

## ***Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity***

Two regional consultations meetings were organized to exchange ideas around the three words: liberty, equality, fraternity. These were held in Davao City last May 8-9 ; and in Cebu City on May 16-17, 2008.

The two consultations collectively traced the introduction of the three words to the Filipino people during the struggle for independence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. On October 31, 1896, General Aguinaldo issued two decrees. They both stated that the aim of the Revolution was the independence of the Philippines. Therefore, he urged Filipinos to fight for freedom, following the example of civilized European and American nations. He proclaimed “Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity” as watchwords of the revolution.

Through the years, the Filipinos lost track of these ideals. But on February 1986, the Filipino people remembered these ideals and overthrow the dictatorship through a bloodless people power revolution.

However, a sense of “learned helplessness” has developed among the disadvantaged sector in our country after the 1986 revolution. The Filipino people have acquired a resigned attitude and lack of expectations among those who feel that traditional power relations will invariably leave them helpless and hopeless to assert their rights.

This state of “learned helplessness” on the part of the powerless in our society is the challenge that should be met by all who are concerned with the attainment of real equality. The disadvantaged among our people – the poor, the women, the aged, the children, the handicapped, etc. – need more than theoretical equality. They deserve more than equality in law which quite often is no more than a hypothetical equality. After all our experience, it is time to realize that to give mere hypothetical equality to them is to treat them with inequality. Equality in creed is not equality in reality,

Our forebears planted the tree of equality in this country and it is our duty as their successors to insure that this tree of equality will bear the fruits that the present and future can enjoy. Thus, PhilNet-RDI has been through the past decade promoting community governance. This has helped empowered the community organizations in dealing directly with government for collaborated and coordinative efforts towards rural development and empowerment.

While gains have been initially achieved, the two consultations realized the problem of sustainability, and mainstreaming of the successes. And as such, conference resolutions were made as follows:

## 1. Mainstreaming of the Theory of Justice (public advocacy)

It is time to rethink our concept of liberty, equality, and fraternity. We like to think we live under the rule of law, when in truth it is often times the rule by law of the powerful over the powerless.

This is our challenge, a challenge addressed not only to our sense of justice but a challenge that ought to prick our conscience. Let us always remember that democracy cannot thrive on the thin topsoil of theoretical equality between the haves and the have-nots.

Inequalities in the allocation and distribution of wealth are acceptable only if they work for the benefit of the least well-off members of society. Thus, PhilNet-RDI strongly recommends the mainstreaming of American political philosopher John Rawls 1971 theory of justice.

Liberty and Equality should have two basic fundamental principles

First: Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive liberty compatible with a similar system of liberty for all;

Second: Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged.

## 2. Policy Advocacy

PhilNet-RDI's own experience would indicate that community organizations matter in promoting civic engagement and educations; and so does government policy toward community organizations.

Community associations stimulate civic involvement and that public policy shapes the community associations capacity to do so. Government regulation of associations and social service providers often make political participation easier or more difficult. It is therefore necessary for government to promote and assure the adoption of government policies that would encourage political communication and advocacy.

The task of renewing civic engagement will require attention to many domains of public life. Attention to the promotion of community organizations should be part of any concerted effort to broaden civic and political engagement. There may be some forms of participation that people do alone but civic engagement generally involves working with others.

Further more, public policies should be designed to promote volunteerism – such as service learning programs in schools – should be designed so as to enhance rather than detract from the connections between service and citizenship.

### 3. Community participation in governance

One of the greatest civic virtues of associational involvement is that it can contribute to one's sense of political efficacy: the conviction that one is capable of influencing policymakers, or that one's voice counts. Testimonies amongst our partners would indicate that community participation makes people feel better about their own political effectiveness and about the ability of the local government to respond to them. It contributes to the amount of political knowledge that people possess.

Democracy has to be deeply rooted on the bedrock of true equality and we can achieve this ideal only by giving the powerless more equality than the powerful for only in that way can we really level their playing field, only in that way can we breathe life to the philosopher's dream that there is power in powerlessness.

The composition of the leadership of these organizations should however be broadly representative of their communities. Selection to leadership positions should not be insular, and to maximize public accountability, the actions of the leadership should be as open as is practical.

### 4. Regular Interface between government and community organizations

Regular interface between community organizations and government are critical factors for political participation. This would serve as the venue for promotive interaction.

Promotive interaction is characterized by community organizations and government officials providing each other with efficient and effective help and assistance; exchanging needed resources, such as information and materials, *and* processing information more efficiently and effectively; providing each other with feedback in order to improve their subsequent performance; challenging each other's conclusions and reasoning in order to promote higher quality decision making and greater insight into the problems being considered; advocating the exertion of effort to achieve mutual goals; influencing each other's efforts to achieve the group's goals; acting in trusting and trustworthy ways; being motivated to strive for mutual benefit; and maintaining a moderate level of arousal characterized by low anxiety and stress.