

Brunner identifies the following as the problems with governance: 1) gridlock; 2) demoscclerosis; 3) single-issue politics and 4) disconnect. Gridlock refers to “the government’s inability to act on major national issues” and “is often but not always a problem in a changing society that undermines old policy solutions and generates new policy problems.” Demoscclerosis, on the other hand, is described as the “hardening of the arteries of democratic government” characterized as the lose of “capacity to experiment and so becomes more and more prone to failure.” Single-issue politics is said to be an underlying factor of the gridlock and demoscclerosis in which government is heavily scrutinized in terms of single issues supported and advocated by different interest groups and associations. This has lead to congress to “finesse the tough issues and tended to straddle every fence it couldn’t burrow under.” Disconnect is “partly a consequence and partly a cause of the other problems described above” and it refers to the growing divide between the government and the political community from the rest of the country and not being able to really create new programs or change policies.

Brunner identifies that the current trend due to these problems is the “increasingly fragmented and dysfunctional structure of governance at the national level.” And this is manifested by the proliferation of organized groups in the public and civic sectors all of which make it harder for integration of interests into policy advancing the common interest. Government becomes reactionary and short-sighted in their actions and legislation because of multiple pressures from multiple groups with varied interests. These fragmented and dysfunctional structures are then replicated in so many different policy areas in a vicious cyclical manner.

Brunner brings forward a change in perspective in terms of governance. Instead of the instinctive “change the system” and knee-jerk “make new agencies or laws or guidelines” response, he posits the idea that there should be more creative ways of breaking the “gridlock”. His proposal is that of collaborative efforts amongst individuals and groups of as varied and different interests on a particular issue as possible working on finding a common interest among and between them. The main idea here is the urge to break the gridlock and move from a stalemate brought about by a federal system by working collaboratively on the local community level and finding solutions from there. He gave examples of how this approach worked in different states and local communities and then highlighted three processes that the communities spontaneously engaged in to achieve their goals: innovation, diffusion and adaptation.

My professional and practical experience has always been on community-based initiatives and efforts in the Philippines with regards to health and health care services and in conflict and post-conflict reconstruction and rebuilding. Because of this I have particular bias for such an approach having seen both the downside of it but more so the enormous benefit and potential the approach has.