Popular Politics of Representation: New Lessons from the Pioneering Projects in Indonesia, Kerala, and the Philippines

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Although it is true that the world-renowned postcolonial attempts at popular representation in Indonesia, the Indian state of Kerala, and the Philippines suffered from the subordination of democratisation to the cold war, anti-imperialism, and top-down politics,[1] the setbacks and new contradictions generated democracy-oriented groups against statism, violence, clientelism, and coercive accumulation of capital for civil rights and public action on concrete issues.[2] In Manila in 1986, a peaceful people-power movement removed Marcos in spite of Maoist predictions that nothing but armed revolution would do. Indonesia, a few years later, witnessed the growing movement against Suharto. In Kerala, participatory politics took a similar direction although in different form with social, environmental, and educational activists initiating campaigns for literacy, group-farming, and alternative development based on participatory mapping of local resources.[3]

A common challenge in each case lay in how to build cooperation between the rights-bearing middle-class civil society activists and broader groups facing marginalisation, exclusion, and rights deprivation; how to build alliances uniting quite disparate groups across social and physical spaces; and how to give such alliances an organised political base in

parties, elections, and eventually government. The Philippine groups were fragmented in many ways and their movement vulnerable to capture by sections of the elite, including celebrities such as Corazon Aquino and Cardinal Jaime Sin. The Indonesian campaigners were short of organised constituencies and marginalised from elitist politics. The Kerala activists could not follow up their campaigns when even leftist parties and related movements failed to support genuine decentralisation.[4]

These problems were not unique. On a general level, the dilemmas may be identified with a figure illustrating the distressed relations between civil society organisations and popular movements on the one hand and organised politics on the other (Figure 11.1). As emphasised in this book, the major challenge along each of the axes is to develop democratic representation to foster scaling up of issues, groups, communities, and workplaces. The conventional approach is to work through state, party, and ideology, but where these are already part of the problem, they had to be reformed and supplemented through more genuine democratic representation from below.

The year 1996 was the starting point for three exciting projects that tried to tackle these challenges. In the Philippines, nongovernmental organisation (NGO) campaigners, social movement activists, socialists, communists, and former Maoists built a citizen action party called *Akbayan*. In Kerala, activists in a people's science education movement in particular mobilised broad backing for decentralisation and participatory local development and gained left-government support for a state-wide People's Planning Campaign. In Indonesia, democracy activists tried to build broader following on a political level in confronting the Suharto regime.
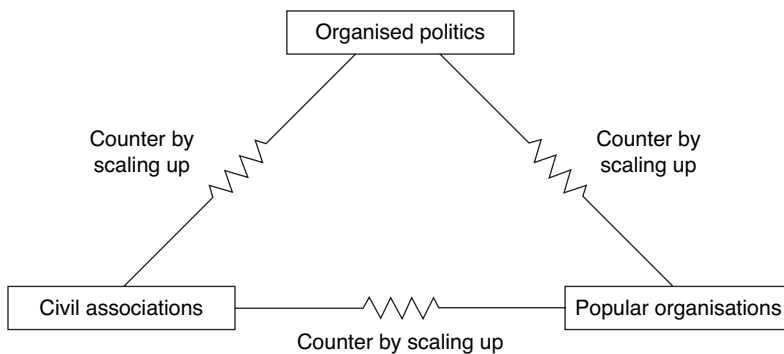

Figure 11.1   Scaling up issues, alliances and spatial links by improved representation, to counter the distressed relations between civil society associations, popular movements and organised politics.

Subsequently, the *Akbayan* project became a model for bringing scattered activists and movements together politically in a democratic way.[5] The Kerala People's Planning Campaign became the Asian version of Porto Alegre's participatory budgeting, in the context of extensive old civil society groups, social movements, and radical parties.[6] The Indonesian democracy movement demonstrated the political potential of civil society and student activists.[7] As a supplement to the authors' previous individual analyses,[8] this chapter seeks to draw some comparative lessons from the most recent phases.

Actions and Dilemmas in the Philippines

At the turn of the millennium, the prospects for the emergent parties and groups of the democratic left appeared promising. In 1992–1993, a few years after the split of the national democratic (ND) movement led by the Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), former NDs, together with some independent socialists and social democrats, formed several new political parties and movements, including *Akbayan*, *Partido ng Manggagawa* (Workers' Party), *Sanlakas,* and *Anak-Mindanao.* This democratic left vowed to transform the country's elite democracy into a more participatory and egalitarian democracy and to replace the patronage politics of the *trapos* (traditional politicians) with new politics based on the issues of peasants, workers, urban poor, women, and other marginalised sectors, including human rights, U.S. military presence, constitutional reform, and other major national issues. They held their own vis-à-vis the Maoists, sometimes even outnumbering the latter in major mass mobilisations. The alliances built created a significant organisational base of engaging in political action in support of agrarian reform, improved labour legislation, reduced prices in basic commodities, and improved conditions for Manila slum dwellers. Anak-Mindano worked for peace advocacy and peace building among Christian, Muslims, and indigenous peoples in war-affected Mindanao and *Akbayan in particular* worked for greater people's participation in decentralised local government. Venturing into electoral politics, the emergent left forces fielded or supported candidates in village and municipal elections. In the 1998 elections, *Akbayan* and *Sanlakas* scored a breakthrough in national electoral politics, winning one seat each in the lower house of Congress through the newly introduced party-list system (to encourage minor parties against traditional politicians and their machines). When President Joseph Estrada was accused of receiving payoffs from *jueteng*, an illegal gambling racket, the new left forces joined a very broad array of organisations

and persons in a campaign for his removal that culminated in a peaceful popular uprising in January 2001 that forced his resignation 15 years after the first people-power toppling of Marcos.

Since People Power II, however, the Philippines has been rocked by a series of dramatic events that have shown just how politically unstable and resistant to reform the country is. The events include the uprising of pro-Estrada forces in May 2001; the failed military mutinies in July 2003, February 2006, and November 2007; the fraud- and violence-marred elections from 2001 to 2007; the campaign to oust the new President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo for electoral fraud and corruption; and armed clashes between government troops and Muslim and communist rebels. Through all these, the patrimonial features of the Philippine state have deepened considerably. Thanks in large part to the rot in the government, military rebels and the Maoists have once again come to the fore, and the new left forces have been pushed to the sidelines with the intensified resort to patronage, manipulation, and deceit by the corrupt Arroyo regime; violence and harassment by the CPP and its guerrilla force, the New People's Army (NPA); and problems resulting from an outdated strategic framework of the new left itself.

Coping with CPP-NPA Violence and Harassment

The Maoist organisations benefitted greatly from being in full force in the 'Oust Estrada' mobilisations, thus managing to break out of the doldrums they had fallen into since several groups and leaders left them in the early 1990s. Partly in appreciation of the Maoists' role in helping topple Estrada, incoming President Arroyo agreed to resumption of peace talks with the National Democratic Front (NDF), the united front organisation of the Maoist Communist Party. The NDF scored a diplomatic coup of sorts when the government arranged for the Norwegian government to become the official facilitator of the talks. Then, in the May 2001 party-list elections, the ruling coalition endorsed the newly organised, open, and legal national democratic party, *Bayan Muna*.

During the 2001 electoral campaign, the Maoists intensified their extortion and intimidation activities, including tactics involving the NPA guerrilla units who campaigned for *Bayan Muna* and harassed members and campaigners of other left groups. Although the *Bayan Muna* thus topped the party-list ballot to the national parliament, the new left parties Akbayan, PM, Sanlakas, and Anak-Mindanao still performed well. However, the extortion and intimidation were repeated during the July 2002 *barangay* elections, and by 2003, the Maoist's relations with the new left forces had

taken a critical turn with a series of killings, some high profile (though largely unreported in national media) targeting the democratic left, in particular, former members of the NPA who had joined it.

Despite the violence, the emergent left parties and groups persevered in their engagements in mass movements and development work. For instance, the Freedom from Debt Coalition opposed the privatisation of power and water supply industries, showing that the services provided by these industries were deteriorating while the rates were skyrocketing. The new left parties participated in the campaign for the enactment of a bill providing suffrage for overseas Filipinos, and they helped thwart moves of *trapos* in Congress to perpetuate themselves in power through constitutional change by Congress itself. And far from being cowed by Maoist violence and intimidation, the emergent left forces strongly denounced the killings of non-Maoist leftists and mobilised national and international support for their position. In the May 2004 elections, the new left groups vigorously campaigned for free and honest elections, hitting hard against the Maoist extortion and harassment, and they managed to retain their five seats in Congress. Shortly after the Maoist killings, moreover, the emergent left forces exposed a hit list, which included prominent leaders of the new left, putting the Maoists somewhat on the political defensive. On the whole, the emergent democratic left has thus managed to defend itself – through political means – from Maoist violence and intimidation, but the defensive measures expended much time, energy, and resources.

Confronting a Corrupt and Repressive Regime

Political corruption and violence have become endemic problems. Paul Hutchcroft describes the Philippines as having a patrimonial oligarchic state, a weak state preyed upon by different factions of the country's politico-economic elite, who take advantage of a largely incoherent bureaucracy.[9] To Alfred McCoy, the country has descended into an 'anarchy' of powerful political families that have increasingly resorted to 'rent-seeking' and political violence to maintain their hold on wealth and power.[10] John T. Sidel depicts *bossism* as a common phenomenon in the Philippines, describing bosses as strongmen who achieve monopolistic control over both coercive and economic resources in certain areas and often resort to mafia-style methods.[11]

When President Estrada was toppled by people power in 2001, many Filipinos thought that corruption in the government would diminish. These hopes were soon thwarted as news about the diversion of sweepstakes funds, the importation of rotten rice, and other scandals hit the

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headlines. In July 2003, some units of the Philippine military staged a mutiny, decrying massive corruption within the armed forces and the government as a whole. Later, more scams were unearthed, with close relatives and friends of new President Arroyo being implicated. The president's husband and relatives were alleged to have been involved in *jueteng* – the same illegal numbers game that had caused Estrada's fall – and in electoral fraud, diversion of fertiliser funds, and money laundering. Then, in June 2005, Arroyo herself was implicated in the 'Hello Garci' scandal, sparked by the release to the public of the recording of a telephone conversation between her and an election commissioner on the rigging of the 2004 presidential elections.

As in the Oust Estrada campaign, the emergent left forces immediately went all out in participating in an Oust Arroyo drive, which quickly drew large numbers from virtually all classes and sectors. Fortuitously, the campaign took off just as the new left forces were in the process of launching a strategic alliance, *Laban ng Masa* (LnM) or Fight of the People, an 'independent counter pole movement of broad progressive forces'. Upon its formal launching, LnM alliance called for an end to the Arroyo regime and an end to elitist rule and for the establishment of a truly broad-based 'transitional revolutionary government'.

The Oust Arroyo campaign got a big boost when ten members of Arroyo's cabinet resigned, but then the tide turned. The Catholic Church hierarchy that had backed the removal of Marcos and later Estrada were divided on Arroyo. Unlike in 2000, the opposition in the lower house of Congress failed to muster the votes for her impeachment. By September 2005, therefore, the campaigners shifted to the 'parliament of the streets'. But people-power fatigue had set in because many people felt that similar past exercises had not really put an end to corrupt oligarchic rule. Yet, the Oust Arroyo forces, including both the Maoists and the new left groups, did not abandon their fight. When rumours of an impending coup swept the country in late 2005 and early 2006, they prepared for another people-power upheaval. Virtually all major opposition forces, including church leaders and businessmen, held clandestine meetings with leaders of various rebellious factions in the military. The twentieth anniversary of People Power I in February loomed as the critical moment. On the eve of the anniversary, however, the armed forces' top generals got wind of plans for a military revolt and had the rebel leaders arrested.

In July 2006, opposition congresspersons once again moved for Arroyo's impeachment but mustered even fewer votes than in the previous year. When military rebels staged another attempt at a 'participatory coup' in November 2007, their call for popular support went unheeded. In the May 2007 elections, the new left parties suffered major setbacks: their seats in

Congress shrank from five to two (one *Akbayan* and one *Anak-Mindanao*), and they had fewer winners in the local elections. An immediate cause of the setback was that the ruling coalition had gone all out to secure an overwhelming majority in the lower house of Congress and to prevent a third attempt at Arroyo's impeachment from succeeding. Even the party-list system was no longer spared from *trapo* manipulation. New government-backed parties proliferated and some even won party-list seats.

Errors and Shortcomings of the Emergent Left Forces

The outdated strategic framework of many of the new left forces themselves has also contributed to their being pushed to the margins since the fall of Estrada. Within the LnM alliance, the majority still appears to adhere to the classic Jacobin concept of revolution that privileges a single foundational moment of rupture. They envisage a left-led people-power uprising as possibly constituting such a foundational moment. Only a minority within LnM view people-power uprisings as merely part of a long process of radical transformation involving both gradual changes and ruptures.

The majority's position has posed problems. First, the insistence on a 'transitional *revolutionary* government' during the Oust Arroyo campaign precluded the formation of a broad coalition of the new left parties and groups in alliance with the middle class and the anti-Arroyo elite. According to political analyst Ramon Casiple, business leaders and middle forces were willing to ally with the new left forces, but balked when they heard of LnM's call for a transitional revolutionary government. Although LnM clarified that Corazon Aquino had also set up a revolutionary government after People Power I, the new associations were with the Maoists and sounded too radical, and the new left had little time to plan and carry out more and bigger joint protest actions with other forces.

Second, in trying to build toward another people-power uprising against Arroyo, the emergent left groups tended to neglect engagement in local elections and governance toward a political base from below. The setbacks suffered by the new left parties in the 2007 party-list elections are a clear indication that their efforts at political-electoral base building have proceeded too slowly and could not counter the *trapos*' resort to patronage and dirty tricks. One of the main reasons why it has been very difficult to dismantle the politics of patronage and patrimonialism in the Philippines is that *trapo* parties control 99 percent of the country's local governments. People power may topple a corrupt president, but the *trapo* parties, with their virtual stranglehold on local politics, can easily put another *trapo* to

replace him or her. The emergent left forces were seeking to emulate the success of the left in Latin America but failed to grasp that this success in electoral victories was based on painstaking efforts engaging in local political engagement throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

Third, there has been a growing imbalance between engagement in contentious politics and engagement in governance and development work, and between engagement in urban and engagement in rural work. Engagement in contentious politics, especially the Oust Arroyo campaign, has tended to draw the attention, energy, and resources of the new left forces away from governance and development politics that characterised *Akbayan* and allied popular and civil society organisations in participatory local governance in the late 1990s. Because contentious politics usually gravitates toward the national capital region and other major urban centres, the new left forces' focus has also shifted away from rural areas and secondary urban centres where they may actually have good chances of contending with and breaking *trapo* control.

The new left forces' neglect of local politics has resulted not only from the outdated strategic framework but also from putting too much emphasis on the party-list vote. The modest victories of the new left parties and groups in the party-list system helped them tremendously in reaching out to a national audience and in gaining national projection. The party-list system, however, has always had great limitations. The party-list seats in Congress that are supposed to be reserved for representatives of poor and marginalised sectors are limited to just 20 percent of the lower house seats. In practice, less than half of the 50-odd party-list seats get filled. For the new left parties, focusing solely or mainly on the party-list vote would thus not have dented *trapo* control over Philippine politics. Their main electoral approach should have been to build the political-electoral base from below by accumulating electoral victories at the local level and then moving upward. Unfortunately, the new left parties have allowed themselves to become much too preoccupied with the party-list vote to the detriment of their engagement in local electoral politics. The political space in the party-list system may be shrinking. Now that *trapos* no longer regard the party-list system as sacrosanct, the new left forces may find it difficult to win even a single party-list seat in the next election – that is, unless they pay much more attention to their political-electoral base building at the local level.

Unresolved Problems in Kerala

Over the last three decades, special ground has been gained in Kerala for decentralised participatory development, with supporters ranging from

leftist ideologue E. M. S. Nampoodiripad of the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M), civil society organisations like the Kerala People's Science Movement,[12] and even followers of Mahatma Gandhi.

While the early development of these efforts has been analysed elsewhere,[13] our focus here is on the last decade. By 1996, the Left Democratic Front (LDF), consisting of the two mainstream communist parties and other socialist and democratic parties under the leadership of CPI-M, had returned to power. The campaigners had most imaginatively combined research, popular education, and pilot showcases to mobilise support for decentralisation and popular participation and thus reinvigorate the celebrated Kerala rights-based model of development. Furthermore, the Indian Parliament had amended the constitution, enabling states like Kerala to empower local governments. Hence, the LDF government could kick-start decentralisation by participatory planning. This was introduced in a campaign mode to mobilise support: the People's Planning Campaign (PPC).[14]

The PPC required an elaborate scheme of specified functions for local self-governments (LSG). These in turn called for necessary functionaries and financing according to recommendations made by government-appointed committees. Meanwhile, the state government earmarked 35 percent of funds for planned investments to all levels of local government, a remarkable increase from next to nothing. In addition, training and capacity building of both elected and nonelected personnel would be handled by institutions such as the Kerala Institute of Local Administration. Most importantly, there was an elaborate support system and the dynamics of the campaign mode.[15]

Eleven years have passed since the beginning of the PPC. The campaign gained attention throughout India and internationally. Various attempts have been made to analyse the pros and cons of the campaign,[16] but little have been done on the basis of the more comprehensive experiences. This is partly because the conditions for contextual critical research have not been the best, and an evaluation of quantitative data is almost impossible. The State Planning Board that oversaw the PPC, along with the Local Self Government Department, gave broad directions on the spending of the funds, but the quality of the projects, transparency of its execution, and level and direction of its impacts cannot be understood by the amounts spent. Therefore, we have instead made assessments on the basis of intensive interviews with 45 selected activists who are known to be supporters of the PPC but also close and critically reflecting observers. They included activists from political parties, government officials, activists from civil society organisations, and social scientists; for instance, we chose people who worked as key resource persons for the PPC, the director of the

Institute for Local Administration, the former secretary of the Local Self Government Department, and the chairman of the committee appointed to study decentralisation experiences. The interviews were conducted on the basis of 26 talking points that were chosen after elaborate consultation with known social scientists and persons with experience on the campaign.[17]

Early Successes and Stumbling Blocks

Initially, the PPC was executed without much criticism. In spite of this, the interviews point to problems already between 1996 and 2001 under the LDF government, not just later on. A basic initial problem was that the campaign suffered from the strong party politicisation.[18] The PPC was conceptualised as a top-to-bottom State Planning Board program with wide popular support and full backing by a front of political parties as a bipartisan scheme. However, given that public opinion on almost every important matter is highly polarised in Kerala, the program was never accepted as being truly bipartisan. Although the opposition parties of the United Democratic Front (UDF) were in general agreement with the concept of decentralisation, they were sceptical of the intentions of the LDF and the priorities of the PPC. This was aggravated by the fact that local politics in Kerala is often discussed and reported in the media in the context of broader state-level issues and conflicts. Hence, the consensus on the PPC, including cooperation between several stakeholders, was missing even at the beginning of the campaign.[19]

Devolution of functionaries to the local level had to face the inevitable bureaucratic delay. Many of those who got redeployed worked under different command (the local government and the state-level line departments, respectively), and the state government officers had difficulty adjusting to the local command. Moreover, the transfer of rights or functionaries to the local level was often contested by politically related regional, community, caste, and sub-caste identities and interest groups. These remain strong in Kerala because the modernisation process was carried out through socio-religious reform movements based on castes and communities.[20] Furthermore, the elaborate PPC training programs were insufficient, and the suggestions to upgrade the quality as well as the qualifications of the secretaries to the Village Councils (*Grama Panchayat*) were never implemented. As a result, highly qualified engineers, doctors, and headmasters found it difficult to work under these secretaries.

Another important early defect was the persistence of corruption and financial misappropriation. Because this was expected, decentralisation was

accompanied by several arrangements through which corruption could be prevented, detected, and pursued by the participants and the wider public, but many of these opportunities were not made full use of. One possible reason is the dominating culture of litigation even with regard to rather minor problems and conflicts. As a result, the instances of corruption or misappropriation that were found by the auditing authorities got exceptional public attention, which strengthened the idea that all or most Village Councils were corrupt, and this created a serious dent in the credibility of decentralisation.

In addition to these problems, the campaign mode of the PPC seems to have slowed down by the end of 2000 and early 2001. Thirty-two out of the 45 interviewees felt that by then the initial excitement had already given way to a certain amount of routinisation. Maybe campaign fatigue had set in among the PPC activists. Some of them were also active in a cultural campaign initiated by the LDF called *Manaveeyam,* and several had been working already with the Total Literacy Campaign during 1989–1991.[21]

Additional Obstacles with the Change of Government

On Top of these early problems, the supportive LDF parties suffered losses in the local and state elections in 2000 and 2001, respectively. It is true that incumbents in Kerala tend to lose and that many additional reasons for the losses were not related to the PPC. However, the elections also revealed tensions between PPC participants, on the one hand, and old popular organisations and many politicians, on the other. For instance, in many local electoral constituencies where the LDF lost, conventional politicians were fielded rather than leaders (including several women) who had gained positive reputation by being involved with the campaign.[22]

After the elections, moreover, there was widespread apprehension on the part of the PPC supporters about the future of the campaign because the winning political front, UDF, had been critical of many aspects of the PPC and now changed its name to Kerala Development Programme (KDP). In fact, some negative changes did take place. The UDF limited the operating space of the Ombudsman, the quasi-judicial body in which complaints about LSGs could be registered.[23] The funds given to the LSGs that were earmarked for the welfare of Tribal people, one of the most marginalised groups, were returned to the state government functionaries. The old bureaucratic agency on the district level that was working parallel to the new LSGs (and that was thus supposed to be merged with the latter) was allowed to continue. The development funds allotted for the members of the Legislative Assembly that they could spend according to their own

preferences were increased. Most importantly, the bureaucratic elements in the decision making and development of project proposals from local levels were strengthened over and above the popular elements.

All these changes, in addition to institutionalisation in ways that strengthened the feeling of routinisation, reversed the trends set in the earlier phase of the campaign. For instance, S. Palaniappan, former joint commissioner of education, who after his retirement served as the chairman of the mid-district level body created by the campaign, put the blame for most problems squarely on the UDF policy.[24] Moreover, the decisions regarding development projects by Village Councils in cooperation with committees with popular participation were now to be 'guided' by the bureaucratic head of the district administration. In short, the general feeling among the interviewees was that, from 2001 to 2006, when the UDF was in power, bureaucratisation of decision making increased, and there was a sharp decline in the quality of decentralisation and participatory development.

The Legacy of Initial Political Problems

However, the basic structure of PPC was not altered by the UDF government.[25] Important policy measures continued, like the transfer of some 35 percent of planned funds, and so did most administrative and legislative changes that had been brought about in the wake of the PPC. *The Hindu*[26] acknowledged that both the UDF Chief Minister and the Minister of the LSG 'were careful about keeping the decentralisation bandwagon on track and had played their bit in ensuring that the initiatives launched in 1996 did not fail'. In our interviews, the PPC associates support this conclusion in general but retain their specific complaints. Hence, one has to ask why the positive institutions that were sustained did not deliver according to expectation. These rules and regulations included the constitutional amendments that increased considerably the representative density of the Indian Polity[27] and empowered the LSGs. Furthermore, all the LSGs had seats reserved for women, marginalised groups such as excluded castes, and tribal people. State-level legislation had also created specific institutions for smooth functioning of decentralised bodies, and Kerala emphasised planning from below as the main instrument of democratic decentralisation. To this end, the common Indian Village Assemblies (*Grama Sabhas*) were given special importance. All voters of the locality could participate in the deliberations on policy prescriptions and project proposals. The Village Assemblies decided who should get what benefits from the developmental and welfare projects. To supplement

their work, smaller Neighbourhood Groups were also formed, and adequate participation was crucial. To audit the decisions and monitor their implementation, moreover, there were transparent discussions among all stakeholders regarding actual performance and social impact. A Charter of Citizen's Rights was also disseminated in addition to the Ombudsman system through which complaints against the LSGs could be voiced. Finally, Self-help groups with their own micro-financing facilities and productive ventures were encouraged, particularly among women, and the Kerala Women's Commission, with the help of LSGs, organised special Vigilance Committees. The crucial point is that, if these specific institutions had at least been working reasonably well – which our informants say they did not – a number of democratic deficits such as exclusion of marginalised groups from local decision making and governance could have been rectified and the mainstreaming of gender issues could have been achieved. Similarly, transparency of public decision making and accountability could also have been ensured at the LSG level. This in turn may have increased the also-not-fully utilised capacity of the PPC to foster production.

So how shall one explain the poor performance? In 2004, a Capacity Development Programme for Decentralisation in Kerala facilitated a focus-group discussion with field-level activists at Eranakulam in Central Kerala. The activists listed about 25 negative experiences with regard to the functioning of the Village Assemblies ranging from factionalism to lack of transparency in decision making.[28] For instance, there was not only meagre attendance at the assemblies, but those who did come (along with elected and nonelected officials for whom attendance was compulsory) were mainly women and other marginalised sections of the population that might become targeted beneficiaries of the various welfare handouts. Thus, decision making in the Village Assemblies could hardly have led to universally acceptable programs and participatory projects. Similar shortcomings were found in a case study conducted in coastal areas of two districts in 1998–1999, much before the state government had changed.[29] Forty-three out of 45 of our informants confirmed this trend. In fact, they also pointed to a number of other negative experiences from related institutions, such as committees that assigned beneficiaries to monitor projects as well as sub district-level expert committees assigned to review project proposals. In fact, the social audit still does not even seem to have passed the testing ground, as certified by persons interviewed as well as the current LDF state minister of finance T. M. Thomas Issac, who was the leading theoretician and initiator of the PPC. In a recent circular to activists,[30] he admitted that the 'social audit which was expected to be indicator of societies' verdict over transparency could not proceed further from its experimental stage'.

In short, it is true that the decentralisation and participatory development program was bureaucratised after 2001 when the UDF government took over the responsibility, but the necessary popular spark that was required to mobilise and use the positive LSG-level institutions that had already been initiated was found missing. This was in spite of some bold initiatives by a few bureaucrats in the Local Self Government Department and NGOs committed to streamlining the functioning of the partially defunct institutions.

Leftist Factionalism Demoralises the Activists

In the meantime, civil society participation itself got into serious trouble. A significant number of the civil society activists who were active in the PPC came from broad leftist persuasions, and with the defeat of the LDF in the 2001 elections, some of them indicated that the PPC had been a stumbling block. Already by 1996 and earlier, when the PPC was developed, there were murmurs of dissent within the LDF and more importantly within its leading party, the CPI-M.[31] This was not surprising given the different views on how to promote development and that the CPI-M's internal decision making was (and is) guided by democratic centralism. Such basic problems were, however, rarely discussed in the open – and neither were the real problems of the PPC. Powerful critics only put forward very different issues that had little to do with the PPC.

The background was that the Government of India supported decentralisation in 1992, immediately following the 1991 acceptance of the World Bank/International Monetary Fund (IMF)-inspired liberal economic reforms. Hence, many leftists became suspicious of decentralisation in general, and the PPC was only accommodated due to the personal charisma of the CPI-M leader E. M. S. Namboodiripad. However, by 2001, he was no longer on the scene, and the debate within the CPI-M itself emerged with no holds barred. During the latest phase of UDF rule between 2001 and 2006, the intensity of the debate gathered momentum, especially as the Kerala unit of the CPI-M became involved in inner party elections. Entangled within personal and group ambitions and factionalism, it threatened to become an open fight, and the national leadership of the party had to intervene. These developments were devastating. In fact, the debate itself had nothing to add to a critically constructive evaluation of the PPC but rather prevented it and made it difficult for well-intentioned civil society participants and committed political cadres to engage in projects of decentralisation and participatory development. As a result, the much-needed synergy that could have developed out of

partnership between popular action, official initiatives, and leadership of elected representatives at the LSG level was found missing.

Return to Power by LDF and the Route Ahead

In the 2006 Elections, the UDF government that had done miserably even by its own standards lost out, and the LDF came back to power. Leading figures among the PPC activists are back in positions of influence. On August 15, 2007, the second phase of the campaign (once again named the PPC) was inaugurated. The faction fight and ideological debate over decentralisation have quieted to some extent, but they are not fully contained. Yet there are very few indicators that PPC is going to be anything beyond a state-run program of limited developmental and welfare significance.

Our interviews of activists and observers of the PPC – a number of them former or current leading activists of left political formations – elicited only negative responses. One of the interviewees felt that by exploiting the faction fight within the left, a strong ideology of anti-decentralisation had become rampant in Kerala. Another felt that no political party had actually accepted the PPC or decentralisation as part of its agenda. Another thought that there was hardly any communication between the organisational leadership of political parties and elected people's representatives on PPC or decentralisation.

Similarly, after collecting data in the context of LSG elections in 2005, the Centre for Rural Management, a Kottayam-based NGO, concluded that political support for the PPC not only at the state level but more importantly at the LSG level is necessary if it shall resume its original character, Because Kerala has no civil society organisation (including the People's Science Movement) that is capable of initiating an effective and independent campaign to mobilise the people behind decentralisation and participatory planning for development, the field for such action is left to organised political parties.

In spite of this, there are some promising developments, such as the fact that the CPI-M has instructed its local branches to interact with their parliamentary groups at the LSG level and monitor their activities. On the one hand, the chances look bleak as long as the political parties continue to dominate the public discussion in addition to popular organisations and civil societies and do not show any genuine interest in reviving comprehensive and democratic decentralisation. The unfortunate leftist debate was due more to particular problems within the CPI-M than anything else. On the other hand, it could also be argued that NGOs and other civil

society activists should enter into dialogues with parties and elected representatives at the LSG level if they are interested in promoting the original objectives of the PPC again. The SDC-CapDeck Programme, for instance, worked through 19 separate organisations, NGOs, and voluntary organisations that were ready to enter into partnership with 71 Village Councils of different political alignments from 14 districts of Kerala. The civil society activists thus accepted the control and direction of elected representatives, and together they have made some significant interventions in different aspects of strengthening LSGs. They are working in areas such as representation of marginalised groups, strengthening the Village Assemblies, mainstreaming gender, and building up support for LSGs from among community-based organisations. In spite of the then-raging controversy over decentralisation and NGO involvement, the Village Councils accepted the partnership of such organisations. This might be one model through which support for the principles and intentions of the PPC could be built anew. Yet it is too early to say anything definite about the wider potential of the experiment.

Indonesian Democracy Activists between Movement and Party

In Indonesia, popular politics continue to suffer from the devastating elimination in the mid-1960s of the broad popular movements that had developed under the reign of Sukarno and the influence of the reformist Communist Party. The democracy movement that emerged much later against Suharto was mainly student- and middle-class driven and poorly organised, yet it rode a wave of structural problems undermining his rule. Hence, by mid-1996, a crackdown on dissidents made wider sections of the population realise that it was impossible to reform the regime. A year later, international investors opted to leave because they became nervous about overrated financial markets and the possibility of earning extra profits through political and military protection. It is true that Suharto was still in command of the people, the bureaucracy, and the military, but his ability to command the market had been undermined by the informalisation and privatisation of the economy. As the economy collapsed, the not-very-democratic middle classes realised that their privileges and options were also at stake. This paved the way for the student demonstrations, which substituted for the lack of a mass organisation and tipped the balance. As in the birth of most new democracies, however, it was at first Suharto's own men that saved their fortunes by abandoning him, accommodating moderate dissidents, and jointly following up with top-level agreements on basic freedoms, rule of law, privatisation, quick elections,

and decentralisation. Meanwhile the pro-democrats were taken by surprise and were both ideologically and organisationally unprepared to make a difference in the elections. Although many individuals dropped out, others joined the elite and yet others opted for principled civil society and social movement activity 'to build genuine democracy from below' while lobbying dissident celebrity politicians.[32]

Four years later, most civil society and popular movement activists agreed that this extra-parliamentary road map had proved insufficient. Case studies showed that many groups and activists were alive and kicking but remained fragmented and unable to establish a firm social base and advance politically.[33] The civil society groups were specialised along 15 front lines of democracy work and various 'territories' and approaches. Previously Suharto had prevented dissidents from organising on the ground to thus turn the people into a 'floating mass', but now it was the pro-democrats themselves that were 'floating' without contacts and roots.[34] Meanwhile, it was rather the elitist parties and groups that captured the political momentum by incorporating ordinary people from top-down. These results were confirmed in the wider framework of two national democracy surveys from 2003 and 2007.[35] Some of the impressive freedoms, elections, and civil society engagements were being undermined; the basic social and economic rights were insufficient; the operational instruments of rule of law and public governance remained poor in spite of some improvements; and, worst of all, political representation was deteriorating. Basically this was because organised politics had been monopolised – not just by the old oligarchs but also by a limited number of powerful groups with roots in state, business, and communal organisations.[36] Meanwhile however, the pro-democracy organisations had also isolated themselves in civil society and lobbying activities, not trying to enter into organised politics with a sufficient base.[37] The obvious conclusion was that the democrats must establish firmer links with social movements to enter into mass politics. The only question was *how*?

The political opportunity structure remains unfavourable to popular participation and representation. With the exception of Aceh, participation even in local elections calls for a national presence, with branch offices in 60 percent of the provinces, 50 percent of the regencies and municipalities, and 25 percent of the sub-districts. Hence, it is almost impossible to build parties from below without access to huge funds. Similarly, only big parties or extensive coalitions may nominate candidates for elections of presidents, governors, mayors, and regents. Aside from the elections of individual representatives from the provinces to an insignificant national assembly (DPD), the openings for independent candidates are only for the well endowed. Finally, the labour classes and women in general are de facto

excluded. Candidates must have comparatively advanced formal schooling. Participation even in village elections calls for male-dominated networks and huge resources. And there are almost no democratic arrangements for interest-based and direct popular representation in public governance – only privileged contacts and top-down selection of individuals and groups. It is true that international organisations that used to focus on elections have now acknowledged the problem of representation. Their priority, however, is to foster functional elitist parties that 'pick up demands from society and bundle them'; popularly controlled representation is deemed 'normative' and 'idealistic'.[38]

Because popular representation is a basic democratic dimension, the scholars and activists that had carried out the previously mentioned democracy surveys initiated in 2007 two special studies on pioneering attempts to foster it. One study focuses on empirical observations of popular and civil society groups that try to engage in organised politics. Most efforts are extensions of existing localised projects and actions. This is in contrast to elite-driven priorities but has sustained the fragmentation. Meanwhile, the attempts to broker alliances and coalitions have not been attractive enough for specialised groups as compared to lobbying or 'good contacts'.[39] Another study[40] draws on theoretical and comparative perspectives over time and space to identify major ways of scaling up issues, groups, communities, and workplaces through improved representation. Early results point to ten partially overlapping models that share a number of dilemmas but also one major option.

Ten Road Maps

The first model is rooted in *civil society and popular interest politics.* Increasingly, many citizen action groups relate to popular movements and assist involvement in organised politics. An interesting example is the environmental umbrella organisation *Walhi's* support for the *Insan* fisher folk association in South Kalimantan in its struggle against a transnational cement factory that devastated the fishing waters. Another is activist lawyer Handoko's (with supportive civil society groups) promotion of a democratic peasant movement in North Central Java to reclaim state-expropriated land and enter into local elections. Although the experiments foster genuine organisation with great potential, there are problems of scaling up the work beyond specificities and personalities to provide representation beyond their own groups and thus win majorities in elections.

The second model is *dissident community politics.* Community work to improve vulnerable people's social and economic conditions was a crucial

entry point to foster political change under Suharto, and it continues to serve as one basis for political engagement (especially outside Java). It has been difficult, however, to broaden the movements beyond core issues and competing specific approaches. Similarly, many minority groups have drawn on and even reinvented customary rules to protect their natural resources, culture, and religion against centralistic and coercive profit-driven development. One example is the indigenous people's alliance AMAN and supportive civil society groups such as *Baileo* in the Moluccas aimed at vitalising customary institutions to gain basic human rights and help people sustain their livelihoods. Unfortunately, however, the communitarian bases tend to undermine political equality if the demands are for special benefits rather than for equal civil or human rights and protection of the environment for the sake of the people in a country or region as a whole.

The third model is *direct political participation.* One reaction against the deficits of the political system is to bypass so-called rotten politics through direct participation. Initially this was done through involvement by people facing specific problems, such as human rights violations, corruption, and environmental destruction. Polycentrism, however, proved difficult to combine with democratic representation because it is unclear what people are supposed to control what parts of public affairs as political equals on behalf of whom and in a responsive and accountable way. This negated the need to scale up issues, people, communities, and workplaces to enable the pro-democrats to make a political difference.

Internationally, the most innovative way of responding to the critique has been by institutionalising new forms of direct representation in sectoral public councils and participatory planning.[41] For example, women activists and the Corruption Watch try to foster social audits and participatory budgeting with more universal participation. Remarkably, however, there are few attempts to substitute democratic representation of organised interests for Suharto's state-driven corporatism. Civil society groups have rather facilitated informal contacts between sections of the people and executive government. One particular form has been that of citizen forums (*Forum Warga)* for direct deliberative links, conflating citizens and the Muslim community. A more common solution is that of the elected independent candidates in Aceh to cater to 'their' clients, thus sustaining patronage politics.

The fourth model is *politics of public discourse.* A major middle-class constituency within the democracy movement against Suharto was composed of journalists and related intellectuals, acting both for the general principle of freedom of speech and their own opportunities to do a good job. Many pro-democrats still try to scale up through alternative research

and information and by fostering public spheres for the deliberation of crucial matters for ordinary citizens, beyond censorship and the resourceful elite. However, many of these efforts have been undermined by the limited reach among ordinary people, lack of public resources, commercialism, extensive reliance on foreign funding, and elitist focus on think tanks, setting aside the tradition of popular education in the nationalist movement.

The fifth model is *political contracts.* Because of the monopolisation of the party system, the most common alternative to participate (beyond lobbying and good contacts) has been to negotiate political contracts on policy commitments with individual politicians and parties. One example involves the groups behind pro-democracy-oriented candidates such as Wayan Sudirtha in Bali. Another is when civil society groups and popular organisations foster political alliances or when a number of similar organisations, such as those working for the urban poor, formulate minimum demands and ask candidates to commit themselves to support them. Many of these arrangements are limited, however, by general agreements in narrow fields. Furthermore, the civil and popular actors lack sufficient bargaining power to enforce the deals. They are typically short of crucial campaigners, unable to deliver a substantial number of votes, and without sustainable organisations to keep successful politicians accountable after the elections. Hence, there is an obvious need for both more solid and autonomous organisation on the part of civil society and popular groups when engaging in politics. It is true that the December 2006 elections of new local executives in Aceh are an inspiring example of the benefit of independent candidates. However, it is often forgotten that the successful candidates were not so independent but rested on (nationalist) movements with (more or less democratic) command-structures.[42]

The sixth model involves *fronts from within.* The obvious alternative to the often-defective political contracts have been either to 'capture' local chapters of small national parties that are eligible to run in local elections even where not really present or try to reform or make an impact within the 'least worst' of the major parties. However, the progressive activists have suffered from these parties' poor reputation and have had to pay for their own campaigns. Among those working within big parties, moreover, even dynamic individuals with middle-class and NGO constituencies have been short of power to make decisive headway. And the attempts by socialist nationalists like Budiman Sudjatmiko to gain power in Megawati's PDI-P by organising popular constituencies run the risk of ending up in a similar catastrophe as those among the Philippine Popular Democrats who tried much the same behind President Joseph Estrada but became the prisoners of elitist populism.

The seventh model is the *trade union party.* As in many other parts of the Global South, there have also been attempts to build parties based on trade unions. Two major problems have invalidated the experiments. The first is the uphill task of expanding the agenda beyond sectoral interests by drawing on labour perspectives and organisation to cater to the society at large. In Indonesia, there are few viable links between trade unions, other similar popular organisations, and radical civil society groups, not to mention attempts at forging compromises with growth-oriented capital to boost development in return for social security and unemployment guarantees. The second problem is the union divisiveness and importance of strongmen. This is partly related to poor trust in representatives. Better-organised labour is likely to play a decisive role in democratic politics, but not without broader agendas for cooperation.

The eighth model is the *multi-sectoral party.* Popularly oriented civil society activists have also tried to build a party-political vehicle (PPR) for local organisations and movements. To prove their trustworthiness, party leaders would not even run themselves, only representatives of people's own movements, primarily among farmers, fisher folks, minorities, and urban poor. This perspective worked well in a province like Bengkulu where the party grew out of dynamic civil society and popular organisations and served as a coordinator without immediate competitors and ambitions to dominate. In many other cases, however, the initiators have either been less-well-grounded NGOs and organisations or established groups with their own agendas and contacts. Hence, both these actors have been reluctant to give full support because they would not benefit until (at best) Election Day and had to invest a lot of time and resources in building up the party and getting accepted by the authorities. Actually, it was less risky and costly to relate to already-established politicians and parties that could offer something immediate in return for votes. In addition, many groups hesitate to link up with any party at all for the risk of being divided and abused. Although the initiators were widely appreciated, PPR thus failed to get reach the formal requirements in terms of local offices around the country. Moreover, although a success might have turned the party into a vital arena for debate and cooperation, several questions would have remained to be solved, such as how to agree on a solid platform, select candidates, and keep them accountable to all organisations not just their own.

The ninth model is *a national ideological party.* This classical road map is modelled on the thesis that there is a need for a common ideology and a well-functioning national organisation. To broaden the framework, the leftist cadre party PRD was de facto transformed into a national united front called *Papernas*, combining the old leftist 'front from above' tactics

(between established organisations) and 'front from below' idea (between groups and people behind ideologically derived minimum demands). However, the attempts to enrol additional organisations or parts of them rather than individuals caused additional fragmentation and political disengagement in the democracy movement. Moreover, in contrast to the Philippines with its national party list system and ideological organisations, the Indonesian political space for new ways of organising is even more related to basic issues and alternative governance on the local level.

The tenth model refers to the building of *local political parties.* This model comes in two varieties. One is the attempt to form several local parties and then build an all-Indonesia alliance to meet the formal requirements for participation in elections. This strategy was close to the eighth road map of the PPR and seems to have run aground. Another is to expand on the special rights in Aceh to form local parties that are eligible themselves to run in elections on the provincial level. This model has become increasingly popular because the Aceh experiment has so far countered the mainstream argument that local parties would foster more separatism and identity politics. It is important to remember, however, that the enforcement of local parties in Aceh rests with the dynamic of the struggle against the dominance of Jakarta and that several of the crucial factors are not relevant in other provinces, including territorial rather than ethnic and religious political identities, temporary international containment after the tsunami of the otherwise dominant primitive accumulation of capital, and a peace agreement in favour of political- and democracy-oriented conflict transformation that boosted the democracy-oriented sections of the Aceh nationalists, some of whom in turn were capable of utilising the new opportunities and even win elections. This is not to argue that other dynamics with similar outcomes cannot evolve elsewhere. However, to simply export the idea of local parties would be another example of naïve crafting of democracy. In fact, Aceh is not about liberal peace but more social-democratic-oriented peace, based as it was on strong politics, regulation of big business, the transformation of conflict within a democratic framework, and people's capacity to use and improve the new institutions. To sustain these factors, there is an urgent need to foster more equal citizenship, protect Aceh from integration into the normal Indonesian symbiosis of politics and capital and develop genuine representation beyond quick transformation of combatant and activist organisations into political parties. Already in the most recent elections, it was only the powerful and patronage-oriented local party with a basis in the old rebel movement command structure that made it to the provincial parliament. Hence there must also be counter patronage-driven direct forms of representation through alliances and campaigns toward *democratic* institutions for direct

access and participation beyond parties and elections only as well as to renew the party system.[43]

The Need for Intermediate Political Blocks

In brief, no single pathway or combination of them seems to offer a viable solution for how to include people in politics through improved representation. The conclusion is rather that all of them need supplementary organisation for joint agendas on an intermediate political level between parties and specific groups at all central to local levels where there are political elections. Efforts toward such democratic political blocks should be of interest *as a supplement* to the activists of all the road maps. The civil society and popular interest politics need to combine issues, alliances, and workplaces by way of cooperation on a more aggregate level, without having to subordinate themselves to top-down parties and politicians. Progressive community, religious, ethnic, and customary groups need cooperation with democrats on more comprehensive agendas where it is possible to relate communal demands to equal civil and political rights and environmental protection for the society at large, thus avoiding fragmentation and identity politics. The activists in favour of direct democratic participation in relation to public planning and services need joint agendas and organisation to put pressure on politicians to institutionalise such measures on broad scale. Intellectuals within media, culture, research, and education need exciting and meaningful public spheres to relate to. Political contracts are not viable without firm and permanent organisation among popular and civil society groups to formulate demands, offer powerful support to positive politicians, and put pressure on defectors. Democrats trying to alter existing parties from within need firm backing from outside without being accused of factionalism. Sectoral political party groups based on trade unions or farmers must relate to wider efforts and demands. Political machines allowing various popular movements to launch their own political candidates need to consider more people, agendas, and priorities. National ideological parties will remain marginal without trustworthy relations to the much wider sections of independently cooperating civil society and popular organisations. Local political parties as in Aceh need to foster supplementary forms of democratic participation beyond elections to curb rather than turn victims or prisoners of old command structures and renewed clientelism. All this calls for intermediate political block organisation and joint agendas. Gradually, politicians who are prepared to promote the block agendas consistently may well generate a more representative party. There are international experiences to draw

on. Generally, this is how Scandinavian social democracy first organised and then became hegemonic.[44] And similar dynamics were at play when the Brazilian Labour Party grew strong, won local elections, and facilitated participatory budgeting and more.[45]

Conclusion

On the one hand, it is of course difficult to draw any firm conclusions from the similarly oriented efforts in the Philippines, Kerala, and Indonesia to combine civil society and popular movement and make a difference in organised politics, given that both the organisations and the contexts were different. On the other hand, if similar attempts face similar problems under quite different conditions, these challenges might be of more universal relevance.

In brief, there are four points to be made. First, although the freedoms remain, it has become increasingly difficult for independent civil society and popularly oriented groups to affect public affairs. Many public affairs have been depoliticised to technocrats, the market, and patronage-dominated communities. There is a shortage of institutionalised channels for interest and issue group participation beyond clientelism and good contacts. Even popular representation in formal government is held back by elitist control of party and electoral systems. It should be possible to gain broad support for giving priority to these problems.

Second, the elitist and centrist elements of the traditional left have been a hindrance too: in the Philippines, by way of Maoist violence and harassment; in Kerala, through the subordination of issues of popular participation in governance and development to destructive party competition and factionalism; in Indonesia, as part of persistent attempts at unifying scattered groups and movements through competitive top-down leadership. The importance of creating more independent and democratically institutionalised spheres for public discourse needs to be reemphasised, along with non-party-dominated politics behind basic agendas.

Third, these hindrances in turn have spurred extra-parliamentary actions and litigation and the participation of special groups and targeted populations in the handling of specific matters of their own concern. There is nothing wrong with this, although it is democratically insufficient and comes at the expense of scaling up civil society and popular work behind concrete proposals and programs in relation to both popular representation and direct participation in local governance.

Finally, the pioneering attempts in this direction have suffered from poor political facilitation. In addition to political struggle for representation to

thus enable participation, the facilitation needs to be firmly in favour of democratic principles of political equality, impartiality, and unbroken chains of popular sovereignty. In the Philippines, insufficient priority has been given to broad work for alternative local governance agendas. In Kerala, there has been inconsistent leftist support and lack of organised backup through non-party formations. In Indonesia, civil society and movement activists 'going political' have not managed to generate basic agendas and organisations in between specific groups and populist leaders.

Notes

1. Cf. Quimpo 2008, Törnquist with Tharakan 1995, Törnquist 1984, 1989, 1991.
2. This chapter is a collective effort. Although Törnquist has served as the coordinating editor and lead author of the comparative and Indonesia sections, Tharakan has been the lead author of the Kerala section and Quimpo of the Philippines section.
3. Törnquist 2002.
4. Ibid.
5. See, e.g., Rocamora 2004 and Törnquist 2002.
6. See, e.g., Törnquist *et al.* 1996, Isaac *et al.* 2003.
7. See, e.g., Törnquist 2000, Lane 2008.
8. See, e.g., Rocamora 2004, Quimpo 2008, Tharakan 2004, Törnquist 2004, Prasetyo *et al.* 2004.
9. Hutchcroft 1998.
10. McCoy 1993.
11. Sidel 1999.
12. *Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishath* (KSSP).
13. See, e.g., Tharakan 1998, 2004a, Törnquist with Tharakan 1995.
14. Tharakan 2004a, Törnquist 2004, Isaac with Franke 2000.
15. Ibid.
16. See, e.g., Tharakan 2004a, Törnquist 2004, 2007.
17. The "questionnaire" was canvassed by Jos Chathukulam, and the data were analysed and presented by P. K. Michael Tharakan. Support and comments were provided by Olle Törnquist, the University of Oslo.
18. Tharakan 2004a.
19. Ibid.
20. Tharakan 1998.
21. Tharakan 1990, 2004b.
22. Cf. Törnquist 2004.
23. Mohan and Jayaraj 2006.
24. Interview on October 28, 2007.
25. Chathakulam and John 2002.
26. 2006.