

CITIZEN REFORM AGENDA 2010

For Candidates and Political Parties of the Upcoming 2010 Elections

Executive Summaries

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Citizen Reform Agenda 2010 or CReforms 2010 is a consultation process initiated by the Ateneo School of Government (ASoG) through its PODER program that aims to bring together the broadest possible representation of citizen organizations in the country to identify key reform agenda or issues that candidates and political parties must address come 2010 elections.

PODER is ASoG's transforming politics program that focuses on reforming and strengthening key democratic institutions such as the Constitution, elections and political parties. PODER provides spaces and produces action-oriented knowledge products that aim to facilitate the engagement of key political players in dialogues that facilitate their common understanding and consensus points on key institutional reform issues.

Agenda on Anti-Corruption

*Corruption has never been this worse. We must end it.
It is time to repair the damaged institutions.*

We need to establish a government that is transparent and accountable.

Recent reports on development in the Philippines point to governance and corruption as constraints to poverty reduction and development. In its report, *Philippines: Critical Development Constraints*, the Asian Development Bank concludes that the worsening perception of corruption partly explains the low level of investments in the Philippines and that corruption is largely to blame for weak tax administration. Poor governance, it said, was found to translate into higher lending rates, making it more expensive to do business in the Philippines. In the end it concluded that one of the steps necessary to improve development is for the Philippine government to prioritize good governance.

The recently released Human Development Report for the Philippines, *Institutions, Politics and Human Development*, says that institutions, broadly defined, are “the incentive systems that structure human interaction. They are the humanly devised ‘rules of the game’ in a society – the formal rules, informal constraints and their enforcement characteristics, which reduce uncertainty, generate regularity in behavior and allow people to get on with everyday business.” Since the incentive systems are what structure human behavior, then there must be sufficient incentive for individuals to “follow the rules”.

Non-compliance must therefore have some consequence, and in our system of government the ones that provide that consequence for non-compliance are the oversight and judicial/quasi-judicial bodies such as the Commission on Audit, the Civil Service Commission, the Supreme Court, and the Ombudsman, to name a few. So it is these institutions (which are themselves defined by a set of formal rules) that must be functioning properly in order to maintain the correct distribution of power.

In November of 2008 a roundtable discussion-workshop was sponsored by the Ateneo School of Government (ASoG) to gather concerned public interest groups, non-government organizations and civil society organizations with experience or concern in anti-corruption to formulate an anti-corruption agenda for candidates running in the 2010 elections. The discussions brought in varied perspectives and viewpoints to the issue of formulating a common anti-corruption agenda.

Not surprisingly, given the experiences and expertise of the participants, the discussion centered on several key issues: 1) access to information and citizen participation; 2) justice reform; 3) strengthening of institutions; 4) professionalizing the bureaucracy; 5) local government autonomy; and 6) political and electoral reforms. The last topic, political and electoral reforms, is recognized by the organizers as an important enough issue to have been separated out and covered in another discussion-workshop. So in this paper, we will defer to separate agenda paper for political and electoral reform, but shall include discussion here where it is additive.

Agenda on Political and Electoral Reforms

*Power has remained in the hands of a few.
We have to transform politics.*

*We demand political processes that are inclusive, empowering and pro-poor.
Institutional reform is an imperative more than ever.*

The 1987 constitution mandated the attainment of full democracy for the Philippines, encompassing all the people. Since then, however, the political situation is one of a capture of power by a political elite who uses it to maintain itself in power and in making the government work for their own interests. Poverty and powerlessness feeds on each other to undermine the meaningful participation of the vast majority of our people, including the youth, in democratic governance and in the electoral process. We need to undertake major political and electoral reforms to strengthen Philippine democracy and its institutions, including the institution of fair and free election processes.

Urgent and immediate political and electoral reforms encompass the following areas: 1) strengthening and making accountable the political party system, including the party-list system, especially in relation to campaign financing; 2) the implementation of the constitutional provision on political dynasties; and 3) reforming or replacing the *Sangguniang Kabataan* as vehicle for youth participation in electoral and democratic governance.

Aside from these, (4) constitutional reforms are called for in relation to political and electoral provisions, such as in the areas of enlarging local initiatives (federalism), broadening people's participation in legislation and governance (shift to a parliamentary system), limiting the role of the Commission on Elections (Comelec) to election administration and defining a separate system to handle election protests situated in the judiciary, enhancing and guaranteeing the complete autonomy of the Commission on Elections, and ensuring participatory democracy.

Current electoral reform bills that are pending in Congress should be passed. The Commission on Elections should also be professional and rid of partisanship, election modernization should be undertaken, and a vigorous citizen-voter education should be pursued.

Constitutional reforms are remote before the 2010 elections. However, best efforts—particularly of the people themselves—should be exerted to overcome the present deficiencies of the political and electoral system. In ensuring that a fair and free 2010 national and local elections take place, the people, including the youth, are in the forefront.

Agenda on Environment and Sustainable Development

As we continue building our nation, we need to rethink how we achieve prosperity.

*Our efforts towards growth and development must not compromise the environment and the future.
We need to respond decisively to environment issues and climate change.*

Since environmental issues represent a myriad list of cross-cutting concerns ranging from economic, political, social to cultural, within no less than five major ecosystems, narrowing these priority reform agenda was a big challenge. Nevertheless, four reform agenda or issues were agreed upon.

The present leadership's lack of an environmental agenda continues to pose a serious threat to the Philippines' dwindling natural resources. The present situation is further aggravated with economic policies (such as fiscal and tax regimes) that are largely biased towards the extractive industries, leaving government coffers shortchanged and ecosystems degraded.

A major paradigm shift on development models is found urgent at this point. This realization calls into focus the revisiting of Philippine Agenda 21 as the framework for sustainable development. The participants of the roundtable discussion have agreed to use the PA 21 framework in identifying the reform agenda/issues on environment and sustainable development.

The first reform agenda identified is the adoption of the Philippine Agenda 21. The questions formulated under this issue are: a) Are you willing to embrace the sustainable development framework? b) Will you support enabling economic policies for the implementation of PA 21?

The second reform agenda pertains to the structural reforms necessary to achieve the following: a) DENR separation of protection and utilization functions; b) additional appropriation for environmental protection and its prudent use; and c) regionalization or devolution of environmental management functions to local government units (LGUs).

The third reform agenda tackles sustainable ecological management of the country's natural resources. Questions developed are: a) will you support a watershed continuum approach as a basic management mechanism?, and b) how will you restore our forests and biodiversity?

The fourth reform agenda is about climate change adaptation. Participants crafted this question: What is your adaptation plan to address the impact of climate change?

In arguing for a new development paradigm, a closer look at the Arroyo government's economic policies show that the continued presence of an open-access system in resource extraction and the absence of a tenure and regulatory system in the country has now become unsustainable. However, reforms should not be limited to economic directives alone. Policy makers need to consider instituting structural changes as well. It is recommended by the participants that DENR should separate its conservation and utilization functions. Additional allocation for conservation programs, including its wise use should be pursued. The devolution of natural resources management functions to LGUs is also advocated for greater transparency and accountability.

Moreover, the adoption of sustainable policies and a responsive institution must be based on a constituency that lives on a healthy ecology. No amount of jobs can sustain communities if they don't have clean water and clean air. The participants likewise recommended that climate change adaptation mechanisms be a principal component of the reforms.

The last part of the paper discusses the different approaches to be employed in convincing the policy makers to adopt the reform agenda. In engaging them, participants have suggested to incorporate economics in the reform agenda questions. Other approaches are proposing solutions along with the issues, and taking the reform agenda not just to the candidates, but to the electorate as well.

Agenda on Local Governance Reforms

*Overly-centralized governance has brought us nowhere.
We must decentralize.*

*We need local government units that are capable of catering to the needs of their constituencies.
They must be given real autonomy balanced by accountability.*

Empowering the Philippine local government proves important on many fronts. Being the closest agency of the government to the people, it stands critical in identifying what its constituents need and consequently formulating and implementing policies that would best cater to the people. Furthermore, its proximity allows it the advantage of flexibility and efficiency in service-delivery and program implementation that, if properly developed, would significantly advance our country as a nation composed of well-performing units.

Indeed there have been reforms aimed at decentralization in the past. Most notably, the establishment of the Local Government Code in 1991 has reconfigured the Philippine political space to grant local government units more autonomy to determine the direction that they would take.

While some local government units have been taking this opportunity to develop its public service, many remain to be spaces for clientelist politicking, graft and corruption. Many remain to be dependent on the national government as these units are lacking capability both administratively and financially.

Key reform agenda on local governance that would ensure substantive decentralization include four main points:

- (1) More devolution and autonomy from the national government through a policy review on the Local Government Code of 1991;
- (2) Installation of a more equitable system of local finance management that effectively equips local governments of resources for their service-delivery and administrative needs;
- (3) Substantive constitutional reform that explores federalism as a viable political framework in empowering local government units and decentralizing political power; and,
- (4) Strengthening transparency and accountability mechanisms for local government units that equal the power that is devolved to them.

Agenda on Human Development

Our greatest asset is our people, but many Filipinos are hungry, unemployed and homeless with no access to health services and education. We must invest in our people.

We need to create more jobs here at home without compromising labor rights.

Quality health care and information on reproductive rights must be accessible to the poor.

The right to quality education must be upheld.

We need to reform our strategy of addressing homelessness.

Human development is central to any reform agenda this coming 2010 elections. This refers to the improvement of the life quality of the nation's citizens, which time and again proved dismal in the Philippines. With the persistence of poverty and of poor living conditions in the country, the Philippines needs a more effective policy agenda that would accelerate the development of Filipino people.

Four important sub-sectors are identified to contribute to a truly developed population: Employment, Education, Health and Housing. All of these four issue areas are intertwined and should be addressed in relation to each other in order to effectively improve human development.

Much should still be done to increase the momentum of human development in the country. Herein are key reform agenda and goals:

- (1) Development of a self-reliant economy through small to medium enterprises, with emphasis on a strengthened labor rights.
- (2) Installation of quality and accessible education through programs that lower school fees and expenses as well as through efforts to de-politicize the educational system, with curriculum revision to cater to job-skills mismatch.
- (3) Increased public access to health care services through effective devolution and through de-politicization of health service with emphasis on reproductive health and the improvement of the local medical industry.
- (4) Improvement of housing service structures and program implementation both administratively and financially with emphasis on respect for human rights.