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POPULISM AND PHILIPPINE CIVIL SOCIETY:

Views from Labor, Urban Poor, and Development NGOs



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Margarita Lopa Perez

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incitegov@incitegov.org.ph | incitegov.org.ph



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Project Leader
Corazon Juliano-Soliman

Coordinator
Marilou M. Ibanez

Editorial Team
Corazon Juliano-Soliman
Teresita Quintos Deles
Veronica Fenix Villavicencio

Writer
Margarita Lopa Perez

Copy Editor
Paulynn P. Sicam

Layout by Verlie Q. Retulin
Cover design by Paul John V. Domalaon
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FOREWORD

Before the 2016 elections, then Davao City Mayor Rodrigo Duterte has packaged himself as the antithesis of a traditional politician. A local government official from Mindanao, he caught the attention of the whole country with his no-nonsense talk on curbing illegal drugs and his message, peppered with vulgar words, resonated with 16 million Filipinos. He earned the respect of those who had been disenfranchised historically, they saw in him someone who took notice of their plight, and that catapulted him to the position of top executive.

Four years into presidency, with thousands of Filipinos killed and his self-imposed timelines for campaign promises unfinished, President Duterte has polarized once strong coalitions, people's organizations, and networks. While some remain supportive and hopeful of the President with two more years in power, some have also withdrawn their support from the strongman. Civil society organizations and organized sectors grapple with the populist methods of the current administration while attempting to do the impossible task of balancing conflicting interests.

This study by INCITEGov on populism aims to look at Philippine society today and civil society's engagement with government. It engaged the sectors to voice out their opinions and widen the discourse on leadership and governance. It asks the difficult questions and explores answers which can shed light on why unity seems like a daunting task for civil society today. It looks back, tracing the history of civil society engagement with the government and the private sector, identifying the divergent perspectives of CSOs and people's organizations on democratic leadership and governance.

Australian philosopher Kate Manne's theory on trickle down aggression, with the United States and Donald Trump as context, can also be seen here in the Philippines. The populist president divides and conquers — wherever you want to place yourself in the political spectrum, trickle down aggression eventually results in disrespect for those who differ from us. What's worse is that it gives a sense of disenfranchisement of rights. We lose our basic freedom of speech: our ability to converse and listen to each other, and reduce the interaction into hateful exchanges. Ultimately, we lose our humanity. We retreat into our bubbles and echo chambers, shutting out those who think differently from us.

The study endeavors to take the first step: restart our ability to listen and empathize. This study looks at the diversity of the various sectors and the issues they face, as

well as their understanding of the current leadership as it relates to the issues and advocacies they promote. Civil society, especially people's organizations, has played, and will always play, an important role in enriching the democratic participation of citizens — a countervailing force to institutions of authority that ensures the recognition and promotion of the well-being and rights of the citizens especially the marginalized sectors.

We would like to acknowledge the team in INCITEGov who were the first to give a thoughtful consideration of the impact of populism on civil society. This group consisted of INCITEGov Chair Teresita Quintos Deles and Trustees Dr. Mary Racelis and Dr. Edilberto de Jesus. They convened early in 2018 to undertake a review of events and trends surrounding the 2016 elections, to craft the research questions, and provide the framework for the study. Under their oversight, focused group discussions with basic sectors were conducted, the results of which were consolidated and presented in a national consultation held in Discovery Suites in Pasig City on September 13, 2018. We also would like to acknowledge the Asia Democracy Research Network for providing funding support for this seminal work that became the basis of a more in-depth study which is now in this publication. We acknowledge the support provided by Reuben James Barrete, the research assistant and writer, to our team of trustees in 2018. We'd like to also thank our friends and partners who generously shared their time and invaluable insights as we conducted validation and peer-review sessions towards the concluding stages of this study. They include Dr. Anna Marie Karaos, Alice Murphy, Jessica Amon, Fides Bagasao, Ibarra "Bong" Malonzo, Bobbit Librojo, and Rene Ofreneo. They also include our key informant interviewees who are too many to mention here. Finally, we would like to thank the team that spent considerable amount of time in putting this study together: Teresita Quintos Deles, for her sharp insights in improving the final versions; Veronica Villavicencio, our trustee, for her discerning eye in providing oversight on the look and feel of this book; Verlie Retulin, our Communications Officer, for her sharp and patient attention to details; and the rest of the INCITEGov staff who all contributed to making this publication possible. Finally, we would like thank the writer, Margarita Ana Lopa Perez, for her keen ability to listen and capture our collective thoughts with extraordinary perception and speed.

I hope this study will make leaps toward enhancing and preserving our democracy as we face the challenge of defining and creating a better normal for our society.

CORAZON JULIANO- SOLIMAN
INCITEGov

INTRODUCTION

In May 2016, former Davao City Mayor Rodrigo Roa Duterte claimed an election victory that would install him as the 16th President of the Republic of the Philippines; the first from Mindanao, the southernmost region of the country, to hold that office. Duterte, a dark horse candidate, would win the election using a populist frame, couching his campaign promises in a pro-poor and anti-elitist veneer while projecting the image of a "strong man" who would be tough on crime. He played to his audiences with invective-ridden speeches that were openly misogynistic but also calculated to make him appear approachable to the masses. A son of Mindanao, he appealed to a number of Filipinos who felt marginalized by decades of Manila-centric and elite-dominated leadership in government. For some, this was enough reason to support him, despite the starkly conflicting images of the man of the masses who slept best under a mosquito net and yet also happened to be the privileged scion of a local political family[1]; the tough talking mayor who always preferred to accept an invitation from a barangay captain over a professional organization, but who was also known to openly cultivate ties with wealthy, local businessmen.[2]

Since Mayor Duterte assumed the office of the President in June 2016, he and his allies have worked to systematically erode the core democratic values and institutions in the country. Today, his critics decry Duterte's lack of remorse in enlisting key institutions such as Congress, the Supreme Court, and the police, among others, to carry out his agenda, in complete disregard for the rule of law or constitutional mandate.

Since Duterte assumed office, thousands of individuals — primarily small-time drug dealers and users — have been slaughtered in extra judicial killings (EJKs) as part of his War on Drugs. More than halfway through his term, the drug problem remains; illegal drugs continue to pour into the country and Duterte himself has publicly acknowledged that the drug problem has worsened.[3]

Critics who have spoken in defense of democracy and called out President Duterte on his administration's systematic violation of human rights have had to contend with the President's wrath and vindictiveness with which he has wielded his power over them. Senator Leila de Lima, who served as chairperson of the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) from 2008 until 2010 and was Department of Justice (DOJ) Secretary from 2010 to 2015 during the administration of President Benigno S. Aquino III, was one such critic. As CHR chair, de Lima investigated the activities of the Davao Death Squad, to which at least a thousand killings in Davao were

attributed during the 20-year term of then Mayor Duterte. The investigation ground to a halt when Duterte became president in 2016 and after de Lima left the DOJ to run for senator. As senator, de Lima would earn the ire of the new president when she spoke out against the EJKs. Trumped up drug charges, based on the testimony of drug convicts, were filed by the DOJ against the senator. As of this writing, de Lima has been languishing in prison under questionable circumstances for more than three years.

Former Supreme Court Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno, who was vocal in her criticism of the President's War on Drugs, was the next critic to be targeted by the Duterte administration. She faced impeachment proceedings initiated by some members of the lower house of Congress on the basis of her alleged failure to file her Statement of Assets, Liabilities, and Net Worth (SALN) — a requirement for all State employees — for the period covered by her teaching stint at the University of the Philippines (UP) College of Law. Before the impeachment process could progress, the Solicitor General succeeded in filing at the Supreme Court a *quo warranto* petition to void Sereno's appointment as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. The legal basis for the petition was Sereno's alleged lack of integrity, as proven by the absence of SALN documentation covering her years of teaching. Sereno's fate was decided by the Supreme Court *en banc*; her fellow justices voted (8 to 6) to remove her from office. Following a motion for reconsideration, which Sereno filed before the Supreme Court to nullify the *quo warranto* decision, the Court would rule with finality on her removal from office in June 2018.

Most recently, Maria Ressa, chief executive officer of Rappler, an online news website known to be critical of President Duterte, earned his ire over what he describes as Rappler's "twisted reporting".[4] Ressa was convicted, along with Rappler researcher-writer Reynaldo Santos Jr., for cyber libel charges on June 15, 2020.[5] The conviction was related to a Rappler report which mentioned the alleged involvement of Wilfredo Keng, a Chinese businessman, in drug and human trafficking. Previously, Ressa had been arrested on libel charges stemming from this same report on Feb. 13, 2019; agents of the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI) served a warrant of arrest just before 5p.m. when most government offices, including courts, close, precluding Ressa's posting bail and meant to ensure a night in jail for the multi-awarded journalist. To date, Ressa faces an array of eight different court cases, which include four tax violation charges related to the transfer of Philippine depository receipts (PDRs) to foreign entities and an additional libel charge related to the Keng article, filed against her and the media outfit.[6] While Ressa and Santos remain free on post-conviction bail for as long as the cyber libel conviction is under appeal (it is appealable all the way to the Supreme Court), many see the onslaught of cases directed against Ressa and Rappler as a sustained and direct attack on press freedom, and once again, the harassment of yet another Duterte critic.

Apart from these three prominent women who have been singled out for daring to speak out against the Duterte administration, the President has also set his sights

on opposition Senator Antonio Trillanes IV and CHR chair Jose Luis Martin Gascon. The President attempted but failed to revive charges against Trillanes' acts of rebellion carried out in 2003 and 2007 and for which then President Benigno S. Aquino III had already granted him amnesty. Regarding CHR chair Chito Gascon, the President vowed to allocate a measly one thousand pesos (₱1,000) for the agency's annual budget. He also called Gascon names for his preoccupation with the series of unresolved deaths of teenagers in Metro Manila.[7] Duterte has also publicly accused Catholic Archdiocese of Caloocan Bishop Pablo Virgilio "Ambo" David of stealing from Church coffers and being a drug user. The public has received these verbal attacks with much incredulity as well as a sobering recognition that this administration is willing to pull out all the stops to silence any Duterte critic, regardless of stature or background.

Despite the killings, despite the rampant violation of human rights, and despite the current administration's failure to deliver on his campaign promises, even his avowed priority agenda to put an end to the drug trade, surveys show that President Duterte's net satisfaction and trust ratings remain high. The President, if surveys are to be believed, appears to have the continued support of an overwhelming number of Filipinos.[8]

In the light of such popular support, civil society groups have had to engage in soul searching even as they confront the urgent challenge of defending democracy. How is it possible that the Philippines, a country that had already engaged in a decades-long struggle against a dictatorship and emerged victorious in its defense of democracy, could so easily hand off control of its leadership to such a man as Duterte? How is it that in spite of all that he has done, Duterte can still enjoy support in a country with a civil society long known for pioneering efforts in citizen engagement and people's empowerment? How is it that institutions have crumbled so easily in one of the most vibrant democracies in Asia?

"How is it that institutions have crumbled so easily in one of the most vibrant democracies in Asia?"

It is with these questions in mind, that the International Center for Innovation, Transformation, and Excellence in Governance (INCITEGov) sought to undertake this study.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PUBLICATION

This report attempts to present the emergence of populism in the context of the Philippines and its manifestation in the leadership of President Rodrigo Duterte. It likewise aims to present the current challenges posed to civil society given the dynamics of these developments in the country's history.

The paper seeks to fulfill the following specific objectives:

- To look into the evolution of Duterte's brand of populism as seen in his campaign for the presidency and eventually, his approach to governance;
- To look into Philippine civil society's views on populism by taking a closer look at these basic sectors' relationships with Duterte, his candidacy, and his avowed style of leadership and governance;
- Views of select sectors in Philippine civil society (labor, urban poor, and development non-government organizations/NGOs) will be written up as individual cases; and
- To draw a quick map of any emerging opposition movement and draw out connections with established civil society centers.

METHODOLOGY USED

The study used several approaches to data gathering, including:

1. Review of Relevant Literature

The study looked into published work by government, non-government organizations, and academic institutions alike, on populism and civil society in the global, regional, and national context. It also used, as reference, articles from major broadsheets and online publications.

2. Focus Group Discussions

Two focus group discussions (FGD) were initially conducted with participants coming from the basic sectors. Most of the participants were members of people's organizations; a few, however, did not belong to any organized group. The first set of FGDs was held to draw a quick inventory of basic sector perceptions about the Duterte presidency in relation to trends and analyses surfaced in the review of relevant literature.

Another set of FGDs, this time with key stakeholders, experts, and focal persons representing the different sectors[9] was held to validate the initial trends coming out of the report and provide additional feedback. This was conducted to enrich the analysis with inputs from the stakeholder groups.

3. Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews (KII) were conducted with civil society members representing the three sectors identified for the study, which served as the basis for drawing out the sectors' views on and responses to Rodrigo Roa Duterte's campaign and presidency.

KEY SECTIONS OF THE PAPER

The paper will discuss the following themes:

What is Populism?

This section will look into the literature on Populism and key elements that define it as it has emerged globally over recent years.

The Basic Sectors and their Engagement with the Duterte Administration

Civil Society's engagement with and responses to Duterte's brand of populism as reflected in his candidacy and governance style will be broken down into sectoral case studies, information for which will be drawn from the results of the FGDs and KIIs per sector. Three case studies will delve into the experiences of a) Development NGOs; b) Labor groups; and c) the Urban Poor.

Civil Society and the Growth of a Resistance Movement

The paper will also look into various forms of organized resistance to the Duterte administration.

It will begin by looking into the role traditionally played by civil society in the Philippines, highlighting its long history of engagement in the empowerment of basic sectors as well as the strategic role it has played in the protection of democracy and the promotion of good governance. It will also look into the current critical challenges facing the basic sectors today.

It will look at how civil society has responded to the threats to democracy under the Duterte administration. It will explore the efforts of four primary formations, *Tindig Pilipinas,* Movement Against Tyranny, *Kalipunan,* and the Coalition for Justice; and one people's organization, the *Samahang Nagkakaisang Pamilya ng Pantawid* (SNPP).

Concluding Chapter

The publication will conclude with a brief discussion on the challenges that face civil society as well as windows of opportunity that have presented themselves to re-energize CSOs in the face of these challenges, and new synergies that are being formed through the emergent responses to the signs of the times.



PHOTO FROM TINDIG PILIPINAS' FACEBOOK PAGE

UNDERSTANDING POPULISM

Populism has taken on various forms all over the world and has been widely adopted by a number of leaders from the left to the right of the political spectrum.

On one hand, there is Donald Trump, who assumed office as the 45th president of the United States of America in 2016 under the campaign slogan, "Make America Great Again". The underlying idea behind that tag line is that America has been on the decline, with an economic system that offers few prospects for its citizens, particularly the poor. There is also antipathy towards those who are considered to be "outsiders", immigrants, in particular, largely from the white working class who have felt a growing disaffection through the years.[10]

France has Marine Le Pen, far-right leader who ran for President and lost to Emmanuel Macron in 2017. She had previously attempted to distance herself from the anti-Semitism which her father Jean-Marie had espoused as party founder of the Front National. She expelled him from the party and renamed it Rassemblement National (RN) or National Rally in an attempt to restore its tarnished reputation. Nevertheless, she managed to gather 34 percent of the vote with her largely anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim rhetoric. She continues to make the news with her attempts to ally with other conservative, right wing forces in Europe with whom she claims shared points of view, proclaiming, "The European Union is dead. Long live Europe."[11]

Hungary's Viktor Orban emerged from a background as a youthful democracy advocate in the late '80s, into the pioneering spirit behind what he now calls an "illiberal democracy", and what some authors have describe as a semi-authoritarian regime.[12] Press freedom, an independent judiciary, asylum seekers, and non-government organizations alike have not been spared under Orban's campaign to restore a Hungary free from the interventions of what he describes as a global elite supported by Brussels-based European Union bureaucrats, both of whom he believes are out to establish a "new, mixed, Islamized Europe". Since 2015, the razor wire fences which line the border between Hungary and Serbia stand testament to Orban's hard line stance against any quotas for asylum seekers mandated by the EU. Orban has been quoted as saying that "Multiculturalism has no place in Hungary."

On the other hand, there was Venezuela's Hugo Chavez who rode the tide of populism to a presidency that would have spanned four terms (from 1999 to 2013) had he not died a few months after his fourth and final election victory. Initial support for

"Populists govern with the idea that they and only they can represent the people. This provides the moral justification for state occupation, mass clientelism and corruption, and the suppression of anything that resembles a critical civil society."

his self-named movement, *Chavismo,* was a response to what were perceived to be the shortcomings of democracy. Like many populists before and after him, Chavez presented himself as the strong leader who would stand up to the elite powers and break down unresponsive, undemocratic institutions, and impose the will of the people. His brand of "leftist populism" was said to have taken a path which by all appearances may have started out looking and feeling democratic but eventually turned into "democratic backsliding and authoritarianism".[13] Years after his death, Venezuela continues to grapple with the repercussions of a leadership which simply pitted what was defined by Chavez as "popular will" against all else — be they journalists, judges, the opposition — who dared to oppose it.

Other left-wing populist parties, like Podemos in Spain[14] and Syriza in Greece[15] that emerged in 2015, were hailed by the followers of political theorists Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau, who see populism as constituting the essence of democratic politics.[16] The list of populists that dominate global politics goes on and on, it seems.

Some authors have ventured to say that Populism, as it is made up and applied through these varied political contexts, contain similar threads. Jan-Werner Müller for one, in his book, *"What is Populism?"* outlines seven key theses that helps to provide a better understanding of Populism:

1. Populism contests the dominance of currently powerful elites.
2. Populists claim that they and they alone are the real representatives of "the people". All others are illegitimate, not to mention immoral.
3. Populism is concerned with a symbolic representation of the "real people" from which the correct policy is deduced rather than a genuine process through which the common good is arrived.
4. Populism is not a path to more participation in politics. Electoral exercises are useful only in that they merely confirm what has already been determined to be the will of the real people.

"While populism does not correct the limitations of liberal democracy as its proponents may aver, it provides some insights into the failures of liberal democracy and its inability to represent certain interest groups."

5. Populists govern with the idea that they and only they can represent the people. As such, this provides the moral justification for state occupation, mass clientelism and corruption, and the suppression of anything that resembles a critical civil society. They will perpetuate themselves in power in support of this idea.
6. Populists are a danger to democracy, not just "liberalism".
7. Populism, while it does not correct the limitations of liberal democracy as its proponents may aver, provides some insights into the failures of liberal democracy and its inability to represent certain interest groups. Moreover, Werner Müller also believes that it should spur introspection into certain general moral questions, among them: What are the criteria for belonging to the polity? Why exactly is pluralism worth preserving? And how can one address the concerns of populist voters who are understood as free and equal citizens, not as pathological cases of men and women driven by frustration, anger, and resentment?

"Only by recognizing and celebrating plurality within any society, can populism's foundations be successfully rejected."

As Cass Mudde, the Dutch political scientist has pointed out, the Populist *zeitgeist* or the spirit that currently defines the times, undeniably pervades both politics, as well as the language that predominates both traditional and social media (i.e., seen in terms such as "common sense", the "silent majority", the "corrupt elite").[17] More and more, we are made aware of the sentiment that there is an "enemy" — a catch-all populist construct that can at times refer to an economic (oligarchs) or political elite (*dilawan* or yellows) or a sub-group of undesirables in society (drug users) — that needs to be either overthrown or completely eliminated by "the people".

In order to counter this populist *zeitgeist*, Mudde says, one cannot revert to populism "lite" (a superficial, simplistic understanding of what populism represents) or anti-populism (a reversal of populist tenets, viewing "the people" as corrupt and the elite as morally pure and good). This means that politicians need to cease to (or pretend to) speak for "the people". Rather, what is needed is a recognition and true understanding of the fact that society is made up of diverse groups with their own interests and values. For politicians, that means representing their electorate but acknowledging that other interest groups are equally valid and legitimate. Only by recognizing and celebrating plurality within any society, can populism's foundations be successfully rejected.



PHOTO BY VERLIE Q. RETULIN

CONVERSATIONS ON THE 2016 ELECTIONS

Filipinos had an opportunity to see populism at play in the presidential elections of 2016, when former Davao City Mayor Rodrigo R. Duterte bested five other aspirants in the race for the presidency. Duterte, who wielded the populist card during his campaign, emerged the victor with 16,601,997 or 39.01 percent of all votes cast for president.[18]

Focus group discussions (FGD)[19] among several basic sector groups were initiated in order to get a deeper understanding of their perspectives on the 2016 Elections. Foremost among the question raised was, *"Prior to the 2016 Presidential elections, what were the characteristics of a president you were looking for?"*

PREFERENCE FOR CANDIDATES

The first group, composed of farmers, fisherfolk, urban poor, labor, and overseas workers, expressed their preference for candidates who embodied an expressed bias in favor of workers and the ordinary people. The person, they felt, should not be identified with the elite. The group also expressed a compelling need for drastic change in the political and social order.

A few participants in the first FGD also intimated that they favored candidates who represented continuity of policies and programs started under the Aquino administration. These candidates, they claimed, should embody the economic vision necessary to move the country's development forward.

One participant mentioned that the ideal president would merge the qualities of the late President Diosdado Macapagal, who possessed a deeply-rooted relationship with the people, with that of former President Benigno S. Aquino III, who governed the country guided by a clear economic vision.

On the same question, the second FGD, composed of representatives of Muslim Mindanao communities, non-Catholic Christians, women, and development NGO networks expressed their preference for candidates who offered a fresh face, a *tabula rasa* or clean slate in terms of goals, ideas, and experience. The candidate they preferred was not a traditional politician and one who should be able to measure up to a degree of moral and intellectual excellence. Finally, they mentioned that their preferred candidate could ably represent Mindanao and bring about change.

DUTERTE'S POPULIST APPEAL

When pressed about their thoughts on the candidacy of Mayor Duterte, the FGD participants noted that the idea of having a president from Mindanao for the first time in the country's history gave him enormous appeal to the masses. This is a response to the perception held by many that the island region of Mindanao has always been relegated to the periphery in terms of the national, political and economic life. Mayor Duterte, the rebel and outsider from Mindanao, was seen as the person who would change this situation. His candidacy represented an active resistance to Manila's "imperialism" and constituted a significant part of the "change" that he vowed to undertake.

"Duterte's candidacy represented an active resistance to Manila's 'imperialism' and constituted a significant part of the 'change' that he vowed to undertake."

Duterte presented himself as part "of the masses", with what some interpreted to be his own definition of a "preferential option for the poor".[20] He looked, spoke and cursed like a man who belonged in the streets. For some voters, his appeal stemmed from his rough exterior and coarse language. The fact that his language was often misogynistic or disrespectful of women mattered little to his supporters, many of whom countered that he actually took women's rights seriously and even introduced programs supportive of women's issues in Davao during his term as mayor. The fact that he claimed that he would kill and spill blood in his Drug War mattered little to those who saw this as proof that he was capable of wielding the strong arm of the law. Some of his supporters would, in time, even laud his making good on that campaign promise.

In the end, Duterte's uncharacteristic behavior reinforced the perceived preference for a strong-willed President defiant of elite social norms who would bring about the changes so badly needed in the Philippines.



PHOTO FROM TINDIG PILIPINAS' FACEBOOK PAGE

CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE PHILIPPINES:

The Basic Sectors and their Engagement with the State

Against this backdrop, the study went on to look more closely at the experiences of organized sectoral groups, in particular, (1) development NGOs, (2) labor, and (3) urban poor. It sought to draw out their experiences in the context of the following: (1) The sector's nature of engagement with the Aquino administration, (2) How the sector voted during the 2016 elections; and (3) How it navigated the early years of the Duterte administration and where they now stand in relation to government.

CAUCUS OF DEVELOPMENT NGOS (CODE-NGO)

The Caucus of Development NGO Networks (CODE-NGO), the largest aggrupation of development NGO networks in the Philippines, was established in 1991 with the intent to synergize the sector's efforts and scale up its impact. It ratified a Covenant for Philippine Development that encapsulated the network's development goals and principles for the country, and established a Code of Conduct among its members to promote professionalism and expand the reach of social development work.

Roselle Rasay, CODE-NGO Executive Director[21], explained that then, as now, CODE-NGO focused its efforts on key campaigns which establish their members as legitimate NGOs that exercise good governance in their own practice. This meant that while demanding full transparency in government, CODE-NGO also demonstrated transparency in all their operations. In its efforts to push for development, good governance, political engagement, and sustainability, it maximized its collective skill and synergy to (a) influence public policy, (b) provide leadership in civil society, and (c) increase the effectiveness of social development work.

Over the course of its existence, CODE-NGO has pursued constructive engagement with the administrations of various Philippine presidents, including that of President Benigno S. Aquino III. Throughout the younger President Aquino's term, CODE-NGO was an active participant in a number of key initiatives that sought to ensure the empowerment of peoples, democratization, and good governance.

One was the Open Government Partnership (OGP), which was launched as a multilateral initiative involving eight founding countries, including the Philippines,



CODE-NGO, in partnership with INCITEGOV, conducted a two-day orientation on Bottom-up Budgeting in October 2013. Present were leaders of civil society organizations nationwide as well as representatives from DBM, DILG and NAPC. Photo and caption courtesy of CODE-NGO's Facebook page.

in September 2011[22], and bringing reformers in government and civil society groups together behind a shared commitment to make governments more inclusive, responsive, and accountable. Towards this end, the partners endorsed a high-level Open Government Declaration, and developed, through a process of public consultations, an action plan that would bring it to fruition. CODE-NGO's members actively participated in this process as civil society representatives in the Philippine OGP Non-Government Steering Committee.[23] Activities included the localization of open government initiatives on participatory budget preparation and open legislation, among others.

Another related initiative was the Bottom-Up Budgeting (BUB) process, which was set up in 2013 as part of the Philippine government's efforts to attain its Millennium Development Goals of inclusive growth and poverty reduction. BUB was designed to make the national budget more responsive to the needs of the people, to encourage local governments to implement reforms, and to deepen democracy and empower citizens.[24] Through BUB, civil society groups in almost 400 municipalities throughout the Philippines were able to participate in the formulation of Local Poverty Reduction Action Plans (LPRAP) which identified priority anti-poverty projects rooted in the needs of the local communities. Ultimately, these plans would be included in the national budget. At the national level, CODE-NGO worked closely with the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) in the formulation of the guidelines that would pave the way for BUB implementation. Rasay recalled that the DBM, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), and the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), the key players in BUB, openly engaged with civil society groups through this process. For Rasay, this was indicative of the



An infographic on the Development Reform Agenda (DRA) 2016-2019 published by CODE-NGO.

openness with which government under the Aquino administration engaged with civil society groups and vice versa.[25] In 2016, BUB implementation would effectively be replaced by the Duterte administration's programs such as the Local Government Support Fund - Assistance to Disadvantaged Municipalities (LGF-ADM), which would bestow the function of identifying priority programs for funding to a mayor and a civil society organization selected by that mayor.

Benedict Balderrama, national coordinator of the Partnership of Philippine Support Service Agencies (PHILSSA), one of the 12 members of CODE-NGO, recalls that their network was especially active in the implementation of the *Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program* (4Ps), government's conditional cash transfer program implemented by the Aquino administration through the DSWD and the Department of Education (DepEd). PHILSSA members monitored the program's implementation as civil society representatives and provided technical support for the program's family development sessions (FDS). PHILSSA was likewise an active partner of DSWD through the Area-Based Standards Network (ABSNET),

which was set up to regulate the operations of social welfare and development agencies (SWDs) registered, licensed, and accredited with the DSWD. PHILSSA members were also engaged in partnership with the DILG through local development councils throughout the country.

CODE-NGO also approved the Civil Society Development Reform Agenda (2016-2019), its proposed priority policies, programs, and plans for the Philippine government, as derived from its 1991 Covenant for Philippine Development and drawn up through a nationwide series of consultations and discussions with civil society organizations. The Agenda is based on the four pillars of a) ensuring empowerment and democratization, b) reducing poverty and inequality, c) building peace, and d) promoting sustainable economic development and environmental protection.[26]

The Development Reform Agenda for 2016-2019, which was signed by more than 50 CSOs, including CODE-NGO member networks, affirmed the work that had been done by the Aquino administration since 2010, particularly in the area of anti-corruption, promotion of transparency, and people's participation in governance, peace-building, improving access to health, education, and other social services, and finally in supporting economic growth. It also identified the continuing need for government to work on reducing poverty and inequality.

CODE-NGO and the 2016 Elections

CODE-NGO pursued the task of agenda setting during the 2016 presidential elections, as had been its practice in the past. Traditionally, CODE-NGO, as an independent network, has never endorsed specific candidates.[27] From the start, CODE-NGO's leadership agreed that the group would not issue statements of support for particular candidates as a matter of policy. Instead, it participated in the electoral process by engaging in political education, and coming up with a profiling of candidates among other activities which would allow CODE-NGO to maintain its neutral, non-partisan position. The majority of CODE-NGO member networks likewise had no mandated plan to choose and campaign for particular candidates for the elections. It did give its individual members free rein to select and support candidates of their own choosing.

Individuals among the leadership and staff of CODE-NGO would, in fact, feel the need to take a more active part in past elections by supporting specific candidates. These individuals would become involved in the formation of the Change Politics Movement (CPM) in May 2009. The movement's stated mission then was, "to undertake a process of selecting change politics candidates through a vote among all its members, after which it will actively campaign for the chosen candidates in the upcoming 2010 elections." It added, "The movement's political engagement will not end with elections, as the movement will also provide continued support to reform candidates once they are in office as well as exact accountability from them."[28]



CODE-NGO published a set of infographics containing the profiles of the presidential and vice presidential candidates during the 2016 elections.

In the months leading up to the 2016 elections, CODE-NGO, as an organization, retained its neutral stance, opting instead to develop a clear basis of unity and shared values for democracy and good governance. It participated in the electoral process by publishing a compilation of candidates' profiles pertaining to the core commitments of its Development Reform Agenda: (1) ensuring empowerment, democratization, and good governance, (2) reducing poverty and inequality, (3) building peace, and (4) promoting sustainable economic development and environmental protection.[29] This was meant to provide its members and the public with the knowledge necessary to make an informed choice on the candidates.

The CPM, for its part, went through the process of selecting a specific candidate for president, and eventually chose Manuel "Mar" Roxas, the administration candidate, to support. A number of CODE-NGO's national networks would likewise choose Roxas as their candidate.

Mayor Duterte, on the other hand, received the endorsement of several Visayas and Mindanao-based member organizations, whose support was premised on his stand against illegal drugs and the fact that he was from Mindanao.

Patricia M. Sarenas, CODE-NGO board member and Mindanao Coalition of Development NGO Networks (MINCODE) chairperson, explains that this wave of support from Mindanao, in general, and Davaeños, in particular, is but natural given Duterte's years in office in Davao City[30], during which he had served as *padrino* or benefactor to many sectors, including the business community and local barangays. Under his watch, his supporters have been known to say that business flourished, peace and order was restored, and pro-women's legislation was instituted. Yet Sarenas[31] feels that this attribution could be questioned, upon closer study. For instance, Sarenas believes that the flourishing of Davao's economy could just as easily be attributed to the businessmen themselves, who set the high standards for sound business practices

"Questions on the violation of human rights under Duterte's watch and the operation of the Davao death squads put into serious question any claims that Davao is among the most peaceful and orderly cities in the country today."

in their province. The same could be said for women's groups in the area which have proven that, regardless of ideological differences, they could successfully unite and work together with the local government towards establishing women-friendly legislation in Davao. Questions on the violation of human rights under Duterte's watch and the operation of the Davao death squads put into serious question any claims that Davao is among the most peaceful and orderly cities in the country today. Sarenas feels, given this, that Duterte's supporters did not really know the man and what he stood for. Some would add that other supporters, well aware of his dismal track record in human rights, opted to sweep this under the rug, saying that all candidates were flawed anyway. Their perfectly imperfect candidate, however, was a son of Mindanao, "one of us", and someone who could finally, adequately speak for the regions that had long felt unheard and under-represented in, and exploited to some extent, by more than one administration. Instead, they were deceived by his persona and all the things that had been attributed to him.

CODE-NGO and the Duterte Administration

CODE-NGO, as a network, continues to adopt a neutral, non-partisan stance in national politics, and has redirected its focus to local governance engagement, educational campaigns, and capacity building. Rasay explains that for the development NGO network, there continue to be spaces for engagement within the government's programs. For instance, CODE-NGO maintains its leadership and secretariat functions in the government's Open Government Partnership with the Department of Budget and Management (DBM). CODE-NGO also continues to work with the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), through its Assistance to the Local Government Strengthening Program. Many of its members continue to take an active part in the government's National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC), a coordinating and advisory body set up in 1997, which institutionalizes the government's social reform and poverty alleviation agenda and coordinates poverty reduction programs undertaken by the national and local governments.[32]

The network continues its constructive engagement with government in the light

of these spaces of opportunity. CODE-NGO'S leadership believes that despite the politics, there are spaces to continue working with the bureaucracy, a workforce that, by and large, remains committed to function and work with civil society in the delivery of programs that will redound to the benefit of the people.

There appears to be a greater space for partnership on the local level, where partnerships with the local government units (LGUs) are found. There is an openness among the local government leadership to work with development NGOs and nurture these existing relationships.

It helps, Rasay feels, that unlike human rights groups, development NGOs are not on Duterte's radar as key critics of his administration. However, since development NGOs are not natural partners with this administration, there is still a need to assert that they are given space for citizen participation in government bodies.

Of course, citizen engagement has been significantly easier for groups that supported Duterte in the elections. This included, until quite recently when the relationship appeared to sour, left and left-of-center groups that are linked to the National Democratic Front (NDF). Sarenas points out that giving preferential status to certain groups has always been the case with Duterte, in the experience of development NGOs in Davao. In addition, she avers, Duterte has always lumped development NGOs with all other groups that criticize him and his alleged Davao death squad on the issue of human rights. And Mayor Duterte is not one to forget grudges, as evidenced by his attack on Senator Leila de Lima.[33]

CODE-NGO, therefore, recognizes that democracy is threatened, and space for engagement is constricted for particular groups. There is a "fear factor" affecting the communities that they assist, and admit that being labeled *Dilawan* (yellow, the color of the opposition) exposes them to harassment and possible violence by Duterte supporters.

CODE-NGO has spoken out on a number of critical issues that have emerged since Duterte's rise to power. For instance, it issued statements against extra-judicial killings and the violations of human rights, the burial of former President Marcos's remains in the *Libingan ng mga Bayani*, the proposed reinstatement of the death penalty, the lowering of the minimum age of criminal liability for minors, the Supreme Court's granting of the *quo warranto* provision seeking to oust former Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno, the extension of martial law in Mindanao, and the administration's proposals for charter change.[34]

There is likewise a sense of disappointment even among those who were willing to give President Duterte a chance, given his perceived closeness to the poor throughout his years in local government. Development NGO leaders involved in rural development are aware that nothing much has happened in the agriculture sector, for instance. Glenn Bais, regional coordinator for PhilDHRRA Mindanao and

its representative to CODE-NGO, says that if there have been any investments in developing the rural sector, these have been insignificant.

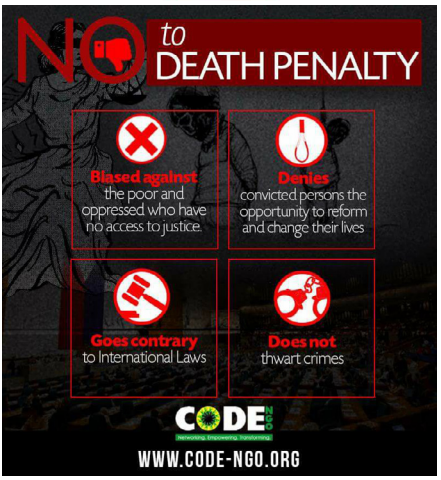
They are also well aware that the poor have been the primary victims of the war on drugs. Bais attributes this glaring flaw in the program, however, to a weakness in Duterte's leadership, that is, his proclivity to delegate far too much to those implementing his programs, who may have less than noble intentions for the country. As for the body count among the poor, Bais says that this is subject to debate until an independent third party is able to confirm the real numbers.

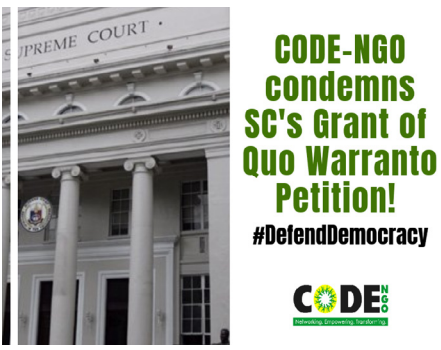
It has also been less easy for some CODE-NGO member networks like PHILINK and PhilDHRRA to arrive at a consensus and make a unified statement on these same critical issues, largely because some of their board members and partners, some of whom represent development NGOs from the Visayas and Mindanao, continue to support Duterte and/or are hesitant to speak out on issues that would antagonize his administration. Many of these groups feel that, flawed as he is, he is the only president who can adequately represent the regions that have so long been denied support from a Luzon-centric national government.

Many of these same CODE-NGO member networks are disinclined to directly criticize President Duterte, and have, in fact pushed for the withdrawal of CODE-NGO's membership from resistance coalitions and broad fronts that are critical of the Duterte administration, specifically the *Alyansa ng Samahang Pantao* (ASAP) and *Tindig Pilipinas.*

This withdrawal from what are currently considered to be the primary avenues for resistance to the Duterte government, as well as the seeming inability of some development NGO networks to speak out on the issues, is telling. Some observers have noted that development NGOs have, in so doing, shed one of their most strategic roles in society as a countervailing force to government.









When asked to comment on this, Bais acknowledges that there is some truth to this perceived weakening. Yet, he also feels that this is true only in so far as the old approaches to fulfilling this role are concerned. Given the situation, with a strong presidency and a seemingly hostile administration, there need to be ways of thinking out of the box to approach the situation. A change in approach, he feels, is the only way to ensure that the next president will not simply be the current dispensation's anointed one. And these new approaches can only emerge out of a really constructive engagement, one that involves "not fault-finding but rather improvement-oriented with an element of sincerity and honesty."[35]

For development NGO leaders like Balderrama, this is the opportune time, given this seeming impasse, to look back on the groups bases for unity and shared principles, and revisit the reasons why they had come together in the past. Now is the time, he feels, to reflect on a vision for the future and agree on how the groups can best achieve this, regardless of politics.

Sarenas, for her part, feels that the rise of populism is a global phenomenon that will continue to pose a challenge to civil society. She echoes the need to continue to explore spaces for participation in government, and in all things, working together in order to share resources and develop scale on impact. She agrees that given the polarizing effect that civil society groups are facing, there is a need to continue talking to each other and engaging in debate, no longer sweeping their differences under the rug.

In a discussion among CODE-NGO board members, the leadership of the development NGO network realized that since the 2016 elections, when their relations became highly polarized as a result of different political views, the group has not initiated face-to-face discussions on the election-related issues that may have inadvertently created a rift between and among its membership. Some years after, the group felt that it was perhaps time to confront the elephant in the room, so to speak, and have the difficult but heartfelt discussions that would allow the network to move onward and forward, while continuing to stand firm on their development principles.



Militant groups protest against the unfulfilled promises of the Duterte administration at Igorot Park, Baguio City in July 2018. Photo by Mau Victa.

LABOR SECTOR

Organized Philippine labor has been estimated to represent less than 10 percent of the 38.8 million work force in the country and is composed of approximately 600 national trade unions, federations and plant-level unions,[36] the bulk of which fall under the influence of a handful of national level labor organizations. These include the Federation of Free Workers (FFW), *Kilusang Mayo Uno* (KMU), *Sentro ng mga Nagkakaisa at Progresibong Manggagawa* (SENTRO), the Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP)[37], and the *Partido Manggagawa* (PM). Given the "ideological" nature of the sector, these labor groups are characterized by deep divisions whose rivalries are based on historical, organizational, and ideological rifts.

Studies show that despite the rise in numbers of existing local and independent unions and public sector unions, membership in unions did not increase in the Philippines between the years 1990 to 1999.[38] In 2019, only 11.9 percent (or 4,701,755) out of a total of 39,247,000 employed Filipinos, were union members. These figures had decreased from 2018, when union members comprised 12.49 percent (or 5,106,487) out of 140,900,000 Filipinos who were employed.[39]

Dr. Rene Ofreneo, professor and former dean of the UP School of Labor and Industrial Relations (SOLAIR), explains that one of the reasons labor cannot be fully organized is because of its segmented nature, with informal workers outnumbering the formal workers, and within the formal workforce, casual workers outnumbering

the regular workers. He adds that the process of organizing regular workers into unions is a highly involved and legal-intensive one.[40]

Atty. Ibarra Malonzo, former president of the National Federation of Labor[41], adds that on top of their relatively small base relative to the total labor force and the fragmentation within, labor organization is hindered by the existing system of labor relations.[42] He explains, "The principal objective of unions in labor relations law is to conduct collective bargaining for their members vis-à-vis the employer with regard to terms and conditions of employment." But each bargaining unit — workers as represented by the unions — must engage the employer independently, often without affiliation to any federation which would ideally provide some leverage and a semblance of greater strength on the bargaining table.

"One of the reasons labor cannot be fully organized is because of its segmented nature."

Labor organizing has, moreover, been weakened over the past four decades by the rapid growth of the informal labor sector accompanied by, and some would say, just as likely due to a rise in the number of non-conventional forms of employment. Casual, contractual, temporary work, and project-based work have given rise to new forms of employer-employee relationships that have left new generations of laborers vulnerable to serious work deficits.[43] The illegal use of short-term contracts that typically do not exceed six months, commonly referred to as ENDO (end of contract) has been particularly damaging. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), under all these new arrangements, informal workers are "exposed to inadequate and unsafe working conditions, and have high illiteracy levels, low skill levels and inadequate training opportunities; have less certain, less regular and lower incomes than those in the formal economy, suffer longer working hours, an

absence of collective bargaining and representation rights, and often, an ambiguous or disguised employment status; and are physically and financially more vulnerable because work in the informal economy is either excluded from, or effectively beyond, the reach of social security schemes and safety and health, maternity and other labor protection legislation."[44]

This phenomenon of informal employment plagues both developed and developing or transitioning economies, and worldwide, some say, labor unions have failed to adapt their strategies and tactics that would aggressively respond to these trends associated with globalization. Moreover, they have failed to develop inclusive approaches which directly cater to the needs of women, professional, technical, and white-collar workers.[45]

Aganon, Serrano, and Certeza have studied how these emerging forms have resulted in a call to re-energize unions and develop social movement unionism.[46] The authors have noted that up to this point, unions have continued to focus on issues and concerns confined to the workplace. This has also translated into a preference for addressing the welfare concerns of their immediate membership rather than the sector as a whole. Finally, they point out that, in their attempt to expand membership, trade unions have not paid enough attention to evolving employment arrangements. Bobbit Librojo of the National Union of Bank Employees (NUBE) and the Union Network International (UNI) Global Union-Philippine Liaison Council (UNI-PLC) explains that these are compounded by the traditionally high barriers to organizing.[47]

On top of the changing nature of the labor force due to new work arrangements, there have also been changes in the way government has been set up to respond to labor regulations, particularly with regard to wage regulations, social security, occupational safety and health, collective bargaining, among others, which have affected the utility of union organizing. Malonzo explains that in the past 20 years, legal compliance to minimum wage regulations has improved due in part to access to government facilities that allows a worker to directly file charges with an errant employer.[48] He adds that government, through the operation of regional wage boards, has been able to issue annual wage adjustments.[49] This has effectively done away with one of several flash points for unrest and dissatisfaction, a basis one could say for organizing mass movements, in general, and labor unions, in particular.

It is important to note that labor groups in the Philippines have a long tradition of engagement with the State. This process was institutionalized through the sector's involvement and representation in tripartite bodies, which at least guaranteed a form of engagement with government. These include the Tripartite Industrial Peace Council (TIPC), Regional Tripartite Wages and Productivity Board (RTWPB), and the Social Security System (SSS) governing body. It is also important to note that the quality of engagement within these bodies and the extent to which they have the ear of the president has varied from administration to administration.[50]

The Labor Sector and the May 2016 elections

During President Benigno S. Aquino's final Independence Day address on June 12, 2016, he said he was leaving the Philippines in a situation that was "better than when we found it". Labor groups responded to this claim with much skepticism, citing the fact that 1.2 million Filipinos between the ages of 15 to 24 remained unemployed, while others suffered from "in-work poverty," continued to earn low incomes, and were in fact, holding irregular, insecure jobs.[51] The continued practice of contractualization, in particular, provided one of the grounds for labor dissatisfaction in 2016.

During the 2016 elections, labor groups belonging to the extreme left of the political spectrum, namely the *Kilusang Mayo Uno* (KMU) and the Alliance of Genuine Labor Organizations (AGLO), stated these as part of their basis for supporting the candidacy of former Mayor Duterte.[52] The nationalist democratic (ND) bloc, to which KMU and AGLO were affiliated, was also assured of slots in the Duterte Cabinet in exchange for their support. This agreement would, in fact, come to pass upon Duterte's victory.

The Trade Union Congress of the Philippines (TUCP) and the Alliance of Labor Unions (ALU) also openly endorsed Duterte's candidacy in the last month of the campaign period, given what they attributed to be his pro-labor platform and his perceived capacity to follow through on his pro-labor campaign promises.[53]

While the Federation of Free Workers (FFW) did not openly endorse Duterte[54], the labor federation's chairperson Sonny Matula explained that the former mayor was viewed in a generally positive light. According to Matula, Duterte had been instrumental in resolving labor issues between workers and management during a strike at the Ateneo de Davao University.[55]

While other labor groups would support Grace Poe, others would back Mar Roxas, then Department of Interior and Local Government Secretary under the Aquino administration, thus whose candidacy was premised on the continuation of the Aquino legacy. Duterte however, won the greater bulk of the labor vote because of his promise to immediately abolish contractualization[56] by executive action. (Roxas would maintain, early on, that this would require legislative action). His expressed commitment to end drugs, crime, and corruption within six months won him further support.

Labor and the Duterte Administration

After the 2016 election, Duterte appointed a number of individuals affiliated with the ND bloc to senior positions in government.[57] *Anakpawis* partylist representative and KMU leader Joel Maglunsod was appointed Undersecretary of the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE).[58] These appointments, especially Maglunsod's, would bolster organized labor's high hopes that the President's promise to end contractualization or ENDO (end of contractual arrangements) would quickly come to pass.

In time, however, those hopes were slowly dashed. A subject of heated and long drawn out negotiations between the sector and the DOLE, the promised Executive Order remained on hold due to legal impediments. Different labor groups adopted varying stances on the issue.

Labor groups affiliated with the extreme left, such as the KMU, adopted the basic position to reject all forms of job subcontracting and short-term employment. Other labor unions, such as the TUCP and FFW, saw the idea of a trilateral system of employment between an employer, a subcontractor and the workers as acceptable and adopted a nuanced position on legitimate labor contracting and labor-only contracting.[59] Just before 2018 Labor Day commemoration, when Duterte issued an executive order that merely reiterated existing provisions in the Labor Code, organized labor groups protested against the EO, saying this was not the version that they had agreed to.[60] The labor movement then formed the Coalition Against Contractualization which saw a long unseen alliance between rival labor centers and groups in the country. For the first time in decades, labor groups from all camps came together in a massive protest rally on May 1, 2018.

In October 2018, Maglunsod, the last of Duterte's appointees associated with the progressive left, was summarily dismissed by the President, with little to no explanation for the move, save to mention that the number of workers strikes had risen. Labor groups decried Maglunsod's dismissal, describing him as the sector's closest ally in the DOLE. SENTRO Secretary General Josua Mata, in an interview with the news website Rappler, was quoted as saying that in fact, the rise in workers strikes was a result of Duterte's failure to resolve the problem of contractualization, as he had previously promised.[61]

In the run up to the May 2019 mid-term elections, KMU reps began to encourage the public to vote against all of President Duterte's candidates, who they said were bound to support his "anti-poor" legislative agenda.[62] Elmer Labor, KMU Chair, went head to head with President Duterte in his May 1 statement, calling out the administration on the President's anti-poor policies, war-mongering, and misogyny. He likewise reiterated the labor group's calls for better working conditions and other reforms, including the revival of a national minimum wage system that would assure workers a minimum wage of least ₱750 per day.

For the first time in many years, the once fractured labor sector came together, as seen in the broad participation of labor groups during the May 2018 Labor Day rally. Foremost among the issues which now bind the labor sector are red-tagging, trade union repression, and contractualization. NAGKAISA, an alliance which was first established with 40 major trade unions and labor federations in 2012[63], now serves as one of the fulcrums for working unities, at least among some of the politically-engaged groups within the labor sector. To date, its members have actively engaged in continuous dialogues on and advocated for the Security of Tenure (SOT) bill in both houses of congress.

Some labor groups , including a number of NAGKAISA members, are likewise involved in tripartite bodies, for instance, the Department of Labor and Employment's National Tripartite Industrial Peace Councils (NTIPCs), a consultative and advisory body composed of labor, employers, and government, as well as in the Tripartite Executive Committee (TEC), the TIPC's technical working group.[64] Through their involvement in such tripartite bodies, these groups have been able to participate in amending DOLE department orders, for instance, those pertaining to labor inspection, occupational safety and health, sheriff's manual, and contractualization.[65] However, it is important to note that this process is viewed with some suspicion by others. Dr. Ofreneo, for one, raised the idea that participation in these tripartite bodies can open one up to possible cooptation by government. This is especially true with a populist administration such as Duterte's, which has openly disregarded accepted protocols in the selection of representatives, effectively awarding the selection of labor representatives to employer groups.[66] This was echoed by Malonzo who cited the example of the Social Security System, whose tripartite system has been in place since 1954 and has been faithfully honored by all previous administrations.[67] But the Duterte administration has done away with the participation of the Employers Confederation of the Philippines (ECOP), which is universally recognized as the "most representative" employers organization in the country, as well as any organized labor groups in the SSS. He has instead appointed to the SSS labor and employer representatives with no appropriate credentials or labor union backgrounds. Only one employer representative has the credentials as an executive of a large company.

A number of NAGKAISA member organizations continue to engage with government as members of the National Anti-Poverty Council (NAPC) and formal labor and migrant workers councils, on a number of migrant workers welfare concerns. However, while these groups continue to engage with DOLE on such matters, their representatives are less inclined to attend meetings called by the Office of the President.



An urban poor community in Manila in 2013. Photo by Verlie Q. Retulin.

URBAN POOR

As recently as 2018, an estimated 16.6 percent of all Filipinos lived below the national poverty line.[68]

A study by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) looked into figures from the 2016 Family Income and Expenditure Survey (FIES) and attempted to draw the profile of a poor Filipino household. It found that 67 percent of heads of poor households had no education beyond elementary school. Poor households also have larger family sizes: less than 20 percent of households with four or less family members were poor, while 40 percent of households with six or more family members were poor. The majority of household heads of poor families (or 52.49 percent) are in the agriculture sector. The poor are most often engaged in agriculture and forestry (45.92 percent) or as laborers or unskilled workers (24.47 percent). Only 8.42 percent are actually unemployed, which seems to support the theory that most of the poor are engaged in some form of employment but are underemployed.[69]

While the majority of Filipino poor are located in the rural areas, a significant number are urban dwellers, largely concentrated in large city centers in Metro Manila, Cebu and Davao, where the promise of jobs and educational opportunities, no matter how elusive, await. In these large urban areas, the poor continue to face the challenges associated with congestion and a rapidly increasing population. They lack access to resources for health, education, capital, credit and other social safety nets. Access to safe, potable water is expensive and erratic. In urban areas, even when the poor are able to access housing, these are often insecure, makeshift, and unsafe. Fear of

massive relocation to remote resettlement sites, and lack of employment continue to plague the urban poor.

The FIES estimates that in 2012, there were almost 700,000 informal settler families (ISF) who occupy human settlements throughout the country under informal arrangements. This reflected an increase of 7.2 percent annually since 1991, when there were 281,000 ISF.[70] But according to the same paper, these are conservative figures, given that the FIES estimates only refer to "illegal occupants" who are defined as those who reside rent free in lots (in structures that they do or do not own) without the consent of the owners. Not included in these estimates are the homeless, the residents of "danger zones" such as creeks (esteros) and other waterways, occupants of public lands, and those residing in abandoned and dilapidated buildings.

The Urban Poor and the Aquino administration

Government response to the situation of the urban poor in the Philippines has often come in the form of an array of services and programs meant to alleviate their plight. During the Aquino administration, these programs included the following:

- The *Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program*, or the 4Ps, a conditional cash transfer (CCT) program which provided poor families with subsidies premised on their children's attendance in school and their availment of health care services. Originally launched under the administration of President Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, the CCT program was expanded to cover more than 4.4 million households on a budget of ₱62.32 billion pesos by the year 2015.
- The *Kapit-Bisig Laban sa Kahirapan - Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Support Services* (KALAHI-CIDSS) program employed a community-driven development (CDD) approach to poverty alleviation which encouraged the involvement of communities in targeted municipalities to participate in identification, planning, budgeting, and implementation of projects that would lift their areas out of poverty. Originally launched in 2003, the program scale-up was approved in January 2013.
- The Community Mortgage Program (CMP), an innovative financing scheme that enabled organizations of informal settler families (ISFs) to purchase lands and invest in housing development through the provision of loans for this purpose. The Localized Community Mortgage Program (LCMP), a modified version of the CMP, involves the local government units (LGUs) in the provision of resources for and the management of housing projects in their localities.[71]
- The Informal Settler Families (ISF) Housing Program, a human settlements program launched under the Aquino administration, which targeted families residing along canals (*esteros*), under bridges, and near other walkways considered as "danger zones". These families were deemed to be especially vulnerable given flooding caused by weather and climate-related disturbances, and other calamities that have afflicted the country in recent years.

Under the ISF Housing Program, ₱20 billion was allocated for a High-Density Housing Program (HDHP), another variant of the CMP. The HDHP offered families alternative opportunities for human settlements through the issuance of condominium rights in lieu of ownership of land, particularly in cities plagued by the high cost of land ownership. Housing was developed in the form of multi-story units and implemented by several stakeholder groups, including community associations, national government, local government units, civil society organizations, and the private sector.[72]

The Urban Poor and the 2016 Elections

On March 5, months prior to the Presidential election of 2010, the groups under the ambit of UP-ALL, an alliance of four national-level non-government organization (NGO) and people's organization (PO) networks[73], came together to present to Aquino and Roxas, then contenders for president and vice-president respectively, their sectoral agenda. The agenda, embodied in a Covenant agreed to and signed by Aquino and Roxas, included the following items: 1) no eviction without decent relocation; 2) support for area upgrading and in-city resettlement; 3) provision of basic services for poor communities; 4) provision of funds for existing and future social housing programs; 5) creation of jobs and provision of incentives, services, and benefits for the informal sector; 6) increased cooperation with local government units for the full implementation of the Urban Development and Housing Act (UDHA); 7) initiation of efforts for sustained and uninterrupted peace negotiations in Mindanao and the response to the communities in Mindanao displaced by continuing conflicts; 8) exploration of new approaches to address the housing and livelihood needs of Typhoon Ondoy-affected families as well as those families living in the Manggahan floodway and Lupang Arenda; 9) the appointment of reform-minded persons to institute reforms and steer the implementation of the delivery of housing services; and 10) emphasis on the participation of all stakeholders in finding solutions to the problems that they face. In signing the Covenant, the two candidates expressed their commitment to include these points in their development agenda and platform for building an inclusive urban society.[74]

Upon Aquino's assumption into office in 2010, a number of organized urban poor networks including UP-ALL would hold him to his commitments to the urban poor groups. The urban poor groups, in turn, would actively engage with the Aquino administration through its resettlement and related programs. As a result, several urban poor communities would be able to initiate and implement their People's Plan for on-site housing with ease of access to sources of income within the city. During the 2016 elections, these same groups would support Roxas in his bid for the presidency. To their mind, a vote for Roxas represented a vote for the continued partnership between the sector and national government in fulfilling the sectoral agenda.

But other groups such as the left-leaning *Kalipunan ng Damayang Mahihirap*

(KADAMAY) were less inclined to vote the same way. In March 2015, KADAMAY representatives cited six major issues that they believed continued to burden the poor under the Aquino administration: "landlessness, low wages, demolition of urban poor communities, massive conversion of local fishing grounds, the continuing neglect of Typhoon Yolanda survivors, and unabated skyrocketing of prices and basic utilities".[75] Carlito Badion, KADAMAY national secretary general, called out Aquino's transgressions against the urban poor, citing the demolition of communities and dislocation of the urban poor from areas close to their sources of income at the expense of building central business districts which only the wealthy could afford to access. KADAMAY further alleged that while the National Housing Authority (NHA) had built almost 49,640 units to house the evicted, almost 93 percent (or 46,322) of these were outside Metro Manila, where the urban poor are cut off from markets, schools, sources of livelihood, and other basic services.[76] Moreover, in an interview conducted on May 2016, Gloria Arellano, KADAMAY chairperson, was quoted expressing disappointment in what had been "the lack of discourse on the plight of millions of informal settlers".[77]

"On June 30, 2016, Duterte capped his inauguration day as president with a solidarity meal with some urban poor groups... It was, his many supporters claimed, a refreshing, auspicious start to his presidency."

Critical as it was of the Aquino administration, KADAMAY would back Duterte and Poe in the 2016 elections. While Poe[78] emerged as the victor in the group's mock polls in December of 2015[79], KADAMAY is known to have voted along party lines, in support of Duterte, the anointed candidate of the extreme left groups.

The Urban Poor and the Duterte Administration

On June 30, 2016, Duterte capped his inauguration day as president with a solidarity meal with some urban poor groups, including representatives of KADAMAY, at the Delpan Sports Complex in Tondo, Manila. Absent of the pomp and pageantry of all past presidential inaugurations, the newly-installed president claimed in his speech, it was his way of honoring the ordinary folk who could not

enter Malacañang Palace to mark the beginning of his administration. It was, his many supporters claimed, a refreshing, auspicious start to his presidency.

But the real hope for Duterte supporters lay in the appointment of their allies to key posts in government. Four cabinet level posts in the Duterte administration were allocated for nominees of leftist organizations. Terry Ridon, former Kabataan Party list representative to the Philippines House of Representatives from 2013 to 2016, was assigned as head of the Presidential Commission for the Urban Poor (PCUP), a move that encouraged some urban poor groups.

Initially, Duterte seemed truly intent on brokering peace between government and the extreme left. A widely circulated clip showed him in a Skype call discussing reform areas with exiled CPP head Jose Maria Sison. He worked for the release from detention of several high-ranking CPP leaders including Wilma and Benito Tiamzon, former CPP Chairperson, to participate in the peace talks representing the CPP-NDF-NPA.

Despite these developments, some groups, including KADAMAY, expressed trepidation towards celebrating prospects for the urban poor sector under the new president. Arellano, for one, was cited as saying, "While Kadamay is not hopeful that Duterte will live up to his promises... ultimately, the people themselves will make the changes that need to be done".[80] This was, perhaps, a portent of things to come.

Relations between government and the extreme left would become strained over time, as the peace talks between the two parties encountered setbacks. By February 2017, the CPP had withdrawn its ceasefire declaration and in November 2017, Duterte declared the termination of the peace negotiations with the CPP-NDF-NPA.[81]

On December 2017, Duterte fired Ridon and other PCUP officials for their failure to convene as a body and for so-called "unofficial junkets". He also initially indicated that he would "abolish" the PCUP as a whole but would later backtrack on the pronouncement.[82] Following these actions, urban poor communities, including those that had initially expressed their support, found Duterte to be far less sympathetic and supportive of the poor's housing needs.

Government response to the huge housing backlog, some would say, was lackluster and a number of urban poor groups, with support from partner NGOs, continue to resist off-city relocation. KADAMAY's Badion explained that they had presented their urban poor agenda, which included jobs, land, solutions to the problem of relocation sites, as well as free and mass housing, personally to President Duterte at the June 2016 inaugural solidarity dinner in Tondo, at a time of great cordiality between government and the leftist groups. They then continued to engage government through a series of dialogues with agencies such as the National Housing Authority and the Housing and Urban Development Coordinating Council. However, they received nothing more than promises to "discuss the issues as soon as possible".[83]

Government's slow response would lead the group to illegally occupy around 6,000 units of an abandoned government housing project originally planned for resettled communities and personnel of the Philippine National Police (PNP) and Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in Pandi, Bulacan in 2017, and in Montalban, Rizal in 2018.[84] President Duterte castigated KADAMAY calling their move "anarchy", but he eventually sought to diffuse tensions by ordering the original intended beneficiaries — soldiers and policemen — to avoid confrontation by stepping down and promised them better arrangements for housing. With the initial, potentially violent stand-off diffused, KADAMAY went on to pursue talks with government to settle the issue. As of December 2019, Kadamay had succeeded in securing a verbal agreement with government for monthly amortization payments of ₱200 (roughly US8 dollars) for housing units for 8,494 families spread out over six social housing projects in Bulacan.[85]

On Feb. 14, 2019, President Duterte signed into law the creation of the Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development (DHUD) which was conceptualized to look into, among other things, the housing backlog for 2 million informal settlers. While this appears to be a bold move in the right direction, the public, and the urban poor, in particular, cannot help but face this with some skepticism. Some groups say that the creation of the DHUD does not substantially alter the government's policies and programs, and merely consolidates the functions of the HUDCC and the HLURB (reconstituted into the Human Settlements Adjudication Commission) to attend to housing and human settlement needs while continuing to pay minimal attention and reacting to the demands of urban development.[86] Moreover, government's touted response to the housing backlog will require resources that the government has yet to generate.[87]

The current budget has only ₱2.7 billion allocated for the housing sector but HUDCC estimates that they will need ₱35 to 40 billion to fill the housing backlog.[88] The reality is that the Duterte administration, while pushing forward with its "build, build, build" infrastructure program, continues to undertake large-scale resettlement while apportioning the smallest budget for housing since 2012.

Furthermore, it is the urban poor that have felt the brunt of the inflationary impact of the recently-implemented Tax Reform for Acceleration and Inclusion (TRAIN) Law. According to a study by the Ateneo de Manila University (ADMU) and commissioned by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS), the TRAIN Law has left the urban poor worse off than before its implementation. According to Dr. Randy Tuaño, the ADMU study, "Assessing the TRAIN's Coal and Petroleum Excise Taxes: Macroeconomic, Environmental and Welfare Effects", showed that poverty incidence in the country had in fact increased and that Filipinos in the lower-decile — the poorest of the population — remained unaffected by all the changes introduced as a result of TRAIN, including its Unconditional Cash Transfer (UCT) component.[89]

"[Duterte] promised the Filipino people that he would be a 'dictator', killing the forces of evil involved in criminality, drugs, and corruption. Two years after, there were 23,983 persons killed, mostly in poor urban communities."

Introduced by the Duterte administration in January 2018, the UCT was presented as an alternative to the *Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program* (4Ps), the Aquino administration's social protection program which appeared headed for the back burner upon the assumption into office by Duterte's first appointee to the Social Welfare portfolio.[90] President Duterte first mentioned the UCT and his intent to provide 40 kilograms of rice to the poor during his 2016 State of the Nation Address (SONA). The UCT has since been launched as a component of the TRAIN Law under which ₱200 will be given monthly to 10 million poor Filipinos suffering from the effects of increased petroleum prices, over a period of three years.[91]

The urban poor are also the most heavily affected by Duterte's War on Drugs, which had served as the cornerstone of his presidential campaign. He promised the Filipino people that he would be a "dictator", killing the forces of evil involved in criminality, drugs, and corruption. Two years after *Oplan Tokhang*[92] was put into effect, there were 23,983 persons killed, mostly in poor urban communities, under inquiry by the Philippine National Police (PNP). As of June 2018, the PNP claimed that 4,279 of these were killed by police forces in "self-defense".[93]

Even the children have not been spared, The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) has estimated that 18,000 have been orphaned in the conduct of the drug war.[94] The Children's Legal Rights and Development Center (CLRD) has counted 54 minors dead, caught in the cross-fire or deliberately hunted down as part of the drug war.[95] Three-year-old Myca Ulpina, was shot when police came to arrest and eventually killed her father Renato Dolofrina in a drug raid on June 28, 2019.[96] Police say that Myca was used by her father as a human shield during the shootout. Officials have described her as "collateral damage". The number of minors victimized by the government's drug war, every single one of them poor, continues to rise by the day.



PHOTO FROM TINDIG PILIPINAS' FACEBOOK PAGE

EMERGENCE OF A RESISTANCE MOVEMENT

Philippine civil society — the all-encompassing term by which non-profit organizations, including non-government and people's organizations, are distinguished from the public (government) and private (business) sectors — has had a long and variable history of engagement with the State. Civil society organizations in the Philippines find their roots in welfare organizations established by the Roman Catholic Church and other religious groups under Spanish colonial rule. Eventually, a number of groups deemed illegal by the colonial government — among them peasant associations, secular and anti-religious organizations, and an intellectual elite-led propaganda movement — would seek to throw off the mantel of Spanish colonialism through a variety of means.[97] Under the Americans, government supported the formation of farmer credit cooperatives. Welfare organizations would also continue to flourish and engage in philanthropic activities and the provision of a breadth of support services, at times with government subsidy. As the years of formal colonial rule came to an end in the Philippines in the 20s and 30s, government support would spur the development of farmer credit cooperatives. However, discontent would also feed into the growth of the communist movement. Other groups, the Roman Catholic Church for one, would attempt to pave alternative paths to the overtly radical approach employed by groups influenced by Marxist-Leninist theory in their social development agenda. They established Church-based institutions designed to engage in direct sectoral organizing among farmers and trade unionists. Protestant Church-based groups, on the other hand, would focus on rural development through cooperatives and credit unions.[98]

Against this backdrop, civil society has played a strategic role in the country's contemporary history, whether as a countervailing force to, or an engaged partner of the State. In the light of the Marcos government's failure to respond to the needs of the poor, development NGOs stepped in to deliver services to the poor and organize rural and urban communities around their most pressing issues and needs. Beyond this, NGOs and POs, together with various cause-oriented groups, were instrumental in the protest movement that resisted Marcos's authoritarian rule. After the EDSA People Power Revolution that toppled the dictatorship and saw the restoration of civil and other freedoms under Corazon C. Aquino, civil society organizations would proliferate and flourish, actively taking a role in nation building, amidst new spaces for engagement with government and the private sector.



1986 People Power Revolution. Photo courtesy of the Official Gazette.

At the end of Aquino's term, her successor, former General Fidel V. Ramos was initially viewed with skepticism by some groups well aware of the military's role during the repressive Marcos years. However, Ramos engaged the basic sectors by drawing their participation in shaping government's development agenda. Farmers, fisherfolk, laborers, urban poor, women, youth/students, the elderly, and the handicapped, among other sectors, were invited to participate in drawing up the Ramos administration's strategy and program of action, redefining a Social Development Agenda that put "the well-being of the ordinary Filipino" as the real parameter for growth.[99]

Ramos's successor, Joseph Ejercito Estrada, would initially garner support from a number of civil society groups in an overwhelming election victory in 1998, but his lackluster performance in office would be marred by allegations of incompetence and corruption particularly from among his cronies. Many NGOs and POs soon joined the clamor for Erap, as Estrada was popularly called, to vacate the presidency after less than three years in office. After an impeachment process that led to his ouster through a Second People Power event in 2001, Estrada would be replaced by his vice-president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, as the next in line of succession.

Arroyo initially engaged members of civil society who had led the campaign to impeach Erap, to play key roles in her cabinet, an encouraging sign, it seemed, of



Government officials who were part of the Hyatt 10 (left to right: Teresita Quintos Deles, Emilia Boncodin, Atty. Florencio Abad, Corazon Juliano-Soliman and Juan Santos) signed a statement on leadership and credibility and announced their collective resignation from the Arroyo government in 2005.

the importance she placed in people's participation in governance. However, it soon became evident that other less lofty interests would prevail in her government. Evidence of fraud in the 2004 elections and corruption emanating from the President's inner circle led the NGO leaders in the Arroyo cabinet to resign from her government *en masse.* The Hyatt 10, as the resigned senior government officials came to be known, cited their loss of faith in the President's leadership and credibility as the basis for their resignation.[100] The group also demanded for the President's resignation and called on her vice president, as constitutional successor, to take over the reins of government. Three months before her term officially ended, Arroyo's net satisfaction ratings reached an all-time low (-53 or very bad) for any Philippine president who ever hold office.[101]

Rising to the call for him to run for the highest office after his mother, Corazon C. Aquino's passing, Benigno C. Aquino III would assume the presidency in 2010. Six members of the former government officials who were part of Hyatt 10 were reinstated in Aquino's cabinet: Florencio Abad (Department of Budget and Management), Corazon Juliano-Soliman (Department of Social Welfare and Development), Imelda Nicolas (Commission on Filipinos Overseas), Cesar Purisima (Department of Finance), Teresita Quintos Deles (Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process), and Rene Villa (Local Water Utilities Administration).[102] Aquino himself expressed his views on the importance of civil society in governance when, during the 20th anniversary of the Caucus of Development NGO Networks (CODE-NGO), he lauded NGOs as government's partners in nation building and development.[103]

With Rodrigo R. Duterte's assumption into presidency in 2016, civil society groups have been polarized as a result of their stances in relation to the populist president. Rifts have been observed along regional lines (many NGO and PO networks from



Members of Tindig Pilipinas mobilized in May 2019 and asked the Commission on Elections (Comelec) to explain the problems that occurred during the transmission of results of the 2019 midterm elections. Photo from Tindig Pilipinas' Facebook page.

Mindanao and the Visayas continue to support Duterte) or an ideological divide (groups allied with the national democratic forces were initially supportive of and given preferential treatment in assignments to key government agencies under Duterte). Despite this, a number of civil society groups have begun to actively participate in and lead in the resistance movement against the Duterte administration.

Organized resistance to the Duterte administration has found expression through the establishment of a number of new formations, foremost of which are *Tindig Pilipinas*, Movement Against Tyranny, *Kalipunan ng Kilusang Masa*, and the Coalition for Justice.

TINDIG PILIPINAS

Tindig Pilipinas was launched on Sept. 18, 2017[104] as a broad coalition/alliance of opposition political groups and individual Filipinos, including civil society groups representing women, youth, the academe, the business sector, religious sector groups, academe, as well as representatives of the minority bloc in the Senate and House of Representatives, who were all equally alarmed by the increasing numbers of extra-judicial killings undertaken in the name of Duterte's War on Drugs.[105]

Among its 50 founding members are the Ateneo de Manila University, Caucus of Development NGO Networks (CODE-NGO), De La Salle Brothers-Philippines, *Alyansa ng mga Abogado para sa Bayan* (ALAB), August Twenty One Movement (ATOM), Black and White Movement, Akbayan Citizens Action Party, Millennials Against Dictators (MAD), Student Council Alliance of the Philippines (SCAP), The Silent Majority (TSM), US Pinoys for Good Governance (USP4GG). Liberal Party President Francis Pangilinan, Senators Risa Hontiveros and Antonio Trillanes IV,

and Magdalo Party representative Gary Alejano, were among the personalities that launched the alliance.

It was evident from its conception that the coalition would include, apart from long-standing members of Philippine civil society and the established organizing streams that were offshoots of these groups, a new section emerging from the electoral political engagement.

The alliance called for an end to extra-judicial killings and the treatment of drug dependence as a crime, the objectification of women and use of misogynistic language, the weakening and the destruction of democratic institutions under Duterte's leadership. These form the basis of unity for its members which are clustered into nine sectoral and organizational hubs.

Tindig Pilipinas' nine sectoral hubs are led by the following organizations: *Manindigan Na!,* The CSO Guild, *Alyansa ng Samahang Pantao* (ASAP), EveryWoman, *Tindig Kabataan*, Magnificent 7, Akbayan, Magdalo, and the Senate and House Minority.

Tindig Pilipinas has established itself as the main, democratic opposition, assuming leadership on a number of fronts, and is poised to undertake sustained, accelerated action in different spheres, including participation in upcoming electoral processes.

MOVEMENT AGAINST TYRANNY

The Movement Against Tyranny (MAT) was established on Aug. 28, 2017, following the outrage surrounding the death of 17-year old Kian delos Santos, a victim of extra-judicial killing by the police. MAT has been described as the left drawing "battle lines against the Duterte administration" after the President's declaration in his State of the Nation address (SONA) that he would stop talking with the communist rebels.

After the President ignored calls for the resumption of the peace talks between government and the National Democratic Front (NDF) and an end to martial law in Mindanao, militant groups believed that the stage was being set for the violation of human rights of Muslim groups and indigenous peoples (IPs) in the area.

MAT convenors are a mix of leftist *makabayan* organizations and a number of known "non-aligned personalities" who include Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT) representative Antonio Tinio, former senator Rene A.V. Saguisag, former representatives Erin Tañada and Neri Colmenares, Bishop Broderick S. Pabillo, and Sr. Mary John Mananzan.

At present, MAT has no clear organizational structure and its activities have been limited to press conferences and mass mobilizations.

KALIPUNAN

The *Kalipunan ng Kilusang Masa* (*Kalipunan*) was established in 2017 as a coalition of labor, urban poor, farmers, fisherfolk, women, environmental activists and youth groups in response to the violence and loss of life under the Duterte Administration. It called on government to exercise leadership by putting an end to violence and promote human rights.

Kalipunan counts among its members the following organizations: *Alyansa Tigil Mina* (ATM), Coalition Against Trafficking In Women–Asia Pacific (CATW-AP), *Kilos Maralita* (KM), *Pambansang Kilusan ng mga Samahang Magsasaka* (PAKISAMA), *Partido Manggagawa* (PM), *Sentro ng Nagkakaisa at Progresibong Manggagawa* (SENTRO), Union of Students for the Advancement of Democracy (USAD-Ateneo de Manila), Urban Poor Alliance (UP-ALL), and the World March of Women-Pilipinas.

Kalipunan's members fall outside the ambit of the Makabayan/leftist circles. However, they share a critical stance vis-a-vis the "yellow" groups that are normally associated with the Aquino administration.

Kalipunan actively pursues organization/consolidation and mass mobilization, and engages in the discourse to address the flaws of liberal democracy.

THE COALITION FOR JUSTICE

The Coalition for Justice (CFJ) was organized in defense of then embattled Supreme Court Justice Ma. Lourdes Sereno and to uphold the rule of law and democracy. Organizing around the battle cry "*Katotohanan, Katuwiran, at Hustisya*", the multi-sectoral group, while issue-based, succeeded in providing the broadest platform for even small non-aligned groups, and the religious (evangelicals and lay groups alike).

The issue-based CFJ, while since being dissolved, spearheaded the first exercises in united action: The United People's SONA (UPS) and the United People's Action (UPA) on Sept. 21, 2019 the anniversary of the proclamation of Martial Law in 1972.

WOMEN'S INITIATIVES

A special note must be made on the active role that women's groups in the Philippines have taken in the efforts of civil society. Women's groups have taken a stand against President Duterte and his cronies, and chosen to speak out against the misogyny, and counter the relentless attacks on the dignity of women, in general, and specific women, in particular.

Every Woman was formed in August 2017 as the women's flank of *Tindig Pilipinas*. Women leaders felt the need to mobilize their forces against the slut-shaming of Senator Leila de Lima who had been illegally and unjustly incarcerated due to her



Every Woman's Padasal para sa mga Pinaslang: Undas ng Kababaihan in 2017. Photo by Jire Carreon.

insistence on conducting a Senate investigation on Duterte's bloody war against drugs. Now the largest coalition of pro-democracy women's groups, it has focused its actions on four main areas: (1) Women defending women defenders of democracy, (2) support for women victims/surviving families of the drug war, (3) campaign against the proliferation of lewd and rude language and behavior inspired by the president among public personalities *(Bantay Bastos)*, and (4) underscoring the gender impact of all issues of resistance. It maintains a Facebook page with over 109,000 followers. Three institutions linked with Every Woman also carried out a forum series on "Misogyny and Authoritarianism" in 2018.

On May 20, 2018, a group of 12 women launched a successful social media campaign centered around the hashtag *#BabaeAko* in protest against President Duterte's highly publicized, derisive statements on the suitability of women for public office, particularly the Office of the Ombudsman and the chief justice of the Supreme Court, then both occupied by women. From this social media campaign arose the *Babae Ako* movement which was bolstered by a second set of events. On June 3, President Duterte kissed a married Filipina on the lips, a lewd act that was met with applause from supporters during a meeting with overseas Filipinos in Seoul. The *Babae Ako* movement launched a round of video messages addressed to Duterte saying *"lalaban ako"* [I will fight]. Since then, the group has taken to the streets and raised its banners during actual street protests waged against the Duterte administration.[106] However, the movement's most significant contribution to date has been in raising support against sexism and misogyny through social media: *Babae Ako* was included in Time Magazine's list of "25 Most Influential People on the Internet in 2018".[107]

The left-leaning group GABRIELA was initially one of the most ardent and vocal supporters of President Duterte. The normally outspoken feminist group was silent on his anti-women statements, due primarily to the largesse of positions they received following Duterte's presidential win. This went on until Duterte changed tack and fired the last of the leftist leaders in his government. At that point, Gabriela and its affiliates finally spoke out against Duterte, calling him out for being a "fascist" and a "misogynist", particularly when he ordered the military to shoot women rebels associated with the New People's Army (NPA) in the vagina.



SNPP core leaders in a press conference following the institutionalization of the 4Ps Act. Photo from SNPP's Facebook page.

SNPP

Unlike the aforementioned groups, the *Samahan ng Nagkakaisang Pamilya ng Pantawid* (SNPP) is not a multisectoral group. It is an association of beneficiaries – comprised largely of parent leaders — of a program of the Philippine government, the *Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program* (4Ps).

In 2016, the parent leaders of the *Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program*, began to see the implications of the Duterte government's policy pivot from poverty reduction to public safety and criminality. They feared that either *Pantawid Pamilya* would be shelved, transformed into a dole-out program, or scrapped altogether in favor of other government programs, including the anti-drug campaign. Realizing that they needed to make their voices heard and that their greatest asset lay in their large numbers, the parent leaders organized themselves into the SNPP on Nov. 30, 2016.

Since then, the SNPP has campaigned successfully for the institutionalization of the *Pantawid* program through legislation and continues to engage with the DSWD and other government agencies on aspects of its implementation. They took an active part in shaping the implementing rules and regulations (IRR) of the *Pantawid* law. SNPP engaged legislators on enhancements to the program, including the provision of rice subsidies to member families. SNPP leaders successfully advocated for the release of the subsidy in the form of cash instead of rice from the National Food Authority (NFA).[108]

Beyond this, the association has also begun to engage in disaster relief efforts to support *Pantawid Pamilya* beneficiary families affected by recent calamities such as the Taal volcano eruption, the Mindanao earthquakes, among others.

The SNPP bears mentioning because in the few years since its establishment it has emerged as one of the few organic, community-based groups that continue to actively engage government on concerns specific to their membership, particularly the implementation of the *Pantawid* program, but also on national level issues which they deem important to their membership. As its roster of members continues to expand, SNPP gains strength in asserting itself as change agents in the broader community.



PHOTO BY MAU VICTA

CONCLUDING CHAPTER

Past the midway mark of President Duterte's term in office, it would appear that the former Davao city mayor's popularity with Filipinos continues to soar. As of this writing, the latest Social Weather Station (SWS) survey reveals that the majority of Filipinos — 81 percent of 1,200 respondents it interviewed in the fourth quarter of 2019 — gave Duterte an "excellent" satisfaction rating.[109] This showed an increase of six points from September 2019, when government was rated as "very good" on a number of performance subjects.[110] It seems, if such survey results are to be believed, that government is well on track in terms of responding to the people's needs. At the very least, if the survey results do not reflect the responsiveness of its programs, it reveals how well the populist administration is succeeding in maintaining its overwhelming connection with the common tao, the ordinary Filipino.

Yet, the experience of organized groups tells a different story. Civil society groups are dealing with disappointment, frustration, and a sense of treachery over Duterte's failure to deliver on the much-celebrated, but yet to be realized, promise of change that served as the premise for his presidency. For the labor sector, an end to contractualization and the installation of policies that promote and safeguard working conditions for the ordinary laborer has not materialized. For the urban poor, measures to resolve their housing needs remain superficial at best, and, not unlike the labor sector, representation in government bodies meant to oversee and promote their sectoral concerns is largely token if not now, entirely absent. The latter, some attribute to the breakdown in the relationship between the Duterte government and extreme leftist groups and is seen by some as the President attempting to appease a military leadership bristling at the idea of a tactical alliance with the very same groups that they face on the battlefield. The development NGO sector, already fractured by politics and facing internal challenges related to dwindling resources and a dissipating successor generation, is struggling to find its voice and regain its once strategic role as a countervailing force to government. Philippine development NGOs understand that falling victim to the polarizing effect that populism has had on society has cost them their voice in the political arena, yet they do not quite know how to emerge from this quagmire and have resorted instead, to engaging government on the local level. Here they believe is where they can continue to make a difference in the lives of the people, despite everything that is unfolding on the national level. Finally, women's groups have little faith that the misogyny and disregard for gender equality and women's empowerment will improve under a leader who is unapologetic in

his disregard for women and, in fact, relishes in modeling the macho culture which those around him tend to emulate. His efforts to shame and/or emasculate strong women who present a threat to his leadership are meant to deliver a message that is accepted, if not outrightly celebrated by his supporters.

In the face of the Duterte government's failure to deliver and follow through on its promises to the different sectors of Philippine society, the support that he, as a leader, continues to receive from the majority of Filipinos displays what Dr. Anna Maria Karaos has described as a "different rationality."[111] For Karaos, such support may be rooted in the Filipino's greater appreciation of the "effort" that one makes to fulfill, over actually succeeding in making good on a promise. She likens this to the Filipinos, particularly the poor's, propensity to assign great value to the efforts of a "beloved *tatay*" or father to provide for his family. It does not matter so much that he is unable to provide food, clothing, or money for his children's schooling. He may even verbally or physically abuse his wife, on occasion. But, at least, he tried to do what he could, despite the odds. The effort was enough proof of his love for and devotion to his family. To many a Filipino, Duterte may not have accomplished what he promised to do. The country's problems — corruption, traffic, or even the drug problem — were simply too grave. But what is important is that he appeared to want to solve the problem, showed compassion, and attempted to do his best.

"Civil society groups are dealing with disappointment, frustration, and a sense of treachery over Duterte's failure to deliver on the much celebrated, but yet to be realized, promise of change that served as the premise for his presidency."

"If mistakes are made or actions turn out to be unpopular with the masses, the President is surrounded by several layers of the bureaucracy to cushion him from any negativity associated with his actions."

Of course, it is helpful to have a well-oiled machinery that is designed to support all of the president's planned undertakings and is set up to deal with any concerns or quash any potential criticism that may emerge in the process. This includes spokespersons that provide the doublespeak that explains away the populist president's missteps and idiosyncrasies, and an army of internet "trolls" that are unleashed in response to criticism, with counter messages that conform to the government's preferred narrative on social media.

This is bolstered by an effective use of intermediaries that provide the populist leader with what Karaos calls a "curtain of accountability". If mistakes are made or actions turn out to be unpopular with the masses, the President is surrounded by several layers of the bureaucracy to cushion him from any negativity associated with his actions. One of the key informants interviewed for this study — an NGO veteran with many years of experience working in rural development — brushed aside the impact of the drug war on the poor. He instead chose to point out that the President's good intentions for the drug war were being jeopardized by his leadership style that relied on others to operationalize his interventions. In other words, rather than faulting the President for launching a program that is systematically culling the poor, his followers would rather pin the blame on his lieutenants who have simply been enlisted to follow through on the president's orders. It is not uncommon for those supportive of the President to claim that he is being given wrong information by the people around him, rather than admitting outright that he is wrong. This same curtain of accountability allows the President, true to his populist nature, to assume the role of hero or the *bida,* as Atty. Bong Malonzo has described, when problems arise in the exercise of government.[112] All too often, we have seen the president, or his alter-ego, Senator Bong Go, step in to "fix" the situation whenever long-term measures instituted by technocrats and other cabinet members encounter snags.

MOVING FORWARD

The situation being what it is, civil society groups have been challenged to take stock and begin a process of self-reflection. Thoughts on moving forward have emerged from that process, some of which were raised by respondents to this study.

1. Internal Stock-taking

Internally, organized groups expressed the need to pause and level off on their bases of unity. This was seen as a particular concern for development NGO networks which, almost four years after what was a fractious national election, continue to suffer the repercussions of the polarization caused by differing views on who was perceived as the most fit to lead the nation. The respondents felt that the time had passed for treading lightly around personal sensitivities and avoiding discussions on politics, and begin engaging with each other through heart-to-heart discussions that will help the sector reconnect on the values and principles that once grounded their engagements and drove their programs, particularly for the poor.

A related set of processes mentioned was the need to look into succession planning. Development NGOs, in particular, have seen the importance of looking into investing in and re-energizing a successor generation given that their current leaders are aging, and second liners are no longer as eager to commit to life-long careers in NGO and social development work. Instead, these younger colleagues, for various reasons, have opted to pursue careers in the academe, the private sector, government, or even development agencies overseas. Because this younger generation of former development workers have since flown the coop, so to speak, there is a need to tap into other sources of energy, from among the millennials and generation Z'ers, for future leaders. Sparking their interest and inspiring them to pursue careers in development work is a tall order, but one that needs to be pursued.

Karaos proposes that it is also worthwhile to take a closer look into the successor generation's movement towards other fields to determine whether this was propelled by shifts in thinking in terms of theories for change. If so, should this not be articulated, reflected on, and discussed in greater depth?

2. Revitalizing the organizing process

Gaps were identified in the community organizing efforts that had been undertaken by the sectors over the years. For the labor sector, in particular, the numbers of the organizable labor force have dwindled in the face of globalization and the complexities of emergent, non-traditional forms of employment, including contractualization. New forms of organizing have yet to be employed that will effectively respond to this "new normal".

Some of the respondents recognized that organized groups represent only a tiny fraction of the urban poor and labor sector in the Philippines, alluding to the fact that perhaps organized groups would be less susceptible to the whims and caprices of a populist agenda. They also recognized, however, that the organizing process, as it is currently being employed, is lacking in depth as well as a clear trajectory. Where once, the organizing process involved continuous political education sessions that would enable the people to connect local issues with national concerns (and eventually the political), and frequent conjunctural analysis allowed them to engage in a dynamic process of action and reflection on the situation, this is no longer the case. At one point, there emerged an aversion to anything being labeled as "political". The respondents found that there is now a large gap in the people's ability to engage in constant analysis that would enable them to radiate issues from the ground up. While this was seen to be due in some part to dwindling resources and hence, the declining numbers of community organizers who could guide the people in that process, this was also attributed to a more fundamental failure to appreciate the fact that analysis is a dynamic process that communities need to constantly engage in if they are to remain on point and wield power in an ever evolving situation.

There was some acceptance among the respondents to this study, of the importance of continuing to engage in community organizing and finding the resources to fuel that process and developing cadres who can help organize and empower both the organized and those as yet unorganized groups. This also means developing instruments for regular conjunctural analysis and popular education that builds and strengthens structural analysis that will allow both organized and unorganized groups to successfully engage and respond, given the fluid situation. Corollary to all this is the importance of elaborating on different forms of organizations that need to be built up. For the labor sector, for instance, should organizing now shift from trade unions, seen as most useful in the past when the majority of the labor force was located in traditional work set ups and subject to the same set of flash points for organizing, to other specialized units such as cooperatives and community-based microfinance organizations which will provide workers with support in terms of self-organization, mutual aid, and collective negotiation?

In all this, Dr. Mary Racelis[113], points out the need to look more closely at how women and men are assuming roles in organizations and understand the gender dynamic that comes to play in the mobilization of people.

3. Identifying new spaces for engagement

Duterte's populism early on translated into a superficial, if erratic, engagement with the organized sectors. When it was politically expedient, particularly at the beginning of his administration when he was still bent on courting the support of the extreme left, Duterte welcomed certain segments of the urban poor and labor groups into the halls of Malacañang Palace. He awarded these groups with plum positions in his cabinet and central posts in key agencies of government. But

when his political survival required wooing the armed forces, which did not look kindly on this fledgling relationship between him and the extreme left, Duterte opted to cut ties.

Where once, certain organized groups from the urban poor and labor, were touted as government's allies, the populist government's sights have now been trained on these very same groups and their allies, as among the new enemies of the State. Some sectors doubt that the severed relations between the Duterte government and the left is permanent or genuine, especially given that the former mayor was known to have kept up a tactical alliance with these same groups in his hometown of Davao City. But for now, it appears that they are at odds and red-tagging[114] has become the norm.

"Where once, certain organized groups from the urban poor and labor, were touted as government's allies, the populist government's sights have now been trained on these very same groups and their allies, as among the new enemies of the State."

For most other organized groups, particularly among development NGOs, respondents expressed some clarity in terms of their engagements with the state. Because the Duterte administration has, from the outset, tended to be hostile towards its critics, these groups have strategically chosen to prioritize engagements with government at the local level, operating programs and continuing to work in cooperation with regional offices and local government units.

Identifying such spaces for engagement given a hostile environment at the national level is a strategy that development NGOs will continue to pursue. This will involve capitalizing on available spaces for representation in different government bodies. For instance, some urban poor groups are realizing that there are opportunities to participate and engage with government in local anti-drug bodies. The budget process was also mentioned as another sphere in which development NGOs and basic sector groups could actively participate in but have not, as yet, been able to fully explore.

In all, there is a general sense that greater efforts must be undertaken to get a deeper understanding of government and its complex systems under the Duterte administration.

4. Developing an effective communications strategy

Part of this attempt to understand involves a better grasp of government's strategy for connecting with the common person and its ability to bolster overwhelming support from the masses — a skill at which a populist government such as Duterte's is quite adept. In the course of discussions relating to this study, there was disbelief expressed at the level of support the populist leader continues to muster despite his failure to follow through on promises, his blatant abuse of individual rights and freedoms, his missteps and miscalculations.

A case in point is the Duterte administration's response to the ongoing coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. Many Filipinos are aghast at the lack of leadership that Duterte has shown in confronting the disease. The President has addressed the public in a series of sporadic, oft-delayed press briefings — often occurring late at night — where the head of state, instead of clearly articulating well-thought-out plans and assurances to the public that their concerns are being addressed by the government, has issued vague or incoherent, and sometimes conflicting statements. President Duterte has used his press briefings to react to issues as they emerge, and to lambast his critics. Afterwards, his subordinates are left with the difficult task of interpreting his messages and providing details on the operationalization of his directives.

The job is left to local government units and the private sector to respond to the needs of the people. With the poor, the homeless in particular, having nowhere to go and the government has not thought out provisions to shelter them for the duration of the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ), have had to be assisted by religious groups and the private sector.[115] The general sentiment is that the people have been left to fend for themselves or rely on the private sector in order to survive under these difficult times. In the meantime, while there is a sense that the President has been more concerned with grandstanding and consolidating his grip on power[116] rather than stemming the tide of the coronavirus pandemic and saving Filipino lives, it remains to be seen whether this will make a dent on his massive popularity.

All these things notwithstanding, there remains the challenge for organized groups to come to a greater understanding of Duterte's populist government's ability to tap into the "different rationality" that pervades among his supporters. Part of this effort needs to include studying how, in terms of messaging as well as the medium, people are receiving the messages being imparted to them. A well-thought-out communication strategy, utilizing social media that will result in a real connection with the masses is seen as essential at this stage in the game.

"The best response to the populist leader and the threat his leadership presents to democracy is not a simplistic understanding of its ways [...] but by recognizing and honoring the interests of multiple stakeholders in society."

5. Bridging gaps and encouraging synergies

Underlying all these is the need to bridge the gap in beliefs that has been encouraged by the populist ethos of sowing divisiveness among groups. For the organized groups, it is key to come to a genuine understanding of how the unorganized sectors think and feel. Even among allied groups, those who belong to the middle and upper classes are challenged to come to a genuine understanding of the needs and pulse of the urban poor groups that they work with.[117] Civil society needs to be able to reach out to and create synergies with other groups such as the private sector, the academe, and even government. Senior movers among the organized sectors must be able to tap into the energies of younger colleagues and nudge them towards greater positions of responsibility and leadership within their sectors. For their part, the young need to assert themselves and lead the way towards new and creative ways of engagement while tapping into the experience and wealth of knowledge of those that came before them.

Borrowing from Mudde, the best response to the populist leader and the threat his leadership presents to democracy, is not a simplistic understanding of its ways; neither is turning populism on its head by sanctifying "the elite" and demonizing "the people", but by recognizing and honoring the interests of multiple stakeholders in society and protecting and promoting those interests in equal turn.

As civil society groups move forward, regroup, and face up to the challenge to present organized resistance to the current threats to democracy, they would do well to hold fast to the tenets of pluralism.

ENDNOTES:

[1] MindaNews. (2016, May 11). Rodrigo Roa Duterte: 16th President, first Mindanawon to lead the country. https://www.mindanews.com/top-stories/2016/05/rodrigo-roa-duterte-16th-president-first-mindanawon-to-lead-the-country/. His father, Vicente, was governor of Davao from 1959 to 1965.

[2] Bais, G. (2019, November 15). Personal communication [Personal interview].

[3] Tupas, E. (2019, March 28). *Drug problem worse? PDEA cites large seizures.* Philippine Star. https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2019/03/28/1905257/drug-problem-worse-pdea-cites-large-seizures

[4] Ranada, P. (2018, March 2). *Duterte says he banned Rappler due to 'twisted' reporting.* Rappler. https://www.rappler.com/nation/duterte-rappler-ban-twisted-reporting

[5] Buan, L. (2020, June 15). *Maria Ressa, Rey Santos Jr convicted of cyber libel.* Rappler. https://www.rappler.com/nation/maria-ressa-reynaldo-santos-jr-convicted-cyber-libel-case-june-15-2020

[6] Hernandez, A. (2020, July 22). *Philippines: Journalist Maria Ressa pleads not guilty in tax case.* Deutsche Welle. https://www.dw.com/en/philippines-journalist-maria-ressa-pleads-not-guilty-in-tax-case/a-54260688

[7] CNN Philippines. (2017, September 17). *Duterte taunts Gascon: 'Are you gay or a pedophile?'.* https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2017/09/17/rodrigo-duterte-chito-gascon-pedophile.html

[8] ABS-CBN News. (2019, January 11). *Duterte approval, trust ratings climb end-2018: Pulse Asia survey.* https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/01/11/19/duterte-approval-trust-ratings-climb-end-2018-pulse-asia-survey

[9] FGD with focal persons for Development NGOs (the Caucus of Development NGOs board) was held on December 18, 2019. FGDs with focal persons with labor and the urban poor were held on January 8, 2020, and March 11, 2020, respectively.

[10] Edwards-Levy, A. (2015, November 17). *Americans Aren't Sure Anything In America Works Anymore.* HuffPost. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/america-future-survey_n_564bae1de4b045bf3df193bd

[11] Marlowe, L. (2019, February 23). *Marine Le Pen: 'The EU is dead. Long live Europe'.* The Irish Times. https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/europe/marine-le-pen-the-eu-is-dead-long-live-europe-1.3801809

[12] The Financial Times. (2018, January 24). *Viktor Orban: the rise of Europe's troublemaker.* https://www.ft.com/content/dda50a3e-0095-11e8-9650-9c0ad2d7c5b5

[13] Fisher, M., & Taub, A. (2017, April 1). *How Does Populism Turn Authoritarian? Venezuela Is a Case in Point.* The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/01/world/americas/venezuela-populism-authoritarianism.html

[14] Tremlett, G. (2019, February 19). *Podemos was the dazzling new force in Spanish politics. What went wrong?.* The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/feb/19/podemos-spanish-politics. Podemos, the left-wing Spanish populist party headed by pony-tailed young rebel Pablo Iglesias, came into power in May 2014, when it succeeded in electing five (5) Members of the European Parliament (MEP). Members signed up in waves upon its establishment, buoyed by the group's promises to solve such problems as inequality, unemployment, and economic malaise in the wake of the European debt crisis. Social media played a key role in its rising popularity among young people especially. Podemos has faced challenges relating to internal squabbles, a failure to sustain its relationships with the broader left-wing movement, and, as some have charged, "an overload of testosterone."

[15] The left-wing populist Syriza party is headed by Alexis Tsipras, voted Prime Minister of Greece in the general election of January 2015, on a campaign platform that was heavily critical of austerity measures being implemented during the Greek debt crisis. Forming a coalition government with right-wing populist Independent Greeks – the National Patriotic Alliance (NPA), he was eventually forced to resign after losing his base during major intra-party defections. Upon calling for a snap election in August of 2015, Tsipras would again recover his seat and reconvene the coalition with the

NPA. Since then, he has received flak for acceding to even graver austerity measures he had previously objected to and for exacerbating the country's economic problems.

[16] Mudde, C. (2015, February 17). *The problem with populism.* The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/feb/17/problem-populism-syriza-podemos-dark-side-europe

[17] Mudde, C. (2019, March 7). *To deserve our respect, politicians must drop their populist rhetoric.* The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/mar/07/politicians-populist-rhetoric-populism-people-elites

[18] There were five aspirants in the 2016 Presidential election: former Davao City Mayor Rodrigo R. Duterte (Partido Demokratiko-Lakas ng Bayan), former Department of Interior and Local Government Secretary Manuel A. Roxas (Liberal Party), Senators Grace Poe (Independent) and Miriam Defensor Santiago (People's Reform Party), and former Makati City Mayor Jejomar Binay (United Nationalist Alliance). Duterte would emerge the victor with 16,601,997 or 39.01% of all votes.

[19] Two focus group discussions (FGD) were organized by INCITEGov and facilitated by the Ateneo-based Institute for Philippine Culture on June 7, 2018. The FGDs aimed to a) analyze the political capital of President Duterte and identify the basis of his support, b) thresh out the characteristics of Populism in the context of the Philippines; and c) draw on basic sector views for a better understanding of current civil society perspectives on the present political situation of the country.

[20] The "preferential option for the poor" is a concept first coined by Fr. Pedro Arrupe, SJ, then Superior General of the Jesuit order in 1968, and later made more widely known by the Latin American bishops and the liberation theology movement. The concern for the welfare of the poor and the marginalized was given paramount importance under recent Catholic social teaching. In an interview with PhilDHRRA Mindanao Coordinator Glenn Bais, this was first mentioned in reference to then Davao City Mayor Duterte's propensity to snub invitations to events attended by professionals as opposed to his eagerness to attend community events extended to him by barangay captains. Secondly, according to Bais, Duterte's expressed pro-poor views must now be reinterpreted in the light of his War on Drugs where, sadly, the poor have been the primary casualties. He says, *"Sa mga pangyayari ngayon, parang may* separation of types of poor. *Yung mahirap na nagresort sa* illegal *dahil sa kahirapan, at yung mga* poor *na hindi naman nag*-resort *sa* illegal." [In recent events, there seems to be a distinction being made between the different types of poor. The poor who have resorted to the illegal because of poverty, and the poor who have not resorted to the illegal."

[21] Roselle Rasay has been with CODE-NGO for 12 years, first as membership program officer and eventually, its deputy executive director. She succeeded Sixto Donato Macasaet as its executive director, when the latter moved on in 2018.

[22] Open Government Partnership. (n.d.). *About OGP Local.* Retrieved April 10, 2019, https://www.opengovpartnership.org/ogp-local/about-ogp-local-program/. Open Government Partnership founding members also included Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico, Norway, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Each country would endorse the Open Government Declaration and launch their country plans. To date, there are 78 countries and 20 sub-national governments participating in the OGP.

[23] CODE-NGO. (2017, September 16). *New PH-OGP Non-Government Steering Committee Members.* https://code-ngo.org/new-ph-ogp-non-government-steering-committee-members/

[24] Department of Budget and Management. (n.d.) *Bottom Up Budgeting (BUB) Basics.* Retrieved April 11, 2019, http://openbub.gov.ph/sites/default/files/Bottom-up%20Budgeting%20101-2.pdf

[25] Rasay, R. (2019, February 6). Personal communication [Personal interview].

[26] CODE-NGO. (n.d). *CODE-NGO@25: Networking, Empowering and Transforming for Social Justice and Sustainable Development* (2016 Annual Report). Retrieved April 10, 2019, https://code-ngo.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/CODE-NGO_Annual_Report_2016.pdf

[27] One exception to CODE-NGO's rule refusing to endorse specific candidates for electoral office, was the candidacy of Crescente "Cris" C. Paez, former party list representative of the cooperative network, NATCCO in the 11th Congress of the Philippines in 1998. With the blessing of its board, CODE-NGO as a network, would actively support and campaign for Paez in 2016. Unfortunately, Paez would fail in his bid to win a Senate seat.

[28] Change Politics Movement. (n.d.). In *Facebook* [Facebook Page]. Retrieved April 12, 2019, https://www.facebook.com/changepoliticsmovt/about/?ref=page_internal

[29] CODE-NGO. (2016, April 22). *Presidential Candidates' Profiles.* https://code-ngo.org/presidential-candidates-profiles/

[30] Duterte first joined the local government as OIC vice-mayor of Davao City in 1986 to 1987. This was followed by 30 years under various capacities, as vice-mayor (2010-2013) and mayor (1988-1998, 2001-2010, 2013-2016). As many other political families are wont to do, Duterte was succeeded by his children Paolo (as vice mayor in 2013) and Sara (as mayor in 2010 and 2016) after several of his terms in office. He also served as representative of Davao City's 1st district to the Philippine House of Representatives from 1998 to 2001.

[31] Patricia Sarenas, a long-time resident of Davao, is also coincidentally a Duterte family friend and was the current president's colleague in the 11th Congress of the Philippines.

[32] National Anti-Poverty Commission. (n.d.). Service Charter. https://napc.gov.ph/articles/citizens-charter

[33] Senator Leila de Lima investigated then Mayor Duterte and his involvement with the Davao death squads when she headed the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) in 2009. She further incurred the ire of President Duterte when she became one of his most vocal critics as Senator in 2016. Within eight months of assuming the office of the President, Duterte orchestrated the filing of what many acknowledge to be trumped up drug-related charges against Sen. de Lima who has been incarcerated, as a result, since February of 2017.

[34] CODE-NGO. (2018, February 24) *CODE-NGO Statement Against Charter Change.* https://code-ngo.org/code-ngo-statement-charter-change/. The proposed changes would, according to CODE-NGO, include the extension of oversight powers for the president over all of government, provide overwhelming appointive powers to the president without clear checks and balances in the appointment of supreme court justices and heads of agencies and constitutional bodies, and the expansion of exemptions to provisions relating to economic protectionism.

[35] Bais, Personal interview.

[36] International Labour Organization. (n.d.). *Workers' and Employers' Organizations in the Philippines.* Retrieved April 26, 2019, https://www.ilo.org/manila/areasofwork/workers-and-employers-organizations/lang--en/index.htm

[37] Magadia, J.C.J. (2003). The Philippine Labor Movement and the Law. *Ateneo Law Journal 899.* http://ateneolawjournal.com/Media/uploads/7502cf92369a6ba290d6b4ce1511e4f8.pdf. The oldest and largest of these organizations, the TUCP, was established in 1975 with the blessings of then President Ferdinand E. Marcos. TUCP's establishment is perceived by some to have been a calculated move on the part of Marcos to clip the wings of the labor movement and in the process coopt the sector. The KMU or the May 1st Labor Movement, on the other hand was established in 1980 to represent progressive workers advocating the national democratic struggle.

[38] Ibid, 908.

[39] Rey, A. (2019, May 1). *To Senate halls from the streets: Will the labor vote prevail in the midterm elections?.* Rappler. https://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/will-labor-vote-prevail-midterm-elections-2019

[40] Dr. Ofreneo shared this during the January 8, 2020 FGD with labor focal persons organized in relation to this study.

[41] Atty. Ibarra "Bong" Malonzo" has engaged in a full range of trade union work - from organizing, educating, and negotiative collective bargaining contracts on behalf of workers' unions, and in 1987, became president of the National Federation of Labor (NFL). He is currently actively engaged with the Kasanyangan Center for Community Development and Microfinance Foundation, Inc. (KCCDMFI), which serves 22,000 clients in Zamboanga City, Zamboanga Sibugay and Zamboanga del Norte and maintains a loan portfolio of P220 million.

[42] Malonzo, I. (2019, November 10). Personal communication [E-mail interview].

[43] Serrano, M.R., & Xhafa, E. (2016, July). *From 'Precarious Informal Employment' to 'Protected Employment': The Positive Transitioning Effect of Trade Unions* (Working Paper No. 42). Global Labor University. http://www.global-labour-university.org/fileadmin/GLU_Working_Papers/GLU_WP_No.42.pdf

[44] International Labour Conference. (2014). *Transitioning from the informal to the formal economy* (Report V (1) - 103rd Session) International Labour Office Geneva. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_norm/---relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_218128.pdf

[45] Aganon, M.E., Serrano, M.R., & Certeza, R.A. (2009). *Union Revitalization and Social Movement Unionism in the Philippines.* Central Books. http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/philippinen/07130.pdf

[46] Ibid.

[47] In the labor key informants FGD organized for this study on January 8, 2020, Bobit Librojo explained the difficult process a trade union must undergo to organize within a workplace. After a group is organized, a union must be registered. Then it must file for recognition as a bargaining agent. It is herein that the difficulty lies and all sources of pressure on the organization emerges. He gave as an example management's refusal to sign a certificate of registration of the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA). Atty. Ibarra "Bong" Malonzo described this as a form of "legalism" to which trade union work has been vulnerable at every turn.

[48] In the January 8, 2020 FGD with labor.

[49] Malonzo, E-mail interview.

[50] Librojo in the January 8, 2020 FGD.

[51] Salamat, M. (2016, June 29). *Aquino's legacy| Proliferation of contractual, seasonal, low-quality jobs.* Bulatlat. https://www.bulatlat.com/2016/06/29/aquinos-legacy-proliferation-of-contractual-seasonal-low-quality-jobs/

[52] Bernadas, K.A. (2016, April 30). *Women empowerment groups: Poe is our only hope.* Rappler. https://www.rappler.com/moveph/women-empowerment-group-grace-poe. The KMU, initially expressed their support for Grace Poe, in fact attended the formal launch of her campaign.

[53] Torres, E. (2016, June 30). *What can workers in the Philippines expect under Duterte?.* Equal Times. https://www.equaltimes.org/what-can-workers-in-the?lang=en#.X70tfc0zY2x

[54] Some quarters explained that the FFW members were actually split among those who supported Duterte, and those who remained loyal to the Marcos family. Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos ran for vice-president with former Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago as his running mate during the 2016 elections.

[55] Torres, *What can workers in the Philippines expect under Duterte?.*

[56] Contractualization or "Endo" (end of contract) arrangements in the Philippines is seen as a component of the strategy to cut labor costs by minimizing regular and permanent job arrangements and exposing labor to substandard working conditions. Contractual employees are terminated just before they can be considered permanent workers and hence exempt from being accorded benefits and privileges required by law.

[57] These included Judy Taguiwalo as Secretary of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), farmer leader Rafael Mariano as Secretary of the Department of Agrarian Reform (DAR), and Liza Maza, as Secretary of the National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC).

[58] Cudis, C.J.C. (2016, June 3). *2 ex-generals, KMU leader in Cabinet.* SunStar. https://www.sunstar.com.ph/article/78210

[59] Malonzo, I. (2019, November 8). Personal communication [E-mail interview].

[60] Rey, A. (2018, May 1). *'Walang silbi': Labor groups reject Duterte's EO vs endo.* Rappler. https://www.rappler.com/nation/eo-contractualization-rally-may-1-labor-day-2018

[61] Rey. A. (2018, October 3). *Labor groups enraged as Duterte sacks Leftist Usec Joel Maglunsod.* Rappler. https://www.rappler.com/nation/labor-groups-enraged-duterte-firing-leftist-labor-undersecretary-joel-maglunsod

[62] Orellana, F. (2019, May 1). *KMU to voters: Reject Duterte candidates.* Philippine Daily Inquirer. https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1112358/kmu-to-voters-reject-duterte-candidates

[63] NAGKAISA. (2012, April 23). *New alliance unites Philippine labor.* http://www.nagkaisa.org/2012/04/

[64] Bureau of Labor Relations. (n.d.). *Tripartism.* Department of Labor and Employment. Retrieved April 14, 2020. https://blr.dole.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/tripartismandsocialdialogues.pdf

[65] Bustillos, E. (2019, January 28). Personal communication [E-mail interview]. Email interview with Edwin Bustillos, of NUWHRAIN-SENTRO and formal labor representative to the National Anti-Poverty Council, on January 28, 2019.

[66] Raised during the January 8, 2020 focus group discussion with labor.

[67] Malonzo, E-mail interview.

[68] Asian Development Bank (2019, May 24). *Basic Statistics 2019.* https://www.adb.org/countries/philippines/poverty#:~:text=In%20the%20Philippines%2C%2016.6%25%20of,day%20in%202019%20is%202.7%25.

[69] Asian Development Bank. (2009). *Poverty in the Philippines: Causes, Constraints, and Opportunities.* https://think-asia.org/bitstream/handle/11540/191/poverty-philippines-causes-constraints-opportunities.pdf?sequence=1

[70] Ballesteros, M.M., Ramos, T.P., & Magtibay, J. (2017). An Assessment of the Community Mortgage Program Implementation Study. *Philippine Institute for Development Studies* (Research Paper Series No. 2017-01), https://pidswebs.pids.gov.ph/CDN/PUBLICATIONS/pidsrp1701.pdf

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[106] Journalist Inday Espina-Varona, actress Mae Paner, Socorro Reyes of Baigani, Edna Aquino of LODI, Coalition Against Trafficking in Women chief for Asia Pacific Jean Enriquez, Zena Bernardo of Bahay Amihan, lawyer Susan Villanueva, Annelle Gumihid-Sabanal of Christians for Life and Democracy (CLAD), Melba Magay and Fhabi Fajardo of the Institute for Studies in Asian Church and Culture (ISACC), Sharon Cabusao-Silva of Voices of Women for Justice and Peace (VoWJP), Gert Ranjo-Libang of the women's alliance GABRIELA and Marielle Rugas of Girls for Peace.

[107] CNN Philippines. (2018, June 29). *TIME hails women of #BabaeAko movement as one of most influential people online.* https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2018/06/29/BabaeAko-Movement-TIME-Magazine-Duterte.html

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[110] These subjects included helping the poor, fighting terrorism, developing a healthy economy, reconciling with Muslim rebels, and protecting the freedom of the press.

[111] Karaos surmises that what may be perceived by observers to be an irrational loyalty to the Filipino leader who has failed to display real governance skills or deliver on his promises for real change actually reflects a "different rationality" that needs to be further examined and understood. This was discussed during a focus group discussion of urban poor key informants held on March 11, 2020.

[112] Shared during the January 8, 2020 FGD with labor key informants.

[113] In the urban poor FGD held last March 11, 2020.

[114] In the context of the Philippines, red tagging is a strategy used by the Philippine government of labelling individuals and/or organizations as belonging to the extreme left of the political spectrum, in effect classifying them as threats to or enemies of the State.

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[117] In a focus group discussion with key informants on the urban poor situation held last March 11, 2020, sociologist Dr. Mary Racelis shared that "there is a large gap between the liberal, reform-oriented groups and their beliefs about the urban poor which are very negative and patronizing". In a meeting she attended, she shared that urban poor representatives disagreed with proposals to use an image of the pieta, an image of the Virgin Mary cradling the dead body of Jesus for their yearly *Kalbaryo* (Calvary re-enactment) activity during the upcoming Holy Week to symbolize extra-judicial killings. The urban poor representatives asserted that there was a mistaken assumption that EJKs were the only problems facing their sector; implied in this was the idea that middle class was imposing a symbolic representation that reflected their views and, while not untrue, did not adequately represent the views and most urgent concerns of the poor.

ANNEX A:
List of Participants to the Focus Group Discussions (FGD)

DEVELOPMENT NGOS, LABOR, WOMEN, URBAN POOR, MARAWI CSOS

June 7, 2018

- Butch Ablir, *ZOTO*
- Marites Delos Reyes, *Kasambahay*
- Nimfa Atienza, *SENTRO*
- Roman Dastas, *SENTRO-WSN*
- Marlene Dela Cruz, *PKKK*
- Fernandina Viray, *EDSA ProDem*
- Ronell Dileno
- Islanie Banocay Jr.
- Arianne Jenelle Liquido, *Religious sect – INC*
- Fhabi Fajardo, *ISACC/ Dulambuhay*
- Dr. Melba Padilla Maggay, *ISACC*
- Joie Cortina, *RH Agenda*
- Judy Ann Lubiano *(Mindanao graduate student)*
- Hamilcar Chanjueco Jr., *SPARK Philippines/Mindanao Pride*
- Christian Gultia, *Youth for Human Rights and Democracy*
- Luigi Karlo Miguel Judan, *INCITEGov*

CODE-NGO/DEVELOPMENT NGOS

December 18, 2019

Board members

- Albert Aquino (Chairperson), *CENVISNET*
- Marjorie Francia Oropesa-Bañares, *CBD*
- Cristina Senaken-Aban, *CORDNET* (alternate)
- Clarita Napoles, *EVNET*
- Andrea Maria Patricia M. Sarenas, *MINCODE*
- Agnes Bolaños (Treasurer), *MINCODE*
- Nadette Toledo, *MINCODE*
- Diosdado Luna, *NATCCO*
- Maricel Genzola, *PHILSSA*
- Lorena Navallasca, *WEVNET* (alternate)
- Atty. Ferdinand Casis (Corporate Secretary)

Network EDs/Coordinators and Representatives

- Norman Jiao, *AF*
- Bel Nachor, *CBD*
- Araw Chavez, *CBD* (CIRI Chair)
- Anton Dignadice, *CENVISNET* (CICB Chair)
- Imelda Matib, *CORDNET*
- Danilo Bustillo, *EVNET*
- Raizsa Mae Anayatin, *MINCODE*

- Reynaldo Laguda, *PBSP*
- Caridad Corridor, *PHILDHRRA*
- Benedict Balderrama, *PHILSSA*
- Rhea Aguilar, *PHILSSA*

Secretariat

- Roselle S. Rasay (Executive Director)
- Deanie Lyn Ocampo *(*Deputy Executive Director)
- Ma. Lourdes G. Arroyo (Finance & Administration Manager)
- Mariefe Del Mundo (Membership Program Officer)
- Sandino Soliman (Advocacy Program Officer)
- Donna Mae Huarde, (Communications Program Officer)
- Ma. Magdalena Labios (Finance & Administration Assistant)

LABOR SECTOR

January 8, 2020

- Ibarra "Bong" Malonzo
- Bobit Librojo
- Rene Ofreneo
- Corazon Juliano- Soliman, *INCITEGov*
- Teresita Quintos Deles, *INCITEGov*
- Marilou M. Ibañez, *INCITEGov*
- Shei Datinguinoo, *INCITEGov*

URBAN POOR

March 11, 2020

- Dr. Mary Racelis
- Alice Murphy
- Jessica Amon
- Dr. Anna Marie Karaos
- Fides Bagasao
- Teresita Quintos Deles, *INCITEGov*
- Margarita Lopa Perez, *INCITEGov*
- Marilou M. Ibañez, *INCITEGov*
- Shei Datinguinoo, *INCITEGov*

ANNEX B:
List of Key Informant Interviews

- Roselle S. Rasay *(July 10, 2018)*
- Mariefe del Mundo *(July 10, 2018)*
- Aga Khan Sharief *(Sept. 3, 2018)*
- Dr. Tirmizy Abdullah *(Sept. 3, 2018)*
- Drieza Abato Lininding *(Sept. 3, 2018)*
- Antonio Fulgado/NFL *(Sept. 11, 2018)*
- Bobit Librojo/National Union of Bank Employees *(Sept. 11, 2018)*
- Nice Coronacion *(Sept. 11, 2018 via FB messenger)*
- Alice Murphy *(Sept. 12, 2018)*
- Bobit Librojo *(January 30, 2019)*
- Ibarra "Bong" Malonzo (via email) *(November 10 and 11, 2019)*
- Dodo Macasaet (via email) *(January 23, 2019)*
- Tony Salvador (via email) *(January 28, 2019)*
- Edwin Bustillos (via email) *(January 28, 2019)*
- Roselle Rasay CODE-NGO *(February 6, 2019)*
- Dick Balderrama PHILSSA *(February 6, 2019)*
- Glenn Bais *(November 15, 2019)*
- Nestor Banuag *(November 6, 2019)*
- Pat Sarenas *(October 29, 2019)*



Margarita (Marge) Lopa Perez is a researcher-writer who has written on social movements and Philippine civil society. Over the years, she has worked with a number of groups which include the Congress for a People's Agrarian Reform, the Philippine Institute for Alternative Futures, the Foundation for Media Alternatives, the Asian Institute of Management, and the Philippine government. A Development Studies graduate of the Ateneo de Manila University, she balances writing deadlines with raising her two children and pursuing a recently discovered passion for watercolor art.

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3rd Level Cyberpark Tower 1, 60 General Aguinaldo Ave, Cubao, Quezon City 1109
incitegov@incitegov.org.ph | incitegov.org.ph

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