

By MANNY VALDEHUESA

It's a sad commentary on the role of highly educated citizens like lawyers and educators that even as they inveigh against problems caused by bad governance, they don't perform the things that bring about good governance.

They're unfocused. Some of them even raise their voice, whining and fuming and complaining; but they fail to focus and do something about the problem.

It wouldn't be so bad if they had guidance from agencies like the department of the interior and local government, commission on elections, or even department of justice—agencies that have charge of promoting and upholding the power of the citizenry.

But instead of minister to the citizenry — who need to be empowered or capacitated to handle problems caused by those in power—said agencies, especially DILG, are focused on helping officials and institutions that are already in power, further empowering them.

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They keep citizens—people who are not in power— in a state of helplessness, no match against those in power, helpless against bad governance and its abuses.

The DILG should have figured out long ago that the core problem of governance is right in everyone's neighborhood—in the barangay, which is the home of every citizen who complains and fumes and whines against misgovernance.

There's not a single problem in our Republic that can't be traced to the barangay, which is also the home of every official and institution that causes problems and aggravations to citizens and society at large.

If official corruption is an issue, it's the barangay that catapults corrupt officials to City Hall, Capitol, Malacanang, and Congress. Every voter is in the barangay and his every vote is cast in its precinct.

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On Election Day, it's barangay officials who ride shotgun on these votes and herd them to the tally centers—election cowboys that get away with their antics because the citizenry lack focus and DILG et al. are no help to them.

Officials get away with abuses if their "Bosses"—the resident citizens—are inattentive. Who else but the same residents elect these ballot-rustling, vote-herding cowboys to office, then fail to have them account for performance after elections?

Some citizens say there's nothing they can do about it because they're not in power, that any effort to instill decency in public service is futile and bound to fail. They're wrong. Very wrong!

In the first place, because government power and authority emanate from them, the same citizens can take back misused or abused power and authority. They just have to learn how to go about it—and that's where DILG et al. can come in with orientation, workshop, or training for citizens.

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Everyone needs to know or be informed and “educated” on how to go about corrective processes that the law affords them in times of need. Then they can apply these measures thereafter.

But they need facilitators for the learning process, to get a clear view of the problem, and learn to lead the community. Many times we are told that the only thing necessary for evil or bad men to triumph is for good men to do nothing.

So we must learn to confront abuse, corruption, or wrong-headedness and resist predators that take advantage of our society’s weaknesses.

But because the popular will has been so weakened by constant violations, emasculated by repeated failure in challenging them, our citizens need empowering support and motivation so they will discover once more as at EDSA their sovereignty and authority over government.

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We have countless laws that ordain what are proper and what are prohibited in our society; but they avail us nothing since we’re not alert to counter the violations or stigmatize the violators.

For instance why do we let officials interpret the law any way they like in order to suit their own purposes—leaving it unchallenged? The Comelec and the Omnibus Election Code (Section 38) say that barangay politics and elections are non-partisan; but the trapos say it’s a hare-brained law, violating it at will, suffering no consequences. Ditto for the anti-dynasty law.

If it’s really stupid, they should have it repealed, but no one insists that they do so, not even the COMELEC. Why do lawmakers and the courts tolerate such disrespect for law?

The law also says no infrastructure or construction project may be built unless it is covered by an Environmental Compliance Certificate. But these get built anyway. And so forth and so on!

It's a terrible irony in a society that boasts of so many lawyers that its officials behave as if they're above the law. We have an out-of-focus society! — Manny writes for MindaViews, the opinion section of MindaNews. He is former UNESCO regional director for Asia-Pacific; secretary-general, Southeast Asia Publishers Association; director, development academy of Philippines; member, Philippine Mission to the UN; vice chair, Local Government Academy; member, Cory Govt's Peace Panel; awardee, PPI-UNICEF outstanding columnist. He is president/national convenor, Gising Barangay Movement Inc. valdehuesa@gmail.com