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**DECENTRALIZATION TO BARANGAYS: IMPLICATIONS FOR REGIONAL
PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE PHILIPPINES**

**By Berhane Belay
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Abstract:

Motivated by the Philippine Government's renewed concern for decentralization as the approach for achieving and the mechanism for encouraging people participation in development, the paper examined the issue of weak citizen participation in the development process in the context of the Philippine experience with barangays as the base of local participation in general, and that of two particular barangays: one urban, and the other rural, located in the province of Laguna. Focus was thus on decentralization to the barangay level and its implications specifically for regional planning and development.

Taking into account the requirements or pre-requisites of development, the study concentrated on the validation of two hypotheses: first, on the relation of citizen participation and coordination to local autonomy; and second, on the linkage between decentralization and regional planning and development.

Surveys and interviews that were undertaken for the purpose have confirmed direct or positive relationship between the dependent and independent variables i.e., that citizen participation and coordination, particularly in the vertical direction, are affected by local autonomy; and that political decentralization or devolution is necessary for regional planning and development.

In the light of the paper's major findings, recommendations were thus focused on ways and means to enhance the autonomy, especially of barangays, with respect to finance, administration and planning, and implementation in an effort to realize active mass participation in the development process (i.e., to encourage direct and active involvement by all if not majority of the people at the lowest local government level in substantive or meaningful development-oriented undertakings; as well as attain effective coordination) in order to fulfill not only regional but local development as well.

Apart from the enhancement of local autonomy other recommendations were presented to improve local participation and coordination. These included the adoption of a community-based institutional framework for participation in regional and local planning and development, the introduction of a goal-oriented project planning approach (ZOPP method) to upgrade the quality of planning project preparation and implementation at the barangay level, extension of the applicability of the "block grant" system to other localities, and adoption of the integrated area management approach for the coordination and integration of service delivery and project implementation, among others.

With its recommendations, the paper hopes to contribute to current government efforts geared towards transforming decentralization into an effective medium or instrument for achieving a truly participatory approach to development.