Concept of Interactive Governance[*]
By Dr. Sosmena

I.   Introduction

The notion of interactive governance in sum is a fashion or style of governing characterized by an awareness and conscious participation of the constituency or the citizenry in making policy decision that concerned communitarian interests.

Interactive governance allows a sustained public communication and dialogue between those who are in the corridors of power and the constituency that legitimizes their position of authority.

This process connotes that the governed using logic and rationale, are completely aware that "conscious participation" in governance is both a political right as well as an obligations of the governed to express their thoughts and wishes which are important cog of the framework of governance.

Those who are in political power exercising local leadership function should encourage the articulation of popular interests that expresses peoples' needs and aspirations.

This specific process will forge an optimal cooperation between those who are chosen or elected to govern and those who are governed.

II.   Awareness of Participation

There are constitutional and legal doctrines or provisions that define some of the rightful vehicle as to which the citizenry or the constituency can exercise meaningful participation in governance. Some of these are expressed in the concept of individual and institutional rights.

1)   Civil Rights

This is the first generation of rights i.e. right to abode and the privacy of communication are manifestations of this right.

This refers to civil liberties both the governor and the governed enjoy as enshrined and protected in democratic societies.

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2)   Political Rights

This is the second generation of Rights actualize when the constituency exercise the right of suffrage by electing those who should govern a political locality.

This second generation of rights or political rights has more or less five (5) reinforcing methods and ways, how the citizenry can articulate or express their preferences over specific political issues.

a) Election

In a democratic society, political leaders are elected by the citizenry. Those who are elected carry to their position of power, the political accountability due the governed. An unwritten understanding is that those who are in power must put first and foremost respond and protect the interests of the citizenry.

b) Recall

This is the right and the power of the citizenry to change their elected political leaders, who in their estimation do not perform their duties in accordance with public law and the Constitution.

Such a right consists of the electorate calling for an election of a new set of political leaders. The Constitution are the laws of certain country, specifying as to when and how recall can duly exercised.

c) Initiative

This legal mechanism allows the citizenry to initiate laws and policies that are intended to benefit the citizenry and their respective communities.

Initiative is usually exercise if the citizenry feels that their duly elected leaders fail to legislate measures necessary to protect the local interest or repeal legislative action inimical to the community as a whole.

d) Referendum

This refers to the process whereby the citizenry are empowered to express and indicate their preferences or initiate certain public issues that usually affect their daily lives.

Referendum or referenda allows the constituency to participate in the discussion and participation in deciding public issues or resolution of problems that affect the present and the future of people's lives.

This process requires the casting of ballots of individual. Position in certain issues that are expressed through or under the jurisdiction of the competent authority i.e. Commission on Election or Referendum Office.

e) Plebiscite

This is another political vehicle that allows the citizens to participate and decide how they should be governed. An example is the peoples' collective decision as to what modality of government is good for them i.e. unitary federalism or parliamentary government.

Another example of a public issue is the aggregation (consolidation) or fragmentation of cities and provinces.

3. Rights to Development

This is the third generation of rights. This right refers to the natural behavior of the citizenry or the constituency to aspire and attain their own optimal development. This specific notion of right entitles the individuals to develop economically, politically and socially in their communities.

This right includes the right to information such as the benefits of new knowledge and science including technologies that place the individual as the center of human development.

III. Concept of Empowerment

The brief description on individual or institutional rights has another meaningful dimension.

This important dimension gives life and meaning to the notion of citizens' empowerment. Empowerment to be relevant in the conscious participation of the citizens in governance can be manifested in these terms:

a) The citizens are a major part in the power hierarchy in society.

This notion is anathema to a feudalistic society where then is an imbalance of political power between the landed estates and the peasants. Power in this society is tilted towards the land gentry or landlords.

To be part of the power hierarchy in society is characterized by a balance of political power no more and no less between those who are govern and those who are governed from whom government authority emanates.

b)   The citizenry participates in collective decision making

This means the citizens in unison making their position and thereby act as multiple individuals making one single decision expressing their position or views of the community as a whole.

c)   The citizenry are part owner of the machinery of production

To be economically enhanced connotes the exercise of political freedom. It means that those who are marginalized should not be tied to the tyranny of political patronage and thereby contribute in reaching a politically educated polity.

d)   Concept of "home-rule" and subsidiarity are important elements in the empowerment concept.

A basic political principle in governance is the concept of the "Home-rule" and self government. It means that communities govern themselves with the minimum influence of "big" or higher government. This expresses the ultimate notion of local autonomy where the citizenry decides what to do with their lives.

Interactive governance besides its feature as an empowerment also ensures public accountability and transparency in governmental administration.

This specific characteristic of interactive governance minimizes corruption and dysfunctions in the public bureaucracy.

Interactive governance once institutionalize will lead to an excellent tradition of a sustained dialogue between those who lead and those who are followers.

A sustained dialogue to a great extent, facilitate the effective formulation of responsive public policies in the process of governance.

It likewise guarantees good governance and provide guideposts for public administrators and the public in general what to expect from their government.

IV.   Institutional Requirements for Interactive Governance.

Popular or public participation in governance is most effective and visible if channeled through existing institutional arrangements.

One example where interest /articulation is being carried out is through governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Development Councils and Peace and Order Councils usually are official governmental organs that can facilitate citizens' participation in governance.

Non-governmental organizations advocating or lobbying for communal causes are other examples.

A basic community based organization for participation in governance is village councils or grassroots government.

These are frontline institutions that can intelligently articulate the wishes and voice of urban and rural communities.

  Institutions which are created by law to perform basic functions including non-governmental institutions existing in all levels of society are excellent examples how participation in governance can be very well carried out.

Levels of government which are closest to the ground or sub-national political structures like local government systems are some of the readily available local institutions that can be utilized to mobilize conscious awareness of the citizenry in participative governance can likewise be easily harnessed.

Political leaders who are sensitive to the "pulse" of the constituency usually resort to these institutions in order to establish a feedback mechanism in achieving good governance.

One of the essential purposes of local governments is the articulation of the people's aspirations and wishes to those who are in the corridors of powers who can make appropriate action.

V.   Some Strategies for Interactive Governance

A system of mutually reinforcing strategies to encourage government-people dialogue is essential in interactive governance.

A village justice system where citizens act as mediators is an excellent grass root examples in participatory governance.

There are certain generators and strategic tools that are useful in triggering interactive governance. Some generators and tools referred to are either the use of organizations to facilitate government-people communications or others that can be classified as "linking pins" generally in the field of communication technologies.

The field of expectations or public endeavor between government and the citizens are wide and varied.

These areas of cooperative action can be in climate change, environmental management, promotion of the Rule of Law and justice and community peace and order. It also includes minimizing corruption and developing good citizens. Other fields of endeavors are the preservation of cultural heritage, the promotion of tourism or promote the good image of the country. The field of endeavor between government and the citizenry can be sum up as holistically societal that ultimately promotes the commonweal.

1.   Grievance Office

The creation of a grievance system within a political institution illustrates the use of institutions, i.e. a grievance office that can receive peoples' complaints requiring recognition and resolution by public authorities.

2.   Public Forum

An excellent tradition to establish is public forum (fora) where the citizenry can air their wishes and aspirations that require action from competent authorities who can bring public concerns into the corridors of power for resolution. Sometimes in some societies, these are labeled as peoples' park.

3.   Start a Peoples' Day Tradition

Some political leaders and governors designate a specific day of the week to devote their time listening to their constituencies.

Other similar practice is open to the public working sessions of the legislative councils after which the citizenry in attendance are

encourage to bring to the members of the council community problems requiring legislation.

4. Citizen's Charter

This is a formal document in which local politicians and government administrators pledge a program of governance and establish a system of consulting the citizenry as to its relevance in their performance as contemplated in their pledge to the community called the Citizens' Charter.

This is a political contract between the governors and the governed. The obligations and the roles of both parties are defined in achieving a common objective.

5. The use of survey and the concept of citizens' satisfaction rating.

Survey as a strategy in interactive governance is intended to "feel" the constituencies with the hope that in the process, governors can be guided of the peoples' preferences as to those who are elected into power will behave and act accordingly in the performance of their official functions.

Surveys can also be a good tool to ask people to rate how public services are being delivered or managed.

The concept of citizens' satisfaction rating in practice is focused on how a local authority is providing basic services, the result of which is presumed to guide all concerned as how service delivery can be much improved.

Some local governments make it a practice to ask their constituencies what services they desire from their local governments.

6. Utility of Radio and Television

Both are very powerful medium of communications.

It has revolutionized and made more democratic citizens' participation in issues concerning national, regional and local interests.

Experience has shown that general participation in governance is facilitated by the use of communication gadgets such as computers, cellphones and other mobile radios and telephones.

Television has allowed several age brackets of the citizens to be totally involved in community interest and public issues.

7.   News Print Media

A good link that has continuously educated the citizenry is to practice civic consciousness and get involve in facets of governance which are extensively facilitated by the power of the print media.

Discussed in this particular section are the indicative strategies useful in the promotion of interactive governance.

There are other strategies of course that can be added to the list.

One of the indirect objectives of interactive governance is to achieve a balance of political power between the center and localities. This is the essence of democratic local governance.

The consolidation of political power in the Center is not good for effective governance.   This situation stagnate the overall development of good governance.

Interactive governance from the standpoint of sharing political power aims to achieve the concept of home-rule or self government and the principle of subsidiary.

All these are imperatives in the preservation of democratic and just societies.

VI.   Interactive Governance as a Thematic Focus

Interactive governance or participative governance as a thematic focus in the KAS-EU SEA Project on Local Governance and Democracy is a crucial component of the whole Regional Project itself.

Substance and objective wise, this regional project is fully supportive to the decentralization phenomena in Southeast Asian countries.   More specifically relevant is the project focus on participative governance.

This particular concept when immersed into the broader concept of decentralization is very instructive in the implementation of government decentralization schemes such as:

1.   Cambodia

The organization of the National League of Communes will get a big boost when the KAS-EU project on local governance and democracy will be implemented in the country.

Interestingly, the organization of the communes is a mandate in 1992 Cambodian Constitution.

The main governmental institution which is a major assistory to this program is the Ministry of Interior.

2. Indonesia

The Indonesia government is continuously implementing Law 32 and Law 33 since 2002. This program of regional autonomy is still in its early stage.

3. Philippines

The sixteenth year implementation of the Local Government Code (Local Autonomy Law) is still far away from institutionalizing the notion of interactive governance. KAS-EU project when implemented in the country will awaken the need to institutionalize consciousness of citizens in good governance.

There are several local government leagues that can assist in this mandate.

4. Thailand

In 2010, the country will have completed a two phase implementation of the Decentralization Act of 1999 (Phase I 2000-2005 and Phase II 2006 to 2010)

Several studies of the Thai Decentralization Act is the urgent need introduce popular participation in local governance.

The Municipal League of Thailand is conscious of this governance issue.

5. Vietnam

The closest activity in the country to the concept of decentralization is the functions and powers exercised by the People's Committees and the Department of Public Investments in Vietnamese cities and provinces under its Economic Reform Program or Doi Moi.

Under this economic scheme, approval of local and foreign investments is decentralized to cities or provinces and need not go to the central government in Hanoi for final action.

While the Ministry of Interior and the National Institute of Public Administration, both in Hanoi are still theorizing about government decentralization, the Association of Cities in Vietnam is continuously advocating good governance and incrementally introduce participative governance,

There are several local government associations that benefit from the regional project. Examples are APEKSI /ADEKSI in Indonesia.

What is significant in overall regional decentralization environment and the KAS-EU local governance and democracy project is that both are mutually reinforcing.

Ultimately, therefore, the KAS-EU project on local governance and democracy is an unprecedented. The project on local governance and democracy which is supported by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) and European Union (EU) is a huge step in the promotion of democratic societies in Southeast Asia through international cooperators and partnership.