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Popular aspirations, decentralization and local democracy

Olle Törnquist

10.1 Introduction

Decentralization of power and governance from centralized and often authoritarian institutions to local state units and governments as well as to markets and widely defined civil society organizations (CSOs) has been a crucial element in the worldwide attempts since the 1980s at crafting democratic institutions through international support for agreements between moderate elites. The postulates have been based more on normative theory and associated ideologies about the causes and effects of liberal democracy than on empirical theories about actual historical development. Thus it has been emphasized that decentralization would (a) undermine authoritarianism in favour of economic and political liberalism, (b) facilitate popular participation, accountability and local democracy, and (c) promote dynamic development in accordance with local needs and possibilities. Today, by contrast, it is widely accepted that these assumptions have not proved generally valid and that there have been mixed outcomes. In crucial cases such as Indonesia there has even been less decentralization of fledgling democratic regimes than dispersion of power to local elites, businessmen and influential non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with extensive and at times global networks (for example, Klinken, 2009; Nordholt, 2004; Nordholt and Klinken, 2007; and references therein). Hence there is a need to abandon the normative and ideological assumptions about the logics involved and to focus instead on the actual politics of decentralization, in its various forms and in different contexts.

In this chapter, I draw on data from longitudinal studies since the 1980s of how a number of significant political and citizens' rights organizations in favour of popular aspirations in the particular contexts of India, Indonesia and the Philippines have tried to foster decentralization and local democracy.[1] This may be particularly useful because (i) one may assume that the agents involved (in contrast to many others) have tried their best to promote democracy in different settings and (ii) their specific approaches can be compared while also keeping in mind the contextual differences.

I shall focus on three such more specific approaches. The first may be called a *social perspective*, stressing the importance of independent CSOs and movements trying to work from below. The second may be labelled the *new party perspective*, emphasizing the need for pro-democrats and CSOs to engage also with locally rooted political vehicles in liberal-democratic elections. The third may be called a *supplementary perspective*, giving priority to additional forms of democratic participation that at best may be combined with established popular organizations as well as liberal-democratic institutions of governance. I shall begin by sketching these approaches and the different contexts, in order then to be able to focus on four points and a conclusion from the longitudinal studies.

10.2 Approaches and contexts

10.2.1 The social perspective

The social perspective was particularly important in Indonesia, where it was adhered to by the majority of the democracy movement, first during the struggle against Suharto's dictatorship, then also in the attempts at developing democracy after the fall of the regime in 1998. Suharto's regime had three major pillars.[2] The first was centralistic and neo-patrimonial political and military control and distribution of resources to privileged clients. This generated rather successful but exclusionary economic development until 1997, in cooperation with international business and Western powers. The second pillar was repression of one of the world's largest radical popular movements and thereafter subordination of ethnic and religious groups too, in addition to a monopoly on membership-based socioeconomic and political organizations. The third pillar was political legitimacy based on the claim that stability and development rested with conservative nationalism in terms of the revival of Indonesia's (or primarily Java's) authoritarian culture.

In this context, the advocates of the social perspective focused on undermining the state and mainstream politics by exposing its repres-

sive, corrupt and exploitative character, as well as by strengthening various communities of people and trying to make them socially and economically more independent of the state and capable of building a pro-democratic civil society.

Indonesia's despotic liberal capitalism was particularly hard hit by the Asian economic crisis in 1997. The pro-democrats were far from able to offer an alternative social and economic contract, but they were decisive in undermining the legitimacy of the regime, which finally proved unable to govern the country. This paved the way for the inclusion of business-people and social and political leaders who had been held back by the previous regime. It also opened the way for the repositioning and renegotiation of strategic and tactical alliances within the dominant elite as a whole.

The main basis for this was liberal freedoms, rights and elections, radical decentralization and privatization of the centralist political and military governance, and fostering of the rule of law. However, the commonest conclusion of consistent proponents of the social perspective was that *Reformasi* and "procedural democracy" had been hijacked by business-people and "crooked politicians". This made it necessary to put on hold the previous priorities of confronting state and mainstream politics in favour of advocacy and self-management in widely defined civil society in order to build better conditions for more genuine democratization.

10.2.2 The new party perspective

The new party perspective was more crucial in the Philippines and the semi-autonomous Indonesian province of Aceh. Between 1983 and 1986 it proved possible to undermine and overthrow President Marcos's dictatorship through popular electoral mobilization and "People Power" demonstrations in response to cheating and attempts at a military takeover. This was in sharp contrast to what the forceful Philippine Maoists and many other radical leftists had predicted (Törnquist, 1991). However, the transformations paved the way for the restoration of "*cacique* democracy", to use Ben Anderson's (1988) widely acclaimed notion of how the electoral institutions exported by the former colonial power (the United States) evolved in the context of both feudal-like and capitalist practices. These practices in turn had become less based on patronage and clientelism than previously. Now they were more dependent on coercion, outright cheating, money politics and media dominance (Sidel, 1999, 2004). But, to attract the discontented middle classes, the radicalized CSOs and popular movements, there were also a number of alternative programmes.

Two of the latter measures were of particular importance for the thinking of sections of the political left and the CSOs, who appreciated the

possibilities of moving ahead by way of peaceful democratization. The first was decentralization, which enabled CSOs to engage in local development planning. The second measure was a separate national party list system, which made it possible for programme-oriented new parties to get into parliament with a few representatives in spite of the otherwise predominant machine politics. Together, the two schemes made it worthwhile for CSOs and left-oriented democrats to try to build new parties that in turn could gain media attention and serve as a platform for coordinating various CSOs and popular organizations nationally as well as locally, thus building political alternatives from below (Törnquist, 1993; Quimpo, 2004).

In parts of Indonesia, new parties seemed to be an important option too. This was in spite of the fact that pro-democrats, as I have already said, typically argued that the post-Suharto *Reformasi* and "procedural democracy" in the framework of decentralization had been hijacked by businesspeople and "crooked politicians", so that one had first to build a stronger civil society for more genuine democratization. Some activists added, however, that it might be possible for genuine democrats to advance politically if independent candidates and local parties were allowed in elections. This is what happened in the war-torn and tsunami-affected autonomous province of Aceh. The successful introduction by pro-democrats of the right for local parties and independent candidates to run in elections in Aceh was a vital part of the peace talks in 2005 and served to replace civil war and natural disaster with peace and reconstruction. Thus the new institutions were even projected as a model for the country at large as well as for other conflict areas.

10.2.3 The supplementary perspective

The supplementary perspective was primarily pioneered in the Indian state of Kerala. In the mid-1980s concerned scholars, school teachers and professionals, most of whom were also political and civil society activists, became increasingly disturbed by the problems of sustaining Kerala's world-famous model of human development. This had been a crucial source of inspiration for actors such as the United Nations Development Programme and scholars such as Amartya Sen. Now it was becoming unviable (Isaac and Franke, 2000; Törnquist with Tharakan, 1996).

Contextually there were three basic historical factors underlying the model. The first was the promotion in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of commercial agriculture by semi-autonomous princely states in the southern part of today's Kerala. The second was that some of the extensive socio-religious reform movements that fought the rigid caste system had supported cultural pluralism in addition to demanding equal

citizen rights and state support rather than special privileges for specific communities. In this way, they initiated Kerala's remarkable combination of an extensive civil society and public welfare policies. The third factor was the class-based agrarian reform movement, which grew strongly in the 1930s. This was led by socialists and communists, who also demanded homestead plots for agricultural workers, a multitude of profession-based trade unions, educational groups and credit cooperatives. Later on this became the backbone of the leftist political fronts, which won several elections after the foundation of the state of Kerala in 1956.

However, by the 1980s production had stagnated, in spite of the land reforms and more. The leftist parties had failed to foster a new social pact that could combine welfare reforms and growth. Rather they had become increasingly dependent on their powerful party-related interest groups and unions. In addition, they relied on centralist governance of both their parties and the state, as well as on environmentally unsustainable projects to generate cheap energy for Kerala's few modern industries and ever-increasing and consumerist middle classes (which benefited from extensive migrant labour remittances). Meanwhile, vulnerable people (for example among the most subordinated castes, tribal populations and fisher folk) who had not benefited from the reforms tended to rely on their communities and rarely supported the left.

In contrast to Indonesia, however, the extensive mass-based parties, popular movements and organizations, and citizen groups had not been eliminated. Hence, most of the dissident scholars and activists did not turn their back on organized politics. To promote change, however, the reformists could not just work from inside the existing parties and organizations (with which many of them were anyway rather frustrated). Instead, they further developed a science literature association (Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad, KSSP) into an educational mass movement of knowledgeable and innovative reform facilitators. This movement initiated a number of campaigns related to education and literacy, the mapping of local resources and cooperation among farmers. The main aim was to show how popular participation in community-based welfare and development policies (in contrast to policies driven by special interests) could reform and thus reinvigorate the Kerala model in a sustainable way.

Although some of these campaigns were local success stories, it proved difficult to link them up with existing organizations and to attract leftist politicians who could help scale them up. The next step was therefore to add a campaign for scholarly and professionally planned participatory development, which called for devolution of many resources and decisions to local governments. These governments in turn would be able to develop forums for public administrators, professionals, interest groups

(including among farmers and other producers), unions, citizens' associations and reformist activists in order to fulfil the requirements of centrally sponsored local development plans.

These ideas caught the imagination of more and more scholars, activists and some crucial politicians, including India's and Kerala's communist patriarch E. M. S Namboodiripad, which meant that the influential left front parties did not reject the scheme. All these crucial actors committed themselves to support the format if they won the next elections. So, when they did win the elections in 1996 they had to provide some space for the dynamic reformist activists, in spite of much scepticism and even resistance among the majority of the political, union and interest group leaders. Thus democratic decentralization was initiated both as a policy and in practice, and the reformists gained control of the state planning board. This made it possible to combine devolution of substantial resources to local governments with carefully designed schemes for participatory local planning – involving politicians as well as various other groups, activists and ordinary citizens – of how the funds should be used. In short, state and organized politics was not abandoned, but campaigns generated by civil society called for supplementary expansion of public local government, which in turn could foster joint efforts by politicians, administrators, professionals, interest groups, citizens' associations and people in their neighbourhoods.

What conclusions can briefly be drawn from these longitudinal studies on the politics of fostering popular aspirations through decentralization and local democratization in a variety of contexts? I shall summarize the main results in four points and a conclusion.

10.3 Main results from the longitudinal studies

10.3.1 Room for manoeuvre but divisive and floating democrats

It is true that power has not become more equal at the local level; at times, quite the opposite. In reality there are no Gandhian "village republics". In Indonesia, where the most extensive and radical decentralization occurred, numerous studies have shown that the related politics and policies paved the way for the expansion of powerful elites and the abuse of public resources at the local level (for example, Aspinall and Fealy, 2003; Klinken, 2007, 2009; Nordholt, 2004; Nordholt and Klinken, 2007; Robison and Hadiz, 2004). Yet it is also a fact that, irrespective of the context, decentralization has opened up space for the involvement of CSOs and activists with alternative ideas and followers who would rarely have had the chance of being anything more than discussed in seminar rooms

under more centralist regimes. Hence Antlov and Wetterberg are wrong to suggest (in Chapter 11 in this volume) that I agree with structuralists who exclude the possibility of change brought about by civic and popular actions.

In contrast to Antlov and Wetterberg's positive view of what civil society groups can achieve through advocacy and deliberation, my results suggest that such democratic changes also and primarily require organized and representative democratic politics. Kerala's decentralization paved the way for extensive popular engagement in alternative development plans. Many Philippine CSOs expanded and made an impact at the municipality and village levels, which enabled them to develop alternative policies in conjunction with progressive politicians. And in Indonesia there were similar though more modest tendencies in several districts, but perhaps less so at the village level, where decentralization was held back. However, organizations adhering to the social perspective were unable to make decisive contributions to democratization within the increasingly dispersed and fragmented forms of localized governance, especially in the Philippines and Indonesia but finally also in Kerala. All this will be expanded upon in more detail below.

The empirical evidence from surveys and case studies (which were carried out in consultation with the activists themselves) is unambiguous (Budiman and Törnquist, 2001; Prasetyo et al., 2004; Priyono et al., 2007; Samadhi and Warouw, 2009). Activists who adhered to the social perspective typically associated themselves with fragments of directly affected sections of the population and rarely connected them and facilitated cooperation. For instance, there were few attempts to link activities in workplaces and residential and other communities. Thus these activists contributed to segmented participation in particular localities and on a great variety of specific rights and complaints, neglecting broader perspectives of how to promote better governance, development and public welfare for large sections of the population. The campaigners focused on the institutional means of democracy to promote the rule of law, justice, human rights and basic needs, civil control of the army, attempts to curb corruption, freedom of the media and citizen participation. They paid much less attention to equal and inclusive citizenship, democratic political representation, issue- and interest-based representation, and the government's capacity to implement policies. Hence, our surveys and case studies point to a more diversified civil society engagement than do Antlov and Wetterberg's data (Chapter 11 in this volume).

Moreover, the activists' presence was quite limited within public administration, in public and private workplaces and in organized politics. Their most frequent activities were the collection and dissemination of information, lobbying and pressure group action, and the promotion of

self-management as an alternative to public service and self-help activities against poverty. The activists' sources of access to power and their ways of gaining authority and legitimacy remained focused on their own knowledge and participation in public discourse, at the expense of organization and attempts to gain a public mandate and win elections.

Finally (and in spite of some advances over the years), the advocates of the social perspective remained poorly connected to social movements and popular organizations (and vice versa). Collective action was based mainly on individual networking, popular leaders or alternative patronage, rather than on broad and representative organizations; and their work in relation to elections, parliaments and the executive institutions of the central and local government remained primarily by way of the media, NGOs and pressure and lobby groups.

No doubt this provided the limited number of people involved with some more influence and benefits. And that was a major advance compared with the subordination of people under Suharto, when organized politics (beyond that of the government party) was prohibited at the grassroots level and when ordinary people should thus become a "floating mass". Yet at this point the pro-democracy activists themselves were usually "floating" too, in the sense of lacking extensive and solid social constituencies. They were rarely able to generate substantial democratic improvements in terms of popular control of public affairs on the basis of political equality, with fundamental principles and criteria such as a well-defined demos and public affairs, political equality and democratic representation. One may even argue that several of the organizations contributed to more polycentrism and privatization, thus weakening the basis for local democracy – its just mentioned basic principles. Meanwhile, the same groups were often marginalized or co-opted by more powerful local actors within politics, administration and business as well as by not very democratic but stronger CSOs and international organizations and donors.

Hence one may well agree with Antlov and Wetterberg (Chapter 11 in this volume) that there are a number of positive examples of deliberative citizen engagement in local politics. But, aside from their unconvincing selection of cases, Antlov and Wetterberg do not discuss what conclusions one can draw from their accounts with regard to democratic representation and an enduring political impact given the well-known critical results, which are summarized here.

10.3.2 Subordinated political contracts

One partial exception is organizations that sought to build a variety of strategies to take advantage of what may be termed "post-clientelist" op-

portunities (see Manor, 2010, 2013). In the Indonesian context, this refers to groups that tried to make an impact by entering into cooperation with strong political actors who anyway needed to broaden their alliances and support base by going beyond their predominant clientelist arrangements (Törnquist et al., 2009). Thus they engaged in programmes that attracted broader sections of the population who for instance wished to see less corrupt governance and better public welfare systems. And the politicians very much wanted to improve their reputation by engaging high-profile experts and NGO activists, whose groups would then be given financial support and special favours in return. In this context – and in exchange for lending their good name and endorsing the politicians in elections – pro-democratic groups typically then tried to sign a public memorandum of understanding or "contract" with the politicians on what measures would be implemented in the event that the politicians won the election. They sought to become indispensable to the politicians, to get the measures that they contribute institutionalized, and to design them in such a way that they increased the capacity of wider sections of the population.

Many of these arrangements were limited, however, by the general character of the measures adopted in the agreements, which, moreover, tended to focus on the rather narrow policy areas in which the activists had some influence. Furthermore, most civil and popular actors did not have sufficient bargaining power to enforce the deals. They typically lacked vital campaigners, were unable to deliver a substantial number of votes and were without sustainable organizations to keep successful politicians accountable after the elections. The most positive cases, such as the election and performance of a progressive mayor in the Central Java city of Solo (Surakarta) since 2005 and the 2012 governor election in Jakarta, point to the importance of broader social movements and instrumental populist party politics (see Manor, 2010, 2013; Pratikno and Lay, 2013).

10.3.3 Marginalized alternative parties

In the Philippines in the mid-1990s, NGO campaigners, social movement activists, socialists, communists and former Maoists managed finally to achieve what seemed an impossibility – to build a joint Citizens' Action Party (Akbayan) that was committed to both electoral and extra-parliamentary work on matters of common concern (Quimpo, 2004; Rocamora, 2004; Törnquist, 1993, 2004; Törnquist et al., 2009). First, Akbayan did make some difference in attempts to develop a number of inspiring showcases of alternative governance and development at the very local level. However, it has remained very difficult to scale up these

endeavours. Secondly, the new party became a node for liberal-democratic leftists at the central level, in addition to workers' and farmers' activists. So far Akbayan has not been able to initiate broader political alliances; it has succeeded only in getting some particularly able leaders and experts accepted in influential positions, for instance as government advisers. Also, it has been particularly difficult to combine the immediate need for decisive activism at the central level with long-term efforts towards alternative government politics at the local level. Similarly, the separate party list enabled the party to gain some national-level representation. But the maximum number of seats for each such party was very low and the national-level party list was not the answer to how to combine governance and development work with the electoral struggle at the local level, where the mainstream machine parties and bosses retained full hegemony.

In Indonesia's semi-autonomous province of Aceh, however, the strategy of fostering political inclusion within the framework of decentralization – by way of local parties and independent candidates in the election of local political executives – was decisive in the peace-building process (Törnquist et al., 2011). (One may even say that agreement on democratization preceded peace.) Much of the strategy to promote peace and post-tsunami reconstruction through democratization was promoted by leading reformists in the Free Aceh Movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, GAM) and related CSOs. Remarkably, these leaders and activists even managed to build an alliance and to win the 2006 elections for local executive posts, in spite of resistance from the aristocratic GAM leaders in exile and, of course, the mainstream Indonesian politicians.

Thereafter, however, the advances were rapidly undermined. The international development aid community was busy with post-tsunami reconstruction work and did not make much effort to employ the huge programmes to foster better governance in Aceh. And international political institutions applauded the democratic Ahtisaari peace agreement, but they failed to (or did not want to) understand what international support was needed to sustain its aims. This helped to enable the aristocratic leaders and local strongmen with access to the command structure of the rebel movement to become dominant, to develop power-sharing agreements with former enemies, even in Jakarta, and to do their utmost to marginalize the reformists. Moreover, the reformists themselves were not very successful in using their new executive positions in the provincial government and in most of the districts to promote inclusive alternative development and thus were not able to resist clientelism and corruption when needing to retain their positions. They also neglected the need to foster popular movements and democratic channels for in-

terest group representation as crucial supplements to liberal-democratic party politics, elections and lobby groups, which the powerful local elite were more skilled in abusing for their own purposes (Törnquist, 2013a).

10.3.4 Supplementary democracy side-tracked

In Kerala, the advocates of the supplementary democracy perspective were initially very successful. Temporarily they even gained hegemony in fostering democratic decentralization combined with a full range of the kind of supplementary channels of democratic popular influence that were instrumental in promoting inclusive development agendas at the local level. The initiatives were even broader than the participatory budgeting practices in Brazil (see Blair, Chapter 6 in this volume). Yet there were also a number of serious challenges (Tharakan, 2004; Törnquist, 2004; Törnquist with Tharakan, 1996; Törnquist et al., 2009; see also Heller, 2005; Heller et al., 2007).

The main challenge was to combine the new channels of participation with the established system of interest-based representation and the elected institutions of local government – all of which in Kerala were also affected by the fact that Kerala was modernized in the context of reform movements based on caste and religion. The contradictions between the established liberal-democratic system and the new forms of participation and representation were a problem of democratic principles as well as of power. In Brazil, both mainstream political representation and interest and community groups were seriously de-legitimized by being elitist and clientelist, whereas the new Workers' Party, which initiated the participatory budgeting process, was seen as an unsullied newcomer. In Kerala, the established system of representation had indeed deteriorated but was still acting as a channel for the most powerful interests and popular aspirations. In fact, most major leftist leaders and parties were very much rooted in the old system too. So, when the Kerala reformists initiated new avenues of democratic popular influence by way of top-level support for decentralization and popular participation, this was seen as a threat by a wide array of established politicians, interest organizations (for example, among workers, farmers, employers, special castes and religious communities) and central bureaucrats, line departments and associated contractors.

Moreover, this was a question not just of central versus local but also of competition between vested interests in different channels of influence, including at the very local level. So when the new processes of planning and participation proceeded beyond discussion to the altering of power relations and the distribution of funds, conflicts increased,

accusations ran wild and compromises and accommodation of various interests became inevitable. This made implementation quite difficult, even to the extent that the new participatory channels of influence could rarely be utilized to restrain political and other special interests and to contain abuse and corruption. Hence it is remarkable that the reformists, who wanted to foster more democratic space for ordinary people who were marginalized or critical of the special interests anyway, never paid serious attention to how it would be possible in theory and in practice to combine conventional democratic representation and interest group influence, on the one hand, with new and additional channels of more direct participation, on the other hand. (And, at the time of writing, it is obvious that the issue remains unresolved even at the national level, given the current conflict in India over the authority of elected but often corrupt politicians versus self-appointed anti-corruption campaigners.)

Another major challenge was the focus on targeting the poor in the decentralized planning of various developments and welfare measures. On the one hand, it was a priority that *all* people in need of support should be dealt with on an equal basis irrespective of political or other affiliations, in addition to special support for women's concerns. In principle this was applauded by many people who were frustrated with the special privileges accorded to well-connected people and were sympathetic to more universal and impartial practices. On the other hand, however, the targeting of the poor also meant that huge numbers of less vulnerable people and not least the resourceful and entrepreneurial middle classes felt that there was very little for them in decentralized participatory planning; and hence they rarely engaged with it.

A third stumbling block was the lack of a viable strategy for linking the democratic practices and welfare measures to a strategy for economic growth. The most fundamental reason for decentralization and participatory planning was that the Kerala model of human development had been undermined by economic stagnation. Yet the new efforts never managed to foster growth coalitions that acknowledged and even benefited from welfare measures (for example, George, 1993, 2011). Decentralization and participatory planning had an insignificant effect on production and employment. One apparent reason was that this would have called for the politically uncomfortable exposure of petty rent-seeking among some of the supporters of the leftist parties themselves, as well as for much more priority being given to production-oriented measures in development planning than to separate welfare measures that might attract specific voters. In this respect, one may thus agree with Romeo (Chapter 3 in this volume) that it is crucial to analyse the political economy and developmental aspects of decentralization, not just

"good governance". Yet, although normative rather than empirically rooted analyses of "good governance" are certainly problematic, one should also consider the historical fact that improved governance and democratization too have fostered growth, at best even inclusive growth, including by way of the representation of production-oriented interests among employers and employees (see Stokke and Törnquist, 2013a, 2013b).

A final major challenge was that most of the reformists tried to stay out of organized "dirty" politics without forming any alternative vehicle, thus being easy to silence and marginalize. When the immensely influential communist patriarch E. M. S Namboodiripad passed away in 1998 it was even possible for conservative communist critics to suggest that those who subscribed to his longstanding ideas of decentralization and reduction of the party-politicization of interest organizations in favour of development priorities were actually influenced instead by the World Bank and neo-liberalism. Likewise, conventional politicians were fielded as candidates in the local and state elections in 2000 and 2001, even in constituencies where reformists (including several women) had gained a good reputation. Thus, ironically, the left-oriented parties did not just have a poor election in the state at large but they also lost where decentralization and participation had been quite successful. Meanwhile, the conservative communists gained the upper hand in various ideological and factional struggles inside the parties. This in turn implied that many of the civil society activists who were not very active or even formally enrolled in any of the parties had lost influence and confidence in the concerted efforts and campaigns, no matter whether they were expelled or branded as next to traitors by the conservative party leaders. It is true that decentralization had survived when the left parties got back into power in 2006 and that several leaders now said that they would support a second phase of participatory planning. But critical public discussion and evaluation remained held back and most of the political and popular momentum to use decentralization to foster local democratization and to combine welfare and growth had been lost.

10.4 Conclusions and implications: The primacy of transformative politics

In spite of the problems in all the cases that have been reported above, there are clear indications that, when an organization made substantive advances in any of the contexts, these advances were related to political coordination among the groups themselves, as well as popular-based cooperation with democracy-oriented politicians and local governments

that could open up positive channels of influence for actors of change and thus also the strengthening of their organizations and joint work. The kind of new "citizen politics" that Antlov and Wetterberg point to (Chapter 11 in this volume) has rarely made any long-lasting political impact and typically also neglects the basics of democracy in terms of well-developed representation. In other words, the advancing of popular aspirations by way of decentralization towards local democratization required demands from below for political coordination and top-down schemes that opened the way for actors in favour of democracy and inclusive development to have a beneficial influence. The keywords are thus transformative politics towards improved democratic representation (see Stokke and Törnquist, 2013a; Webster et al., 2009).

However, most of these efforts were not strong enough to survive. This raises the question of how such attempts can be strengthened and become more viable. The experiences from the earlier studies point in two directions.

The first is to recall (as stated in the introduction) that the normative postulation that decentralization of power and governance from centralized and often authoritarian institutions to local state units and governments, as well as to markets and widely defined CSOs, would open the way for "everything good", including local democracy and popular-oriented growth, has not proved generally valid. Hence it is necessary instead to specify the aim in terms of a democracy that can be used by ordinary people and not just the elite (see Ribot, Chapter 4 in this volume). This is easier said than done because democracy itself is a multi-dimensional moving target.[3] But it is not impossible, and the next step would be to engage in critical empirical studies of whether and how the politics of decentralization have actually fostered or contradicted such goals in different contexts.

The second measure is to engage in comparatives studies in these respects. The frequent assessments of the deficits in local democratization specify what should be improved but say very little about how it could be done; and this allows for arbitrary interpretations of the results. It is better, but also not enough, to know the dynamics of the roots and challenges in a particular context in order to discuss possible options and opportunities. To gain the necessary alternative perspectives, one must also add comparative studies of previous experiences with transformative politics.

What can be learnt, for instance, from the most positive attempts to tackle the challenges that have been identified in this chapter? Scandinavia may be a prime case in point. Its unique and historically successful experiences of fostering a combination of, on the one hand, strong interest-based movements among farmers and workers in particular and

citizen rights based organizations and, on the other hand, effective and trustworthy central and local government institutions have contributed to social pacts between trade unions and employers on how to combine welfare and economic growth (for example, Breman, 2006; Esping-Andersen, 1985, 1990). Currently these experiences are attracting increasing attention in the global South, as reflected, for instance, in the recent flagship report from the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development on combating poverty and inequality (UNRISD, 2010).

This does not imply that specific institutions and policies can be exported, but the structures and forms of democratic politics are less contextual and characteristic of their time and may thus serve as a source of inspiration (see Stokke and Törnquist, 2013b). A recent example is the district of South Aceh. As already indicated in this chapter, contextual research from a theoretical perspective shows that the inclusive democratic model that facilitated peace and reconstruction has been weakened by the dominance of powerful elites, insufficiently accountable and development-oriented government, and the lack of interest-based organizations beyond clientelism, middle-class NGOs and lobby groups (Törnquist et al., 2011; Törnquist, 2013a). In South Aceh, these tendencies are very explicit. A local research team has mapped the problems of public action and tried to understand why it is so difficult for the main actors and ordinary people to come together to discuss and decide on welfare and development priorities despite the new freedoms and elections. A major conclusion is that the basic problem is the weak position and capacity of development-oriented administrators, producers and labourers (Avonius, 2011). There are numerous schemes for consultation, as well as associations and community and customary groups, but they materialize mainly when top-down instructions are given and support is expected. Most importantly, they tend to be driven by the already powerful vested interests and they usually fail to represent potential actors of change. Based on how similar problems were addressed historically in Scandinavia, one may therefore study the possible potential of a supplementary development forum with a clear focus on fostering a welfare-based growth coalition related to productive sectors with the best potential, such as fishing, and based on key representative actors from government as well as the businesspeople, small-scale producers and labourers involved. Most importantly, it should also provide preferential treatment in support of better interest-based democratic representation of such key actors to enhance their capacity and power to foster political transformation.

It has been argued by James Manor among others (Manor 2010, 2013, and Chapter 2 in this volume) that transformative strategies and practices for better representation call for strong political support, which is

simply not available in most contexts in the global South. There is much to this concern but I would like to conclude by putting forward three counter-arguments.

The first argument is that much of the success of the Kerala experience was in spite of rather than thanks to the political support of the left front parties, and the Communist Party of India(Marxist) (CPI(M)) in particular. As already indicated (in sub-sections 10.2.3 and 10.3.4 on the Kerala experiments), some leading leftist politicians did indeed support the efforts, especially in the initial stages, but large parts of the CPI(M) as well as of other leftist parties and their related interest associations were quite reluctant to introduce decentralization and supplementary institutions and practices of participatory democracy; and after 2001 some of them even denounced the efforts as revisionist. It may also be added that when the CPI(M) leaders did come out in defence of the efforts for a brief period in 1999 and 2000 it was mainly in response to criticism by competing leftist parties, which even caused some CPI(M) cadres to try to dominate the new institutions, thus at times causing harm rather than providing support.

The second contention is that even the Scandinavian experiences, which later turned into an idealized model, did not develop out of as supportive historical conditions as is generally taken for granted. In fact, the most important lessons are from the period just before social democracy became hegemonic, that is, when the foundations of the major advances were shaped. The key period of transformation unfolded in the late 1920s and early 1930s with poverty, economic crisis, extensive conflicts in the labour market, weak governments and emerging threats from fascist and Nazi welfare policies; and the unique lessons are precisely the social democratic politics that dealt with these challenges. Innovative political strategies were thus crucial (Berman, 2006; Esping-Andersen, 1985, 1990; Stokke and Törnquist, 2013a). I would argue that the same applies to the periods of success in Aceh, the Philippines and Kerala.

The third argument relates to Manor's own proposition (2010, 2013) that the dynamics of post-clientelism have generated a new space for local democratization. My studies support this, and one may add that there is a new need in rapidly industrializing countries such as India for general social and employment security schemes (see Chatterjee, 2008; Harriss et al., 2011; UNRISD, 2010). If so, it may be possible to identify new opportunities for innovative pro-democratic strategies beyond local post-clientelism. And, even if it is implausible, it would be rational if the Scandinavian countries redirected – in the interests of sustaining their own welfare states in a global order – their international policies and development cooperation towards innovative strategies and agents of similar democratic and welfare-oriented regimes.

Notes

1. In this chapter I shall therefore primarily refer to the reports from these studies. These reports in turn include additional references to related research that I draw on and/or criticize. For a general review of the results up to 2001, see Törnquist (2002) and relevant chapters in the anthologies edited by Harriss et al. (2004) and Törnquist et al. (2009).

2. See Törnquist (1990, 1997 and 2000), in addition to Budiman and Törnquist (2001) and Prasetyo et al. (2004); for the more general political economy and mainstream politics, see, for example, Aspinall (2005); Robison (1987); and Robison and Hadiz (2004).

3. Space does not permit me to engage here in the challenges of defining the basic institutions of democracy and the crucial factors that have an impact on their quality as well as on whether and how people can use and further develop them. See, however, the theoretical and methodological sections in the two basic reports from the national participatory democracy surveys in Indonesia (Priyono et al., 2007; and Samadhi and Warouw, 2009), the elaboration on democratic representation in Törnquist (2009), and the summary of lessons learnt in Törnquist (2013b).

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