

V. COORDINATING LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN MEGACITIES

large metropolitan area may consist of several neighboring municipalities. In many cases, they need to cooperate to provide public services, such as maintenance of roads or sewerage lines that run through them. The question is how to coordinate activities, pool resources, and define responsibilities among the municipalities with regard to such services. Similarly, national and provincial governments as well as government-controlled agencies may be responsible for the delivery of some services like power, telecommunications, or a mass-transit system. The question again is how to coordinate, plan, and allocate responsibilities between the municipality and the agency with regard to such services.

Municipal residents do not understand these bureaucratic problems but see the outcome in either no or delayed actions, inconsistent resolution of problems, and varying service levels. Local governments in a metropolitan setting also resist the efforts of the national or provincial governments to create megagovernments for the metropolitan cities, as they deem this to be a subversion of local autonomy.

This chapter illustrates how plans and actions are coordinated in one city, Manila. Congressman Ignacio Bunye discusses the evolution of the Metro Manila Development

Authority (MMDA) as an agency responsible for planning, supervising, and coordinating certain basic services, and passing ordinances in the metropolitan area that comprises 17 cities and municipalities. Congressman Bunye frankly admits that due to a major turn of events in the Philippines, the provision of more autonomy to local governments, Metro Manila is still searching for the right solution. It is seeking an appropriate mix to reduce conflict between MMDA and the autonomous local government units in its task of coordination, while at the same time addressing problems of metro-wide scope and concern.

METROPOLITANIZATION: THE METRO MANILA EXPERIENCE

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The geopolitical entity known as Metropolitan (or Metro) Manila covers 17 cities and municipalities. It includes among others, Manila, the capital city; Quezon City, the former capital; Makati City, the financial center; Mandaluyong City, a major business center; and the City of Muntinlupa of which I was Mayor for 12 years and now represent in the Philippine House of Representatives.

Metropolitan Manila is the political and business capital of the Philippines. It has a population of approximately 10 million, which swells in daytime by another half a million. This is roughly 14 percent of the total population, congested in a combined area of only 636 km².

Because of common problems like traffic, solid waste management, and environmental

pollution—problems that respect no political boundaries—there is a need for integrating and coordinating the 17 cities and municipalities.

The evolution of 17 local governments into what is now known as Metropolitan Manila (also known as the National Capital Region) has taken place over three different periods of our history. The first happened during the martial law regime of Ferdinand Marcos from 1975 to 1986; the second during the incumbency of former President Corazon A. Aquino from 1986 to 1992; and the third during the presidency of former President Fidel V. Ramos from 1992 to 1998.

Metropolitan Manila was created in 1975 as a geopolitical unit during the martial regime of Ferdinand Marcos. It was governed by a national agency called the Metropolitan Manila Commission (MMC). This was in response to the increasing population resulting from unchecked immigration from depressed rural areas that started in the 1960s. This unprecedented increase strained the “carrying capacity” of an already burdened urban area that did not have a comprehensive land-use policy. The spillover from Manila of homeless and dislocated families to adjacent jurisdictions posed problems for basic services and housing.

Local government authorities tackled these problems within their areas of jurisdiction with mixed results. Predictably, only the minority with adequate resources were able to address the socioeconomic problems adequately. Problems relating to housing, water, drainage, road improvements, transportation, and traffic management began to be increasingly felt.

Metropolitan Manila Commission (MMC): 1975–1986

In 27 February 1975, a referendum was synchronized with the local elections to decide whether or not 17 localities in Manila should be integrated, along with the creation of a manager-commission type of government. These 17 localities consisted of three cities—Manila, Quezon City, and Pasay City—and 14 municipalities. Of the 14 municipalities, 13 were part of the then premier province of Rizal and one was part of the province of Bulacan, just north of Manila.

Since the result of the referendum was supposedly “overwhelming”, Ferdinand Marcos issued a presidential decree (P.D. 824) creating the public corporation known as Metropolitan Manila and the Metro Manila Commission as the central government to manage the public corporation.

Many believed that the referendum was rigged to suit the political objective of Marcos. On the surface, it appeared that the creation of Metropolitan Manila and the Metropolitan Manila Commission was in recognition of the need to have a simultaneous and unified approach to coordinated planning, administration, and operation of many public services. It was also perceived to have brought together several fragmented provincial and local governments in an urban region.

As now recorded in history, this move was actually designed to consolidate the powers of Marcos. Metro Manila became the minikingdom of his wife, Imelda, and her training ground in preparation for her succession after her husband. Ferdinand appointed her as Governor of Metro Manila. In this light, the Commission could be viewed more as an instrument for personal power than as an institution for metropolitan governance and management.

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The first casualty of this political exercise was the province of Rizal, which until that time was the country's premier province. The next casualties were the different cities and municipalities because soon their respective legislative councils were abolished. Lawmaking powers became concentrated in the MMC. Taxation powers were also exercised by the MMC.

In the manager-commission type of government as employed by the MMC, all legislative and executive powers were vested in a single, five-member governing board made up of the Governor, Vice Governor, and one commissioner each for planning, finance, and operations.

The final casualty was the MMC itself. It lost all power when by virtue of another presidential decree (P.D. 1274-A), the Governor was made the sole decision- and policymaker for the area. It is safe to say that the MMC during the martial law era was an absolute one-woman rule and the chief executives of the integrated local governments were mere figureheads.

Being the central government for the whole of Metro Manila, the Commission was responsible for planning and development of the metropolis, including the provision of services for solid waste management and traffic management. Other powers granted to this Commission were to

- levy and collect taxes and special assessments;
- borrow and expend money and issue bonds, revenue certificates, and other obligations of indebtedness;
- charge and collect fees for the use of public service facilities;
- allocate money for the operation of the metropolitan government and review appropriations of the local authorities within

its jurisdiction with authority to disapprove the same if found to be not in accordance with its established policies;

- enact or approve ordinances and resolutions, and to fix penalties for any violations;
- establish a fire-control operation center to direct the fire services of the local authorities;
- establish a disposal operation center to direct garbage collection and disposal;
- establish a transport and traffic center to direct traffic services;
- coordinate and monitor governmental and private activities pertaining to essential services such as transportation, flood control and drainage, water supply and sewage, social health and environmental services, housing, and park development; and
- monitor the undertaking of comprehensive social, economic, and physical planning and development of the metropolis.

In 1978, three years after its creation, the direct supervision of the President over the Commission was transferred to the Ministry of Human Settlements, of which Imelda Marcos was the Minister. Having gained this, she exercised direct control over two of the most powerful government agencies during the time of Ferdinand Marcos.

Nathaniel von Einsiedel, one of the participants in this forum, was nominally a deputy general manager for planning of the MMC. He correctly observed that the Commission was created with correct intentions but was being run for the wrong reasons, i.e., the selfish ends of the Marcoses. Having seen where MMC was headed, he resigned from government.

Metropolitan Manila Commission (MMA): 1986–1994

In 1986, when Corazon A. Aquino became President in the aftermath of the bloodless revolution, “people power” clamored to expunge all vestiges of the Marcos rule—its abuses, graft, and corruption. The Commission, because it was seen primarily as an instrument of Imelda Marcos, was not spared. The campaign promise made by the opposition party to abolish the Commission, however, did not materialize. One of the compelling reasons was that the Government did not have the funds to pay for the separation benefits of the huge workforce numbering approximately 15,000. But perhaps a more cogent reason was the fact that levelheaded political advisers of former President Corazon Aquino still saw the real need for a coordinating agency for metropolitan concerns. The Commission continued to exist, but this time, with diminished powers.

Moves to dismantle the MMC were finally scuttled when the Constitutional Commission wrote into the 1987 constitution a provision that recognized the need for a metropolitan organization to oversee the governance of Metro Manila. This metro organization was supposed to have been created by law but the Eighth Congress of the Philippines (1988–1991) failed to pass a law creating such body. For a long time, Metro Manila governance was in limbo.

In 1988, with the first truly democratic elections after the dismantling of the Marcos regime, legislative councils in the various local government units of Metro Manila were elected. The legislative councils then started questioning the rule-making powers of the MMC.

Continued congressional inaction did little to alleviate the situation. It was later found out that

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the problem in Congress was the result of bitter partisan politics. In the House of Representatives, a vociferous opponent of metropolitanization belonged to a powerful family from the province of Rizal, which was dismembered with the transfer of its resource-rich cities and municipalities to Metro Manila. The family resented the fact that Rizal Province, regarded as the premier province in the country prior to martial law, had been effectively reduced to third-class status.

Furthermore, the capitol of Rizal Province remained in Pasig City, now a part of Metropolitan Manila. Due to its financial dismemberment, Rizal Province did not even have enough resources to relocate its provincial capitol within its own territory.

To break this impasse, former President Aquino issued an executive order (E.O. 392) in 1990 creating an organizational structure to be known as the Metropolitan Manila Authority or MMA. It was clear that it was to serve only as an interim body until Congress passed a law. The MMA functioned as a planning and coordinating agency but without legislative powers. Other structural changes included the following:

- The MMA no longer exercised the power to review the budgets of the component localities. This power now rests with the Department of Budget and Management. In order to appease the rebellious local government units, the mandatory contribution formerly paid by the 17 cities and municipalities was reduced from 20 percent to 15 percent of the local government units' estimated annual income from regular sources in their general funds.
- The power to appoint city and municipal treasurers, assessors, and their deputies was removed from the MMA and transferred to the Department of Finance.

- The power to tax was returned to the local government units.
- The governing board was abolished. It never truly functioned anyway during the martial law regime. An interim council composed of 17 mayors from the local government units replaced it.

The Authority was headed by a Chair, elected by the other mayors from among themselves and who served for a period of six months. Why six months?—because it was erroneously anticipated that Congress would pass a law creating the new Metropolitan body. At one point, I was elected as Chair of MMA for three terms or a total of 18 months. This set-up proved difficult. A term of six months was too short to be able to really do any forward planning. Moreover, the head of the agency was working part-time as he also had to attend to the needs of his own city or municipal constituents.

The professional staff, headed by a general manager, assisted by a deputy each for planning, finance, and operations, respectively, managed the day-to-day operations of the agency. The limited powers of the MMA were to

- exercise jurisdiction over the delivery of basic services requiring coordination;
- integrate city/municipal plans or priorities with sectional or regional plans;
- provide technical assistance in preparing local development plans;
- review legislation proposed by local legislative assemblies or councils to ensure uniformity among local authorities and to ensure consistency with the regional development plan (the review power did not include the power to amend or revoke);

- undertake periodic reviews of functions, structure, and impact of programs or projects; and
- submit periodic reports to the President.

What used to be a very strong organization, enjoying wide powers and financial resources, had been severely emasculated.

Another development took place, which affected the course of metropolitan governance. This was the passage into law of the Local Government Code of 1991 (LGC). The cornerstone of the LGC was local autonomy and the weaning away of local governments units (LGUs) from the central authority.

With the passage of the LGC, the bigger and more financially stable LGUs wanted to break away from Metropolitan Manila. Soon the LGUs started to withhold their payment of dues to the MMA. Once again, talks of dismantling the MMA, even from within the ranks of the mayors who made up the council, began to be heard. Without the power that it used to enjoy in the Marcos regime, MMA could not even force the mayors to pay.

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Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA): 1995 to the Present

The election of Fidel V. Ramos as President in 1992 boosted the confidence of the MMA to a new high, upon his announcement that one of the priorities in his administration's agenda was the creation of a strong metropolitan body for Manila.

In the House of Representatives, some congressmen echoing the wishes of President Ramos batted for a strong Metro Manila government. But quite unlike the MMC of the Marcos regime, the head of this political unit was to be elected at large

by the 10 million residents of Metro Manila. In effect, what was desired was a “super province”. It would have all the powers and resources of the MMC but hopefully, none of the abuses. President Ramos seemed to prefer this structure.

The creation of a “super province” would necessitate that the question be submitted to a plebiscite. It was very doubtful that such would gain approval among the larger LGUs, e.g. Manila, Quezon City, Makati, and Mandaluyong, given the fact that LGUs had found new powers and prerogatives by virtue of the LGC. These large LGUs accounted for more than half of the registered voters in Metro Manila. Thus, the idea was doomed from the start.

The only viable alternative was a special body directly under the Office of the President. Instead of being elected, the head of the agency would be appointed by the President, upon the recommendation of the Council. To give the position more power, the agency head was to be given a Cabinet rank.

In 1995, Congress passed Republic Act 7924 creating the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) and designated Metro Manila as a Special Development and Administrative Region. Decision- and policymaking were vested in an expanded Metro Manila Council. In addition to the mayors, new members were added, namely the Metro Manila Vice-Mayors League and the President of the Metro Manila Councilors League as voting members. Their inclusion was meant to assuage the legislative councils, which had complained about the diminution of the autonomy guaranteed to the LGUs under the LGC. Ex-officio members from the national government were also included, such as the secretaries of the Department of Transportation and Communications, Public Works and Highways, Tourism, and Budget and Management; the head of the Housing and Urban

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Development Coordinating Committee; and the Chief of the Philippine National Police.

The MMDA is responsible for planning, supervising, and coordinating certain basic services and it can pass ordinances related to the following services:

- Development planning.
- Transport and traffic management.
- Solid waste disposal and management.
- Urban renewal, zoning, and land-use planning.
- Health and sanitation, urban protection, and pollution control.
- Public safety.

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The power of MMDA to pass ordinances covered in these areas was criticized by MMDA critics as being anomalous considering the restoration of legislative powers to the different city and municipal councils. The ordinance-making powers of the MMDA contradicted another provision of the MMDA law that in the execution of its functions, the Authority can in no way diminish the autonomy of the LGUs. In a situation like this, MMDA has a difficult balancing act to perform.

It cannot be denied that there are problems that transcend political boundaries. Land use has to be coordinated. If the different localities acted independently, and without any coordination, an anomalous situation could arise where a residential area and a factory site could exist side by side along the common boundary of two localities. Air and water pollution respects no political boundaries; neither does traffic; neither does crime; neither does the stench of garbage. Individually, the LGUs cannot tackle these problems.

Metro Manila is still searching for the right answer to the dilemma. We are still looking for the

so-called “right mix” to abate the discord between MMDA and the autonomous LGUs in addressing the problems of coordination and delineation of responsibilities. Perhaps the answer lies in what Nathaniel von Einsiedel offered: let the MMDA take care of formulation of policies while the LGUs take care of their execution.