code; legislation that devolved more power and responsibility to local government.

And though politicians anywhere, don't readily give up power, power sharing in the Philippines has had some supporters in the National Parliament like Senator Aquillino Pimentel Junior.

SENATOR AQUILLINO PIMENTEL JUNIOR:

We have had a very highly centralised government since the turn of the century when the Americans came and instituted civil government in this country in 1902. And even as we had already redeemed or recovered our independence from the Americans in 1946 the central government followed the same pattern of a very highly centralised system of governance. And so we have the situation in the country where the countryside's development was really stunted and selective, depended upon the good graces of the central government in Manila. And that's the reason why we thought that it is best to devolve certain central government powers to the local government units.

PROFESSOR ALEX BRILLANTES:

It transferred the responsibility for the delivery of basic services to our local governments. Health, agriculture, infrastructure, social services, well parts of infrastructure really, parts of environment were transferred to the local governments. Before that was the responsibility of the national government, now it became theirs.

SENATOR PIMENTEL:

Of course there was much resistance from the secretaries of the departments concerned and also from the bureaucrats who would be affected by the devolution of these powers. And even today there are bits of central government powers that are being shared by local governments like environment for example and matters of police because although the central government is a little bit ambivalent on the matter of returning the police to local government units, actually by virtue of a law that I sponsored civilianising the department of the police, removing it from the control of the armed forces, the local government officials now have a share of the power to appoint the chiefs of police in their localities.

JOHN WESTLAND:

Notwithstanding some pockets of resistance, ask Senator Pimentel for a report card on how the Local Government Code has worked on the ground and he'll provide you with any number of Filipino 'success stories'.

SENATOR PIMENTEL:

In the city of Maraquina, for example, which is a suburb actually of Manila, you will see the city run so efficiently. And well, you know sidewalks are paved and clean and there's order in the city. The markets look like supermarkets and definitely there is a big change, not only in the appearance of Maraquina as a local government unit, but as a well-run corporate city I might add. And there's a province in the Visayas called Negros Oriental where the Governor was a doctor of medicine and he saw that the devolution of powers of health could enable him to establish hospitals staffed with doctors and nurses in far flung areas which was not possible before the advent of the Local Government Code.

JOHN WESTLAND:

Professor Alex Brillantes also regularly gets out of Manila to find out how people at the local level are managing responsibility for local governments.

PROFESSOR ALEX BRILLANTES:

Part of what we did when I was at the Local Government Academy and we continue today is to search for what you guys and everybody calls good practices, best practices. How have local governments been using their powers under a regime of autonomy? And we recognise them in a national award ceremony. Before the Local Government Code was enacted one of the major problems was really financing projects. We have a local government in Victorias. In fact I was with the governor yesterday in Cebu and we talked about this program. What this local government did was it found out that the people needed public housing. Obviously local government doesn't have money, it never has enough money, so they decided to float bonds. They floated bonds and they were able to construct public housing for the people in the municipality with minimal financial support from the local government. I know this is true in two parts or three parts of the country, wherein the public market burnt down, they were able to repair the public market this time not by using public funds, but they went in through what's called a BOT, Build Operate Transfer. So now you have a public market in several areas in a rich city in here in Manila and a very poor municipality up north, and a poor municipality in Mindanao that have been able to reconstruct a burned down public market through a Build Operate Transfer. Where before governance was simply government, now it's not only government but it's government plus participation of the people, participation of business and participation of civil society.

JOHN WESTLAND:

While Professor Brillantes is enthusiastic about what can be achieved when local government is given responsibility for finding solutions to local problems, do the politicians and bureaucrats in Manila still need persuading about the benefits of devolving political and economic power away from the Centre?

PROFESSOR ALEX BRILLANTES:

That's an excellent question surely because the past 10 years we have focussed on what we call capacity building, capability building on local governments assuming quite presumptuously that many of them do not have the capacities which I think is wrong. And we offered training programs, we offered all kinds of study tours etc., with the ultimate objective of reforming if you made their mindset. You know before that over the past 10 years we forgot to focus our capacity building, part of the shifting efforts at our national government agencies. Because of that oversight I would say many national government agencies simply chose to stand back and watch devolution fail or succeed at the level of local government. Let's see if you can do it was the attitude, or second, they simply didn't know what to do under a devolved setup. Should they be providing technical assistance, should they be going to the field and doing actual work in the paradigm of inventing government? Should we continue rowing but not steering? These are some of the things that I think we should have done, so in response to your question yes, there has been some resistance on the part of some national government agencies but it is encouraging to note that after the past ten years, one of the things that we should be doing right now will be to redefine the functions of national government agencies in terms of providing technical assistance, in terms of policy setting, and in terms of training perhaps.

JOHN WESTLAND:

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ANDI MALLARANGENG:

The central government now has less function, less power and less money, that means, also, the central government bureaucracy should be smaller and the standing of the central government should also be limited, be cut, significantly.

JOHN WESTLAND:

Andi Mallarangeng is an academic commentator who takes part in an Indonesian radio program that promotes democratisation through devolution of power.

Unlike the Philippines that's had over a decade to implement its post-Marcos decentralisation program, Indonesians have had little experience of power sharing. It wasn't until two years after the fall of the Suharto government that regional autonomy laws were implemented.

In the mid 1990's Elizabeth Collins, Director of the Southeast Asian Studies Program at Ohio University, returned to Indonesia after a 20-year absence to see how villagers in the forests of lowland Sumatra had fared under Suharto's New Order government.

ELIZABETH COLLINS:

My very first impression was that there'd been tremendous development during the early years of the 'New Order'. But as I conducted research towards the mid part of the 1990s I became aware of growing conflicts in the lowland forests of south Sumatra, an area where there were ancient villages along the rivers, rather remote from the major roads but where people had a sustainable, in fact, rather prosperous livelihood growing rubber under the jungle canopy, raising animals and fishing in the rivers. They were able to send their children to universities.

JOHN WESTLAND:

It was in timber plantations in the lowlands of South Sumatra that fires broke out in 1997, sending a thick plume of unwanted smoke to neighbouring countries. As the villagers' livelihoods became increasingly jeopardised, they began to clash with the corporations that had been granted concessions to take over the land.

ELIZABETH COLLINS:

In 1998, the problems that had been simmering below the surface of the 'New Order', began to explode. What had happened was that in the last decade of the 'New Order' as the corruption increased and the cronyism of Suharto, enormous areas of the lowland forest were given in concessions to corporations that had multinational funding from places like the IMF and the Asian Development Bank, but that were controlled by cronies of Suharto, one working in paper and pulp production and industrial timber, the other in industrial shrimp farming.

JOHN WESTLAND:

Now in a democratic system of government, the first port of call for disgruntled voters would be their local government officials and beyond that the local member of parliament. So where did the Sumatran villagers go for help?

ELIZABETH COLLINS:

What they did in this situation is they began to realise that their livelihood was at stake, they wrote letters, they wrote letters to the local government officials, they wrote letters to the governor, to the Bupati, all the way up to the President of Indonesia pleading for help, we're poor, we're stupid but we understand that this land is our, it came from our ancestors and now we're being told that it belongs to this corporation, they're cutting down our trees, help us please. However local officials, who were to certify what was unproductive land could easily be bribed and headmen were intimidated. I've talked to headmen who said they had no choice, they were never consulted. So that the chain of command from Suharto through the government was to please their superiors, not to respond to the needs of villages. And what happened was that at some point the intimidation and the threats to villagers that they were anti-development, that they were communist were frightening

enough or people were arrested, that they sought through the children they'd sent to university they learned about the NGOs. In particular, the two most important are the Legal Aid Society known as L.B.H, and the environmental organisation known as W.A.L.H.I. And they went to these organisations which originally worked together, they're now separate, with their case, and in at least three cases I know of, land was returned to the villagers, either by the Ministry of Forestry or through a negotiation organised by the governor. There are 195 cases according to the Legal Aid Society, 135 according to the governor, so the number of cases that have been settled is still very, very small.

JOHN WESTLAND:

So will the regional autonomy laws that give local district officials more powers and responsibilities make them any more accountable to people at the village level?

ELIZABETH COLLINS:

Local government officials in Indonesia are not popularly elected; they're elected by a local legislature. And so the governor or the Bupati who have the real power in this case they need funding because a tremendous amount of corruption is involved in these elections, paying off of legislators. And so the focus has shifted from appeasing the people to repressing the conflict through the use of police for people who disrupt law and order. The governor's strategy against the NGOs that have supported the villagers has been that when they do radio programs to air the problem and to make people in the cities understand what's going on in the villages. He calls in at the end of the program and of course it's easy for him to arrange to be the last speaker and he says these NGOs they only collect information, they don't actually do anything to solve the problem, I'm the one who can do something. But he's less and less involved in really resolving the disputes and it's a more sophisticated kind of repression of the conflicts right now. So no, it's not going to solve the problem, the local autonomy legislation, but it will bring the conflicts and the issues down to a local level where you're going to see different patterns emerge in different places depending on corporate power, depending on traditional allegiances that a governor or a particular political figure can draw on. It will be a confusing picture for some time to come.

JOHN WESTLAND:

Clearly - if local officials are to be made more accountable there needs to be electoral reform so that they are elected by the people and not, as at present, by local legislators.

In the Philippines people have extracted greater accountability from their elected officials by posting checklists at town halls alongside official promises and demanding they report back to public meetings. However, devolving power to minority communities like the Muslims in Southern Mindanao or the ethnic minorities in the Cordillera Mountain provinces in the North of the country has proven far more difficult.

Nathan Quimpo, a Lecturer at the University of the Philippines, has written on conflict resolution and is doing his PHD at the Australian National University.

NATHAN QUIMPO:

The cultural formation of the nation in the Philippines has been so much dictated by the so-called Christian ethnic that there has been this feeling among Muslims and also people in Cordillera and other ethnic groups that they don't belong. For long, long periods of time there were no Muslims in the Supreme Court, no Muslims in the Cabinet, no Muslims in the top ranks of the armed forces of the Philippines. And at the moment in the Upper House of Congress there's not a single Muslim senator. OK and then for as long as you have this feeling they don't belong to this Christian ethnic then there will always be that feeling either that OK, then we will set up our own nation with a separate government or the alternative will be to really assert and OK, we are a nation, you should recognise us as a nation and that the Philippines should recognise that the Philippines is in fact multinational, multiethnic, multicultural. I'm hopeful that it will move towards that because for as long as these ethnocentric tendencies remain you'll still be encountering all these tensions and armed conflict.

PRESIDENT GLORIA ARROYO:

To murder and even behead a helpless person is as ruthless as it is cowardly. The reported murder of Mrs Savero only strengthens our resolve to decimate once and for all this cold blooded bandit group.

JOHN WESTLAND:

While most Filipinos welcome American military assistance to deal with the extremist separatist rebels in the Abu Sayyaf many would like to see a political solution end secessionist tendencies amongst Muslims in the South.

It's now over a decade since Manila began sharing more power with local government and Senator Pimentel has come to the conclusion that a system of government modelled more along federalist lines would give regional communities more control over their lives.

SENATOR PIMENTEL:

In devolution, as is experienced here in our country, more powers and more money have been devolved to local government units, but up to a point, meaning to say central government laws in many areas would still govern the lives and the properties and the liberties of the people living in the various communities. Whereas under a federal system more or less it's the federal state that determines what kind of laws would apply in matters of development for example or even matters of police. We had one Mindanao-wide seminar already and we're scheduling another one in Cebu pushing for the eventual adoption of a federal system, including amending the constitution for that

purpose. And I'm convinced that we will end the secessionist tendencies of the Muslims in Southern and Central Mindanao.

JOHN WESTLAND:

Senator Aquillino Pimentel Junior.

Next week...we'll look at calls for constitutional change across the region in ' Founding Charters '.

Sharing Power is produced by Sue Slamen with technical production by Ryan Egan. Academic consultant is Dr Richard Chauvel from Victoria University in Melbourne.

I'm John Westland, hope you can join me next week.

