The Civil Society and NGOs: Key Players in Achieving Philippine Sustainable Future

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Since the 1990s, we have witnessed globally the dramatic increase in the involvement of the civil society and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in global governance.
Civil society is described as a social interaction between the household and the state characterized by community cooperation, structures of voluntary association, and networks of public communication.
Similarly, **NGOs are highly diverse**, from local to national to regional until international groups with various objectives like youth empowerment, sustainable development, poverty alleviation, environmental protection, and other issues.
The Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD), responsible for implementing Agenda 21, classifies civil society into the following major groups:

(1) women;
(2) children and youth;
(3) indigenous peoples and communities;
(4) non-government organizations;
(5) workers and trade unions;
(6) the scientific and technological community; and
(7) farmers.
The commitment and genuine involvement of non-state actors – the civil society and NGOs – are critical in ensuring the achievement of sustainable development goals. Hence, the role of civil society and NGOs are critical in the entire process.
The involvement of civil society and NGOs can take in a variety of forms:
Expert advice and analysis.

They can facilitate negotiations by giving politicians access to competing ideas from outside the normal bureaucratic channels.
Intellectual competition to governments. They often have much better analytical and technical skills and capacity to respond more quickly than government officials.
Mobilization of public opinion.

They can influence the public through campaigns and broad outreach.
Representation of the voiceless.

They can help vocalize the interests of persons not well-represented in policymaking.
**Service provision.**

They can deliver technical expertise on particular topics as needed by government officials as well as participate directly in operational activities.
Monitoring and assessment.

They can help strengthen governance by monitoring governmental compliance.
The creativity, flexibility, entrepreneurial nature, and capacity for vision and long-term thinking often set them apart from governmental bodies. **The entire community would benefit from greater participation of the civil society and NGOs.**
The civil society and NGOs should play a major role in five key areas:
Information collection and dissemination

The civil society and the NGOs have much to offer in the way of information collection, dissemination, and analysis. Numerous other examples exist in which they serve a key information-based role.
The recent multi-stakeholder consultations on the Nationally Determined Contributions have shown how the civil society and NGOs can mobilize their networks to articulate their positions on the draft texts.
Often, the meetings are distinguished less by what is said in plenary session than by the wealth of research and policy documents produced by the civil society and the NGOs and released specifically to coincide with the official events. Many conference delegates read these opinion papers and other documents, which often shed new light on the costs of inaction and the options for change.
Over the past decades, the civil society and NGOs have assumed a more active role in the process of agenda-setting and policy development. They have been instrumental in notifying the public and governments of critical new issues for many years. A point in case is, global environmental issues gained prominence in the 1970s as a result of their activities.
Policy implementation

The civil society and NGOs are particularly useful in an operational context, as they can provide implementation tailored to specific conditions and can “make the impossible possible by doing what government cannot or will not do”.

[Image Source: Unsplash]
These operational functions within the system could still be strengthened by:

• Expanded efforts at inclusion of local, community-based groups with knowledge of the issues at hand;

• Capacity building targeted at enhancing communication between local groups and other governance partners;

• Support for initiatives to measure and monitor service delivery and the use of benchmarking and the identification of “best practices” as a way to improve performance.
The civil society and environmental NGOs are critical actors in compliance monitoring of international agreements and in finding more accurate compliance data than government is willing to provide. However, much room exists for greater civil society involvement in this important area of governance.
Key measures that could facilitate their assessment and monitoring includes:

• **Creation of a comprehensive database for information and analysis at different geographic and political levels.** The civil society and NGOs are key providers of local environmental data and information. A coherent mechanism for data collection and analysis will encourage this function and facilitate a two-way information flow;
• Involvement of a larger part of the population in assessment and monitoring functions. The inclusion of civil society and NGOs in data collection would greatly contribute to filling knowledge gaps as well as enhance knowledge development, increase interest, and promote engagement; and
• Support for knowledge-generating institutions. Universities are key generators of knowledge, yet they are among the most under-funded institutions. Funding and communication technology transfer will be critical to their ability to perform these functions.
Advocacy for environmental and social justice

Over the past few decades, the civil society and NGOs have been extremely effective in highlighting disparities in who bears environmental burdens and who gets the benefits of environmental investments. Some groups have issued reports.
There should be reform measures to facilitate the participation of the civil society and NGOs in the entire governance structure.
While the government may agree that the civil society and NGOs’ participation are indispensable, many also feel that the drawbacks of civil society participation may outweigh the benefits. Arguments and concerns abound on both sides.
Civil society can help build the political will for a new approach to development that integrates environmental and social goals.

Non-governmental organizations can serve as alternatives to weak or inadequate democratic institutions, as avenues for more inclusive dialogues, and as conduits for disseminating information on activities and issues within system.
The civil society and NGOs are not only stakeholders in governance, but also a driving force behind greater national cooperation through the active mobilization of public support.
The constructive participation of the civil society and NGOs in achieving a sustainable future for the Philippines is one of the most important tasks that are deemed critical but necessary.
THANK YOU!

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