

SURVEY □ Barangays

Barangays: democracy is what it does

ONE MAJOR TASK of the Administration is the promotion of effective citizen participation in government decision-making. The achievement of this goal will ensure that legislative and administrative output would satisfy crucial demands of citizens in providing for long range national goals.

Preconditions for success. One requisite for effective citizen participation is the institutionalization of channels of participation. For Filipinos, the barangay is the main institution for participating in government processes. Through the Barangay Assembly, all Filipinos aged from fifteen years up, can recommend to their barangay officers measures to be adopted for the welfare of the barangay. And through the barangay officials, the average barangay member can make his voice heard at the uppermost levels of government; this is possible because the Sangguniang Bayan and the various barangay federations (municipal, city, provincial, regional, national), whose functions include recommending measures to the President, are based mainly on the mass of barangay officials who are accountable to barangay members.

Another requisite for effective citizen participation is that the system of representation must also provide for representatives chosen through nongeographic criteria. This requisite is fulfilled, in the municipal level at least, through the selection of representatives to the municipal Sangguniang Bayan from the capital, labor and professional sectors.

A third requisite is that citizen participation must be possible and essential at each level of government. This requisite is substantially fulfilled in these ways: a) at each level of government, there is a corresponding group of Sangguniang Bayan officers and barangay federation officers who exercise advisory functions; b) legislative functions are also exercised by the municipal, city and provincial Sangguniang Bayan assemblies.

Fourth requisite: the citizens' leadership must be equipped with organizational and planning skills. This requirement is fulfilled in some barangays and partly or barely in others. This is why the government, through the Department of Local Government and Community Development (DLGCD), is giving technical assistance and training such as seminars and workshops to local government officials down to the barangay level. The government has initiated the evolution of a system of local government autonomy and as this goes on, local officials' initiative will develop.

Scope of popular participation. While the basic channels of participation have been established, the full strength of citizen participation in local government decision-making has yet to be fully realized until the full establishment of local government autonomy. Establishing the grounds for effective local government autonomy is now a major activity for the government.

The public does participate considerably in planning and implementing activities geared toward local and national development goals. Such planning is done in barangay assembly meetings and in meetings between officials of different barangays.

Some quarters object that the political will of the Filipinos has been suppressed so that citizen participation now is meaningless. But citizen participation does not necessarily have to occur in political decision-making before it can be deemed significant. It is already significant when it occurs in solving the main problems of the nation which, according to the average Filipino's demands, are: opportunities for economic betterment, more education and health services, better housing, enough police

protection, et. al. The most pressing demands of Filipinos today are economic and social, not political, in nature.

A profile of the quality of some barangay operations, according to a UP Local Government Center survey, is as follows.

□ **The leadership.** Most of the barangay officials have much to learn of their role in the total effort for national development. The foremost example of lack of capability mentioned by the UP survey happened at the First National Symposium on Good Government held last year. Many lacked job knowledge. They displayed lack of respect for the rules of parliamentary procedure, lack of mastery of basic communication skills. The problem was hampered by the mixed use of Tagalog and English and the lack of mastery of both languages.

Besides lack of leadership skills, the UP survey says that lack of incentives and financial resources hampers barangay leaders. The UP survey recommends the following:

1. Elect a new set of barangay officials since the present crop of barangay officials are mostly leftovers of the old society. In the old society, the people did not care about barrio elections as much as town elections. Politicians were then able to easily put up their cronies as candidates. Street characters and even ex-convicts became a common breed of barrio officials. And then when barangays were organized out of barrios, not many able and respected citizens were willing to run for office. Now, however, people are more willing to participate meaningfully in setting up a better set of officials.

2. Provide barangay officials with better incentives, financial and otherwise.

3. In selecting succeeding barangay officials, preference should be given those who have been active leaders of the Kabataang Barangay. Their experience in seminars and in barangay meetings qualifies them for greater involvement.

□ **Local initiative.** Many projects and activities are initiated from higher levels of government. The common prac-

tice is for barangays to choose from a government listing of projects. This understandably includes necessary activities like cereal distribution, food production and rehabilitation. Other activities are of local scope but since these cover most if not all of community needs, the opportunity for more local initiative will come in the future.

□ **Community resources.** Lack of funds is the major problem of the barangays. About 80 percent of the barangay officials surveyed mentioned lack of funds as their chief problem. Despite this, a positive character of involvement is shown in the way barangay members recourse to their own pockets for funding. In four districts of one city, 62 percent of barangay funds came from contributions of members, 27 percent from private individuals and organizations, and 11 percent from the government.

The most frequently mentioned solution to problems is self-help. This perhaps shows that the government's efforts to promote self-reliance as a community ethic is bearing fruit.

□ **Activities.** The frequency of activities of a set of barangay assemblies in one city is as follows: twice a month—38.64 percent; thrice—9.09 percent; more than thrice—20.45 percent; once—13.64 percent. Of the barangay officers questioned, 70 percent said that their meetings are well attended and only 20 percent said no.

The main activities of the barangays are: promotion of peace and order which includes the control of gambling and excessive drinking and the organization of vigilantes; promotion of health and sanitation which includes cleanliness and beautification campaigns, repair of drainage systems, and immunization campaigns; encouragement of food production and home industries which includes planting vegetable and root crops, backyard poultry and hog raising, and food preservation.

□ **Cooperation.** There is no substantive lack of cooperation among barangay officials and other government units. Of a sample set of barangay of-

ficers in one city, 75 percent had good working relationship with other barangays; 93.19 percent said they had meetings with other barangay officials; 91 percent said they consulted with city officials.

The barangay officials named the DLGCD as the agency helping them in their projects. Other agencies mentioned were the Department of Education and Culture, Department of Social Welfare, Commission on Elections, Department of Public Highways and Board of Transportation, and the city Barangay Secretariat. The most frequently mentioned type of assistance coming from these agencies was coordination and facilitation of procedures. Next was supervision of funds.

□ **Case studies.** Two barangays of one city were studied by the UP Local Government Center. The first barangay studied was very affluent, since 20 percent of its family heads were government officials and the rest were executives or supervisors in the private sector. The second barangay is one of the poorest in the city; almost all of its family heads are factory workers, farmers, drivers, security guards, janitors and laborers in the government.

The studies confirm this: the rich do still look to the government, but unlike the poor, mainly for traditional services like adjudication and protection of civil rights. The poor depend on the government mainly for more basic wants like better economic opportunities and health services. It is in the satisfaction of their respective demands that the government—and therefore the barangay—is meaningful to both the rich and the poor.

The members of the rich barangay value more their private associations, like the homeowners' association and a country club, than the barangay assembly with regards to participation in activities like cleanliness drives, repair of roads, construction of community facilities; in other words, the cleanliness drive of the homeowners' association would be more participated in than the cleanliness drive of the barangay. Moreover, the barangay realizes less contributions than the homeowners' association. The barangay assembly's meetings too are poorly attended; the barangay captain, to force the attendance of those who work in the government, has to threaten the members that their offices will be informed about any absence.

The members of the poor barangay, on the other hand, have only the barangay assembly as the community association to resort to for collective needs. The meetings are well attended and the members wholeheartedly contribute money, free labor, freematerials, etc. to barangay projects. Among some of their projects are electrification of the community, improvement of their health center, widening of roads. The barangay assembly, in short, has made it possible for the members to improve their community.

If the rich barangay's members can realize most of their community improvement programs through their private associations, how is the barangay meaningful to them? One instance shows how.

The owners of a subdivision had planned to construct a health spa and a commercial complex in the subdivision. The homeowners' association opposed the projects and appealed to the government. After much litigation, the issue was finally settled through a *barangay referendum* which repudiated the two projects. That referendum was a political function not possible among the private associations. — Marcos Agayo



Promote self-reliance as community ethic.