

EDITOR'S NOTE

Non-government organizations or NGOs are back in the limelight. They played a major role in EDSA II; they were instrumental in shaping public opinion and in mobilizing various forces which constituted the core of the protesters. The same is true for EDSA III, which some would rather call a reaction. The NGOs that supported Joseph Estrada created an upheaval that nearly toppled the newly formed Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo presidency. The pro-Estrada NGOs and urban poor organizations also produced the warm bodies of the *masa* in the failed Malacañang attack.

NGOs, regardless of their loyalty or their independence and regardless of their rivalry, have shown that they are a powerful force that can shake the Philippine political landscape. EDSA II and EDSA III—and for that matter, EDSA I, have demonstrated the role of NGOs in making or unmaking governments.

On the other hand, controversies and scandals involving NGOs have emerged before and after EDSA II. The more embarrassing controversies have not only exposed the bad NGOs but have tarnished the image of the whole NGO community and can possibly diminish the credibility and legitimacy of NGOs.

It is against this background that interest in NGOs is growing. The University of the Philippines is one of a few academic institutions that have undertaken pioneering efforts in studying NGOs. In Diliman, the College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, the National College of Public Administration and Governance, and the College of Social Work and Development have courses and/or programs on NGOs and the non-profit sector. There are similar programs in the other University of the Philippines campuses.

Research centers—the Third World Studies Center and the Center for Integrative and Development Studies, among others—have consistently promoted studies and discourses about the NGOs, the broader civil society and the movements for social change.

Other prestigious educational institutions have also embarked on strengthening their programs relating to NGOs and the social movement. Ateneo de Manila University and other Jesuit institutions have built academic programs as well as research offices and support groups that cater to NGOs and people's organizations. De La Salle University has begun to undertake NGO advocacy through its Institute of Governance. The Asian Institute of Management and the University of

Asia and the Pacific, aside from offering courses suited to the non-profit sector, are involved in policy advocacy in collaboration with other civil society groups.

In the same vein, we see a steady growth in the literature about NGOs, civil society and their interaction with the state. We can expect more scholarly publications on this subject to come out soon. The Ateneo de Manila Press has led the way in publications. Soon to be off the press are books authored by Jose J. Magadia on “state-society dynamics,” in which NGOs and other civil society groups figure prominently, and by Dorothea Hilhorst, which focuses on NGO dynamics in the Cordillera region.

It is high time *Public Policy* addressed the NGO phenomenon. This issue of *Public Policy* aims to contribute to the enrichment of the discourse on NGOs, civil society and development. The contributors—Fernando T. Aldaba, Edna E.A. Co, Ramon L. Fernan III and Isagani R. Serrano—are all scholars in their own right, as academics or as “public intellectuals.” Equally important, they are NGO practitioners, boasting of solid track records which span a generation of active involvement in social and political movements. What they write on the issue of NGOs thus carries a lot of weight.

The contributions to this volume address what the authors consider to be the critical issues and challenges that face NGOs and the larger civil society. An afterword from the editor completes the collection of essays on NGOs. Hopefully, these essays will capture the interest, if not provoke the minds, of the readers of *Public Policy*, who for better or for worse, are affected by the increasing intervention of NGOs in public life.

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