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Publisher Atty. Javier P. Flores / **Editor In Chief** Lakambini Bautista / **Art Director** Agnes S. Escasa / **Managing Editor** Kristel Dacumos-Lagorza / **Copy Editor** Ma. Lourdes E. Rosal / **Editorial Assistant** Shimico Dianne Nakamura, Elaine Louie Gonzales / **Marketing Manager** Juan Miguel Paolo Tungpalan / **Marketing Consultant** Daniel Marco Nicanor / **Contributing Writers** Joyce Reyes-Aguila, Maielle Montayre, Maridol Ranoa-Bismark, Herman Joseph Kraft, Rhoda Osalvo, Rosy Mina, Almira Blancada, Helen Hernane / **Photographers** Ricky Ladia, Daniel Soriano, Teddy Pelaez, Manuel Generoso, Jar Concengco, Romeo Peralta, Jr. / **Illustrator** Luciano Sardea Ramirez

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Farmer
Entrepreneurship
PROGRAM



FARMER ENTREPRENEURS AS JOLLIBEE FOODS CORP. SUPPLIERS

Filipino farmers work hard every day to provide food for the country. But the uncertainty of who will buy their produce and at what price affects their ability to make a living for their families.

This is where the Farmer Entrepreneurship Program (FEP) comes in. FEP enables smallholder farmers to directly supply institutional markets such as Jollibee Foods Corporation

(JFC), assuring them of regular market and income.

Since 2008, Jollibee Group Foundation and its partners have built the capacities of farmers to meet the standards and requirements of food companies while ensuring they make a profit. With FEP, the vegetables needed to produce JFC's delicious burgers, rice meals, pizzas and pastas, now come directly from farmers.

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Politicians often get a negative reputation that is largely undeserved. No matter how they started out in life – whether they came from zero or whether they inherited the luster of their name from others – what cannot be denied is that they are men and women of significance to their community.

Our mandate in *LEAGUE* Magazine is to show the projects and accomplishments that create the ripples of consequence that our leaders generate, and hopefully chip away at any negative impression out there. None of the projects credited to the men and women we feature are easy to implement; these projects require the cooperation of teams of supporters to execute, but those who hold office are almost always the spark plug of these undertakings, from coming up with ideas to getting people excited to get these projects going.

A lot of people may not realize the magnitude of the effort that goes into the work. It does not simply take daydreaming about bettering the welfare of the constituents. If people dealing with government have reason to complain of red tape, that red tape cuts both ways, it may also dampen efforts of politicians to deliver service. Next time you see a project by your local council, think that it had gone through deliberations and it was measured against regulations before it could even be announced, but more than that, think also that there was someone pushing for it from the outset, and that person deserves praise and accolade.

In this issue, we chronicle the efforts of Mayor Jimmy Fresnedi to achieve a staggering 2.3% economic growth for Muntinlupa and still manage to snag the “Most Friendly LGU” award for his city from the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry. We likewise highlight Masbate Vice Governor Kaye Celera-Revil’s efforts to boost tourism, empower youth and women, protect the environment, and still remain a dutiful mom to four kids with another one on the way. We likewise chronicle the efforts of Binalonan Mayor Ramon V. Guico III as he pushed for the upgrading of his town in Pangasinan from a third class to a first class municipality.

In this issue, we also feature city government of Legazpi and the efforts of its mayor, Noel E. Rosal, in pushing green economic development, waste management and a proper sewerage system, all of which helped the city bag the award ‘No. 1 Competitive City under the Component City Category.’

We in *LEAGUE* Magazine believe that these efforts at serving the public ought to be the norm, that the men and women who head our communities ought to be impelled by a genuine desire to be of help to their constituents, if only to leave a legacy behind. We shall not shirk in our duty of highlighting the people who put in more than what is required of them so that others may follow in their footsteps. We remain full of hope for the future.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Atty. Javier P. Flores
Publisher



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PANGASINAN POLICE CELEBRATES 26TH NATIONAL CHILDREN'S MONTH

In celebration of the 26th National Children's Month, the Pangasinan Police Provincial Office (PPO) visited the Libsong Elementary School in Lingayen, Pangasinan last November 16. With the theme "Isulong: Tamang Pag-aaruga Para sa Lahat ng Bata," a fun walk was held to begin the program and to encourage proper child care. Afterwards, the PPO discussed the Anti-Child Abuse Law, Anti-Violence Against Women and their Children Law, Anti-Rape Law, Anti-Bullying Law, the dangerous effects of illegal drugs, and overall crime prevention through a series of lectures.

Led by Senior Supt. Wilson Lopez, acting police provincial director of Pangasinan, the PPO also distributed school supplies, slippers, and snacks to the school children. With a total of 1,000 attendees, including parents and teachers, the outreach program was also attended by Police Inspector Norman Florentino, Police Community Relations Branch (PCRB) chief.



BULACAN HONORS BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF GREGORIO DEL PILAR

In a celebration called "Catorse de Noviembre," the Provincial Government of Bulacan commemorated the 143rd birth anniversary of local hero, General Gregorio H. Del Pilar, of the Philippine Revolutionary Army. Residents offered flowers at the shrine of "General Goyo" who was born on November 14, 1875 in San Jose, Bulacan.

The annual event, which began 13 years ago, was opened by Mayor Patrick Meneses and other local officials. Fourteen local barangays participated in the street-dancing competition called *Indakan sa Kalye* with a P50,000 cash prize for the champion. The event also showcased the cultural heritage of the province as well as famous products from different *barangays* such as dried fish, embroidery, and farming.



EVACUATION CENTER OPENS IN BAGO CITY

The Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) and the Office of Civil Defense (OCD) finished the construction of the P36-million, two-storey evacuation center in Barangay Lag-asan, Bago City, Negros Occidental. A turnover ceremony was held last November 16, with Mayor Nicholas Ulo in attendance, alongside Undersecretary Ricardo Jalad, who is the administrator of the OCD and executive director of the National Risk Reduction and Management. A Memorandum of Agreement for the operation of the evacuation center was also signed between the city government and the implementing agencies.

This is the first of nine regional evacuation centers slated for construction in Western Visayas. The total cost for all nine centers is said to reach around P310 million. The center includes an infirmary, a pharmacy, and an area designed to accommodate at least 33 families or 130 individuals, with toilets and bathrooms. Aside from this, there is a laundry area, generator room for emergency, pump room, water tank, cistern tank, and materials recovery facilities.



ANTIQUE RESIDENTS AND PEACEKEEPING BODIES RECEIVE AID

The Provincial Government of Antique, presided by Governor Rhodora "Dodod" Cadio, led the food supply and financial assistance program last November 13. The food was given to members of the Philippine National Police, Philippine Army, and other related agencies tasked with keeping the peace and order and public safety of Antique. There were P500,000 worth of food supplies, consisting of 120 bags of rice, noodles, canned goods, biscuits, coffee, and candies. Advocating for the continued peace and order of the province, Governor Cadio allocates budget for the peacekeeping bodies who go to mountainous areas in Antique.

On the other hand, the financial aid amounting to P84,000 was awarded to 29 recipients of the Kabalaka Kang Gobernadora sa mga Lolo kag Lola Program and to the five chosen recipients of the Aid to Individual in Crisis Situation (AICS). A wheelchair was also given to a disabled resident of Patnongon, Antique.

SUBIC: THE NEW ECO-URBAN FREEPORT

Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority (SBMA) envisions to turn Subic into the leading eco-urban Freeport in Southeast Asia, as well as grow it to be an environmentally sustainable community where locators and stakeholders can enjoy the highest quality of life.

SBMA was recently awarded the International Finance Awards for Best Social Responsibility Initiative and Fastest Growing Free Trade Zone, a great recognition that validates the efforts of the agency. “It was definitely not an easy task,” shares Atty. Wilma Eisma, the Chairman and Administrator of SBMA, “because there were so many factors at play – stakeholders corporation, government support, and even staff capability.”

As part of its mandate to generate job opportunities and promote the Subic Bay Freeport Zone as an investment hub, the SBMA aims to generate more investment projects, and is currently expanding the scope of the Freeport to neighboring municipalities, particularly San Antonio and San Marcelino in Zambales, and Hermosa in Bataan.

SBMA has also zeroed in on the development of the Redondo Peninsula in Subic, Zambales, where Hanjin (HHIC-Phil. Inc.) and RP-Energy are currently located.

Not only does SBMA plan for expansion in industrial development but also in tourism, especially with the emergence of Subic as one of the premier cruise ship destinations in the country. The goal is to showcase the beauty and safety of the Subic Bay Freeport Zone and to train the light on the beauty and offerings



of contiguous areas, including Zambales, Bataan, and Pampanga.

SBMA also supports the enhancement of the current and new world-class entertainment and tourist facilities such as resorts, casinos, and the like, which in the past have led to tourist influx.

The combination of an international airport and a world-class seaport presents a very unique advantage for SBMA. Considering the strategic location and Freeport status that provides unparalleled business and tax incentives for both Freeport locators and tourists, Subic is set for great success.

In order to maximize this advantage, SBMA has developed both short-term and long-term programs, which include the use of technology and the streamlining of procedures and systems that promote not only efficiency and ease of doing business, but, more importantly, transparency and the safeguard of the government’s interest.

Atty. Eisma shares: “For locators and port users, and in support of the Build, Build, Build initiative of the government, SBMA has earmarked funds to improve its port facilities, with the goal of being able to handle both current and future demands.

“But be assured that in the pursuit of development, we won’t sacrifice the environment that has made Subic a much better venue for both business and leisure,” she ends.



PALAWAN HOLDS 5TH UNDERGROUND RIVER DAY

Sitio Sabang, Barangay Cabayugan located in Puerto Princesa, Palawan was proud to host the annual event in honor of the Puerto Princesa Underground River (PPUR). The city government and the Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park (PPSRP) participated in the Subaraw Biodiversity Festival. Subaraw comes from the word *suba* (river) and *taraw* (limestone cliff). On its fifth year, the theme was “Keeping the Balance of Transformative Tourism and Ecological Integrity.” The festivities serve to promote sustainable tourism, and ensure the conservation and protection of the PPUR.

The weeklong festival, which began on November 3 and culminated on November 11, has been declared as Puerto Princesa Underground River Day based on Proclamation No. 816. The PPUR, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, has been named as one of the Seven New Wonders of the World.



EDUCATING ILOCOS FARMERS

The Mariano Marcos State University (MMSU) in Batac City partnered with the Ilocos Agriculture, Aquatic Resources Research and Development Consortium (ILAARRDEC) to teach 575 farmers from 16 municipalities the latest farming production technologies and farming management best practices. The School-on-the-Air (SOA) Program ran for six months from May to November on the government-owned DWFC Radyo Pilipinas in Laoag City and DWCI Radyo Piddig.

Together with the Philippine Council for Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources Research and Development (PCAARRD), the Philippine Rice Research Institute (PhilRice), the Department of Agriculture (DA), and the Philippine Broadcasting Services (PBS), the local farmers were taught how to improve crop production practices and livestock raising management. The graduation ceremony was held last November 14, 2018, at the MMSU Teatro Ilocandia. Achievers and top-notchers of the class were awarded with medals and plaques of appreciation during the ceremony.



DILG AWARDS 74 LGUS AT PERFORMANCE CHALLENGE SUMMIT

Last November 8, the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) held the Performance Challenge Fund (PCF) Summit at the Sulo Riviera Hotel in Diliman, Quezon City. It was titled “Sharing the Best Practices of Good Local Governance: The PCF Summit 2018.” DILG Secretary Eduardo M. Año gave a speech, with Senator JV Ejercito as the keynote speaker. Senator Ejercito, along with six other speakers, shared the best practices of their respective LGUs in completing PCF projects. To date, 2,981 of the 3,391 PCF projects have been implemented.

A total of 74 local government units (LGUs) were awarded, along with DILG regional field personnel nationwide for their exemplary performance in their respective PCF projects. The PCF is a financial incentive awarded to LGUs, who also received the Seal of Good Local Governance (SGLG). Sixty-two of the 74 LGUs, who have received the PCF for six to seven years and have been SGLC consistent awardees from 2015-2017, also received the Masidhing Paghanga Award. Twelve LGUs, who have received the PCF three to five times and SGLC awardees from 2015-2017 were given the Katangi-Tanging Pagpupugay sa Lokal na Pamahalaan sa Pagsasakatuparan ng PCF. On the other hand, seven DILG personnel received the Pagkilala sa Matikas na Paglilingkod Bilang PCF Focal Person, and all 17 DILG Regional Directors were given the Pagkilala sa Rehiyon sa Masigasig na Implementasyon ng PCF.



INAUGURATION OF SOUTHERN QUEZON CONVENTION CENTER

As part of its ongoing infrastructure project, in line with President Rodrigo Duterte’s “Build, Build, Build” program, the Province of Quezon built the Southern Quezon Convention Center in Gumaca. The blessing and inauguration was held on November 8 with Quezon Governor David C. Suarez, House Minority Floor Leader Rep. Danilo Suarez, ALONA Party-list Rep. Anna V. Suarez, and Gumaca Mayor Erwin Caralian in attendance. Former Special Assistant to the President (SAP), Christopher Lawrence ‘Bong’ Go, was also present.

The high-capacity Convention Center is largely beneficial for residents of the third and fourth districts of Quezon as they no longer have to travel to Lucena City for large gatherings, conventions, and similar events. It will also help boost economic activities within the Municipality of Gumaca.



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'Tis the Season of Love

Christmas is not as much about opening our presents as opening our hearts. LGU officials share how they make Christmas more joyful and meaningful for the people in their *barangay*.

INTERVIEWS BY SHIMICO DIANNE NAKAMURA



Here in our *barangay*, it has become a practice to focus more on the youth during Christmas season;

we give gifts to the children. Hopefully, this year, we'll also be able to give back through our senior citizens. It was actually their request. That is the essence of Christmas—giving and sharing.

Kagawad Darwin Leuterio Dela Cruz

BARANGAY 177, ZONE 15, DISTRICT 1, NORTH CALOOCAN CITY



It is a tradition in our *barangay* that every Christmas, we give back to the families. Although we prioritize the children and senior citizens, we extend donations to families if there are remaining resources left. We don't really focus on gifts, we give food so that each family may welcome Christmas Eve with food on their table, and for us, that's what's important. Instead of having a lavish and big Christmas party, others donate; they contribute donations for the needy in our *barangay*.

Kagawad John Lester Joson

BARANGAY POBLACION, PATEROS



Whenever someone mentions Christmas, the first thing that comes to mind are the children. In our *barangay*, we hold special programs and whole-day activities for the kids such as a simple feast and some entertainment featuring clowns, a public viewing of cartoon shows

and movie marathons. The most awaited part of the day that every child is most excited about is the kris kringle and exchanging of gifts. The number of attending children does not go lower than 500.

Brgy. Captain Edgardo A. Paragua Jr.,

BARANGAY PALTOK, DISTRICT 1, QUEZON CITY



Every year, "Maligayang Bata" has become a tradition here in our *barangay*. We give gifts to kids. This gift-giving is a partnership with NGO Pasig brotherhood, a Fil-Chinese Fire volunteer. This year, we plan to add another project, which we call "Libreng guPET na maluPET" for children in our *barangay*. Hope this year will be another successful Christmas project for us.

Kagawad Petri Cortez

BARANGAY CANIOGAN, PASIG

EMPIRE
Dental Lounge

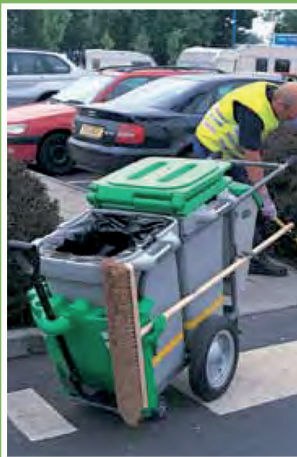


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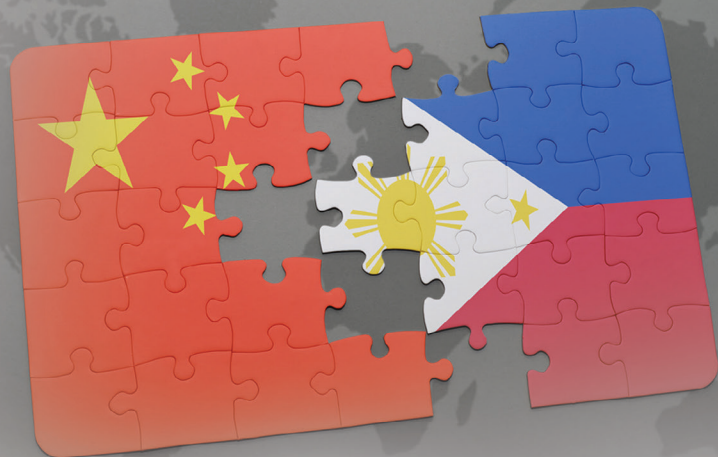
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GOOD



GOVERNANCE

What can the Philippines expect in its relationship with China beyond the Duterte administration?



PHILIPPINE-CHINA RELATIONS: HAS CHANGE COME TO OUR FOREIGN POLICY?

BY HERMAN JOSEPH S. KRAFT

President Duterte campaigned with the slogan of “Change is Coming!” and a key area where this has been prominently noticeable is in foreign policy. The “pivot to China” has been seen as a sea-change in how the Philippines approaches its foreign relationships. From a focus on being a key non-NATO ally of the United States to the new country coordinator for ASEAN-China bilateral relations seems to be a complete turn-around. In reality, Philippine relations with the US remain fundamentally the same. For all the criticism (to say the least) that President Duterte has heaped on the US, the institutionalized linkages that have made it the key strategic partner of the Philippines in its international relations remain unchanged. There is more than something, however, to the idea of change in Philippine-China relations with the turn-around happening in such a short time. Seen from a historical perspective, the relationship between the two countries has

been steadily improving since the establishment of diplomatic ties between the Republic of the Philippines and the People’s Republic of China in 1975. The tendency to see the Duterte Administration’s “pivot to China” as a major shift in Philippine foreign policy is only in the context of conditions, albeit important and intense conditions, in the last 10 years regarding the West Philippine Sea. To be sure, developments regarding the disputing claims to land features (and even the waters themselves on the part of China) located there had spilled over into different aspects of the bilateral relationship between the two countries. And there were even concerns over how this might blow into a conflict involving the two great powers in the region—the US and China. Given historic trends, however, it is probably more accurate to characterize the Duterte administration’s approach as a normalization of the bilateral relations rather than a “shift.”

The most noticeable foreign policy priority of President Duterte upon his accession to

power was the restoration of Philippine-China relations. The difficulty lay in the fact that this had significantly deteriorated during the Aquino administration. The confrontation over Scarborough Shoal in 2012, the challenge posed to China at the 2012 ASEAN Summit, and eventually the initiation of an arbitration case against China by issuing a Notification and Statement of Claim in accordance with the dispute settlement provisions of UNCLOS, particularly under Art. 287 and Annex VII have all contributed to a situation where almost all lines for dialogue had been cut off. China had indicated, as the case prospered, that any discussion to restore Philippine-China relations would have to await the emergence of a new presidential administration. This pretty much signaled that relations with the Philippines were dead in the water as long as Aquino was at the helm of the government.

At the start of his presidency, Duterte worked hard to assure China of his good intentions. Buttressed by three visits to China within the first year of his administration, he was able to turn relations with China around. A major part of this turn-around was when the decision of the arbitration court came out within a month after the accession of Duterte to the presidency. The fundamental ruling went completely against China.

Despite the “win,” President Duterte decided not to bring up the Arbitral Award in its pursuit of improving relations with China. This was the key ingredient of observations of a “shift” in Philippine foreign policy towards China. President Duterte claimed that this did not mean that the Philippines was giving up on its claim but that this will be raised before his administration ends at “an appropriate time.” He explained this position by claiming that he did not want to go to war with China – an event that could only be disastrous for the Philippines. In the meantime, the Philippines would instead seek to harvest economic benefits from an improvement in relations with China.

In a number of visits to Beijing and meetings with Xi Jinping between 2016 and 2018, Duterte was able to secure Chinese goodwill and promises of investments and loans of up to US\$24 billion. In late February 2018, President Duterte was quoted as explaining cooperation between the Philippines and China

on jointly sharing in the resources of waters surrounding the disputed features in the South China Sea as similar to “co-ownership.” While his spokesperson explained this away as a simplification of a more complex notion of joint development, it raised the hackles of critics of the President’s policies regarding the South China Sea. The statement, however, illustrates the attitude of President Duterte and the policies that guided his approach to the issue. At the same time, China’s own policies moved towards favoring the Philippines. In February 2018, the two leaders agreed to set up a joint panel to draft a framework agreement on exploring oil and gas in the South China



Illustration by
Luciano Sardea Ramirez

According to Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, there has been an uptick in foreign direct investments from China to the Philippines. The increase seems to be cautiously restrained, but the rate has been steadily going upwards. It reached nearly US \$30 million at the end of 2017 from just above US\$10 million in the beginning of 2016.

Sea. At the turn-over ceremonies of ASEAN in Singapore last November 2018, the Philippines was given the mantle of being the country coordinator for ASEAN-China bilateral relations. This is not a role that is driven by a rotational assignment, and would not have happened without the explicit agreement of the Chinese government. This shows how far China was willing to demonstrate its acceptance of the new relationship with the Philippines.

It is, however, in the economic side that the Duterte administration has bet more fully on Philippine-China relations. The promise of the pledges of huge amounts of Chinese capital that would be invested in the Philippines is the key driver of the Duterte foreign policy

Overall, the fulfillment of the expectations of China's involvement in the economic programs of the Philippines has been less than impressive. Japan and Korea retain a much larger share of investments to the Philippines compared to China. China has surged in ranking as a trade partner of the Philippines, but this overwhelmingly favors China.

of pivoting to China. With the "Build, Build, Build" economic thrust, capital is something that the Duterte administration will be needing a lot of. An initial estimate of US\$180 billion is going to be needed for the highly ambitious infrastructure-driven economic strategy. Granted that this is something that needs to be done (in fact should have been done a long time ago), it is a huge undertaking, one that is certainly not going to be completed in the course of one presidential term. But it must be done, and has to be started.

If it is correct to assume that the pivot to China is largely economically-driven, what has this led to? A number of changes facilitated by improvements in the Philippines' relations with China has become evident in the last few years. Overall the trend has been modest, but steadily rising across most indicators. According to information provided by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, there has already been an uptick in foreign direct investments from China to the Philippines. The increase seems to be cautiously restrained but the rate has been steadily going upwards. It reached nearly US \$30 million at the end of 2017 from just above US \$10 million in the beginning of 2016.

Tourist arrivals have also been going up since 2016. The Department of Tourism has reported that the volume of tourist arrivals from

China in 2018 increased by 42%. In fact, the number of Chinese tourists to the Philippines had passed tourist arrivals from the US. This leap in numbers is attributed to the improved ties between the Philippines and China, the addition of air routes, and the Visa Upon Arrival (VUA) option for Chinese nationals. Others, however, point to the increase in the number of Chinese nationals that have been given permission to work in the Philippines – an issue raised by Senator Franklin Drilon, among others.

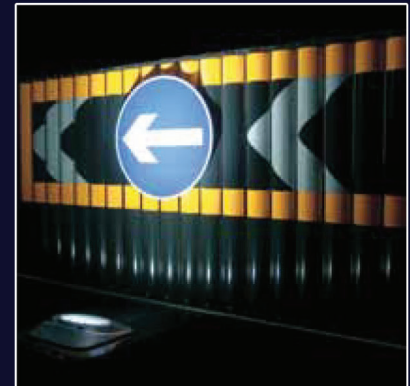
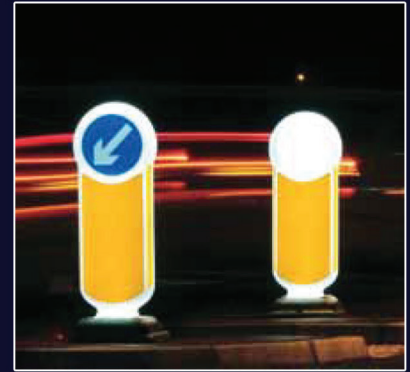
Likewise, there has been a mild increase in trade relations between the two countries. Between April 2017 and April 2018, there was a 34% increase in the volume of trade between China and the Philippines. A significant part of this, however, was accounted for by a huge surge in imports to the Philippines from China. Over the same period of time, the trade imbalance between the two countries has been growing significantly in China's favor.

Overall, the fulfillment of the expectations of China's involvement in the economic programs of the Philippines has been less than impressive. Japan and Korea retain a much larger share of investments to the Philippines compared to China. China has surged in ranking as a trade partner of the Philippines, but this overwhelmingly favors China.

There is something to be said about Duterte's pursuit of better relations with China as the crowning consideration of his foreign policy. For all the fawning that has been done, however, the numbers are quite underwhelming. In the case of trade, it would even seem that the Philippines is becoming a dumping ground for surplus Chinese products. Perhaps it is too much to expect dramatic changes given that it has only been less than three years since President Duterte came to power, and the turn-around in relations with China. Beyond questions of numbers, we still have the unresolved issue of the Arbitral Decision and other issues related to the South China Sea. With the current good relations so connected to the personality and preferences of President Duterte, what can the Philippines expect in its relationship with China beyond the Duterte administration?

The writer is currently a Taiwan Fellow at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at National Sun Yat-sen University in Kaohsiung, Taiwan. He is an Associate Professor at the Department of Political Science at the University of the Philippines in Diliman, Quezon City.

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RESILIENCE OR RESISTANCE?

BY RHODA OSALVO



Resilience is a character trait we Filipinos are proud of, but we must not let our hopefulness and positivity be a poor substitute for real action. Because when it comes to climate change and protecting our cities from natural calamities, we need plans and not mere prayers.

When typhoons come, and they come pretty often on our side, we put our faith in God and bear the brunt of nature. When it's over, we smile in front of the cameras despite the devastation around us and carry on with life because we say, "The Filipino spirit is waterproof."

Engr. Noel Antonio Gaerlan, Climate Change commissioner, contests the Filipino people's resiliency. He tells LEAGUE, "If we are truly resilient, why do disasters continue to harm us on an annual cycle?"

CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE COMMISSIONS

Climate change is an issue of major concern. "It is the change in the weather, global temperature, usual precipitation, wind patterns, and other measures of climate that occur over several decades or longer," explains Commissioner Gaerlan. Climate Change Commission or CCC works hand-in-hand with the local officials and executives, capacitating them to address and adapt to climate change. CCC is only on its ninth year since the enactment of RA 9729 or the Climate Change Act creating the CCC. Commissioner Gaerlan is one of the three commissioners of the CCC, with President Duterte as its chairman. Prior to his appointment to CCC in 2016, Commissioner Gaerlan served as the Executive Director of the Manila Bay Coordinating Office (MBCO) and as the OIC Assistant Director of the DENR-Biodiversity Management Bureau. Some of his previous experience include developing master plans of major river systems in the country and climate-tagging and proofing the same.

CCC, or Komisyon sa Pagbabagong Klima in Filipino, is the lead climate policy-making

government body mandated “to coordinate, monitor, and evaluate programs and ensure mainstreaming of climate change action in the national, local, and sectoral plans towards a climate-resilient and climate-smart Philippines.”

“Mainstreaming means that climate change action is embedded deep into one’s consciousness such that it has become a way of life or built into one’s lifestyle. It starts with awareness of what climate change is and its effects,” Gaerlan clarifies.

For example, global warming or the Earth’s rising temperature is an effect of climate change. According to “Climate Change and the Philippines,” an executive brief prepared by the CCC, “climate change has resulted in rising sea levels and extreme weather events such as super typhoons, more heavy rains, more intense heat and heat waves, and prolonged

severe droughts, and consequently, enormous losses in lives, livelihoods, properties and the environment.” Haven’t we seen these effects and continue to experience them?

For the past 20 years or so, environmentalists have been painting an ugly picture of things to come if the world doesn’t change its ways. The ugly picture has become our reality in recent years with devastating super typhoons like Yolanda (2013) and Ondoy (2009) that claimed thousands of lives and properties, to name a few. The need to alter our lifestyles has become more urgent. As CCC’s tagline aptly reads, “*Nagbabago na ang Panahon, Panahon na Para Magbago.*” Now more than ever, the need to adapt to the impacts of climate change and to build resilience are of vital importance.

“While energy conservation is important, risk-based adaptation is a must for transformation. The former applies to all

citizens, the latter to its leaders, particularly, the LGUs. Given the recent developments and our previous experiences during the typhoons and other disasters, we need to fast-track and address climate change action,” says the commissioner.



PHOTOGRAPH BY JAR CONCENCCO

Climate change has resulted in rising sea levels and extreme weather events such as super typhoons, more heavy rains, more intense heat and heat waves, and prolonged severe droughts, and consequently, enormous losses in lives, livelihoods, properties and the environment.



UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF LGUS

According to RA 9729, the local government units are the frontline agencies in addressing climate change action and are to formulate the Local Climate Change Action Plan (LCCAP), in accordance with the National Climate Change Action Plan (NCCAP). The NCCAP establishes the short, medium, and long-term plans for the government to implement climate change actions in seven areas—food security, water sufficiency, ecological and environmental stability, human security, climate-smart industries and services, sustainable energy,

and knowledge and capacity development.

A vital document in accomplishing the LCCAP is the Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP). Executive Order No. 72, which provides for the preparation and implementation of CLUP, was signed by President Fidel Ramos in 1993. According to the Housing and Land Use Regulatory Board's (HLURB) estimates in 2012, 70% of the municipalities had no or

outdated land use plans prompting the agency to come up in 2015 with enhanced guidelines and to address the shortcomings of the older version incorporating climate change and disaster.

“Before, you’d think that you have to have CLUP ready before you can do your LCCAP, before you can do your land use development plan. What if you haven’t done a risk-impact assessment in your area? How do you prepare your land use plan? Although,

you can do these simultaneously. When you know your future risks, then you do your LCCAP, then rationalize your land use and project your development—that becomes your local development investment plan,” Gaerlan explains.

LOW LCCAP TURN-OUT

In 2016, CCC rolled out its training program to provide technical assistance to LGUs in accomplishing their LCCAP using science-based tools and methods. It is an ongoing program offered by the Commission.

A quick look at the number of LCCAP submissions on the CCC website shows that only about 10% of the cities and municipalities across the country have submitted as of this writing; with the notable absence of LGUs from the NCR and Regions 14 to 17. Although, DILG reported that they already have 1,515 LCCAP submissions, according to Commissioner Gaerlan.

The Commissioner explains that given their presence only in Metro Manila and limited personnel, the Commission has yet to reach out to the other cities and municipalities in other regions. While the conduct of the Communities for Resilience Modular Training Manuals or CORE Module Series is scheduled by region according to CCC’s resources, LGUs may contact the Commission to arrange for the technical training.

Other factors in accomplishing the LCCAP include the political interferences and challenges, like the short three-year term of a local chief executive. There’s the lack of CLUP, which should not be much of a setback since the Commissioner himself said that this can be prepared simultaneously with the land use development plan.

PARTNERSHIP WITH THE ACADEME

Another difficulty is the lack of personnel to prepare who can be trained in an LGU, especially the lower class municipalities. One strategy that CCC is using is employing the help of higher education institutions (HEIs), mainly made up of SUCs or state universities and colleges like the UP System. CCC provides training to the HEI faculty members and assigns them as technical support to the LGUs where they belong. One advantage of engaging the academe instead of going directly to the



We are very responsive to imminent danger and always on the recovery state. If that remains to be an annual cycle, how can you say you’re resilient? The concept of climate change action is anticipatory. People should be able to anticipate future events so that your disaster response becomes smaller.



city or town hall is the presence of personnel and the sustainability of the program. In fact, Cagayan State University (CSU) has a climate change curriculum proposal. Once approved by CHED, the other SUCs can replicate it. UP has one but with greater emphasis on disaster response. In the level of Basic Education, learning materials are now available for K-12 to make the younger generation become aware of climate change.

Funds are needed to mobilize HEIs and to establish the risk information system through the People's Survival Fund (PSF)—a proposal recommended by the Commissioner that is awaiting approval from the DOF.

ACCESS TO THE BILLION-PESO FUND

Aside from the practical use of LCCAP, LGUs who have accomplished this science-based plan can have access to the PSF, which has an annual budget of P1 billion, as they now have a basis for climate change projects.

To date, these four projects amounting to P191.75 million have been approved and released in part: disaster risk reduction and management response as adaptation mechanism to resiliency by Lanuza, Surigao

del Sur; climate field school for farmers and fisherfolks in Del Carmen, Siargao; resiliency and climate-informed program of Gerona, Tarlac; and building resiliency through community-based ecological farming in San Francisco, Camotes Island, Cebu.

The PSF Board, under the chairmanship of the DOF, has given a go to nine more projects amounting to P979.7 million but subject to further review, including those of Sarangani and Kitcharao, Agusan del Norte. With these developments, the other LGUs are encouraged to come up with measures to mitigate global warming and to increase their capacity to face disasters caused by extreme weather conditions.

A HERCULEAN TASK

Sadly, the country, though not a major emitter of greenhouse gas, is ranked third among the most vulnerable to climate change based on the survey conducted by HSBC. A country's vulnerability is based on geography and development.

When asked how the Commissioner ranks the Philippines in terms of its resiliency to changing climate from a scale of 1-10,



he replies, “Not even a 3. For one is our vulnerability. Second, we are very responsive to imminent danger and always on the recovery state. If that remains to be an annual cycle, how can you say you’re resilient? The concept of climate change action is anticipatory. People should be able to anticipate future events so that your disaster response becomes smaller.”

The Commissioner cited the case of one whole *barangay* in Compostella Valley that was totally wiped out. *Barangay* Andap’s response was right, they evacuated; but the site of the evacuation center was the pathway of the landslide. In Tacloban during Typhoon Haiyan, the evacuation center was hit by the storm surge. The same site was later used to rebuild houses. When strong rains came, it was flooded.

Unfortunately, politics interferes; not everybody listens to the authority on climate change.

A GLIMMER OF HOPE

“What we do now is look for LGUs who are willing to take on the challenge and be our champions and then replicate,” Gaerlan says.

One example is the partnership of the local government and academe that established the Cagayan Valley Climate Change Consortium—composed of all the provincial agencies with technical support from CSU and Isabela State University (ISU). ISU is part of the group as it intends to replicate the partnership in the province of Isabela and eventually, to create a regional climate change consortium by early next year. Iloilo also has what it calls the Climate Change Adaptation Provincial Hub.

Commissioner Gaerlan hopes that the partnerships above will spark inspiration and encourage the other localities to band together to transform their respective areas to adapt to changing climate.

Some of the initiatives worth emulating are the coffee-based agroforestation program in Tublay, Benguet; the Banacon Island Mangrove Forest in Bohol; the Gulayan sa Bakod Program of the Eco-Entrepreneurial Greens Communities Inc. in Negros Oriental; H. Bautista Elementary School's use of rainwater harvesting system in Marikina City; the New Lucena Eco-Park in Iloilo; and the Climate Resiliency Field Schools in Calasiao, Pangasinan.

In the legislative department, the bill to create the Department of Disaster Resiliency—integrating the NDRRMC with the other offices like the Climate Change Office, Office of Civil Defense, among others, and attaching PAG-ASA and PHIVOLCS to itself—for the country to respond faster to natural and man-made calamities has been approved at the House, a development that the Commissioner welcomes. What he also proposes is a policy

that sets the standard for LGUs during planning, for example, which method to use when undertaking risk-impact assessment; what considerations should be taken into account to ensure CLUPs and LCCAPs and done correctly.

WATER-PROOF TO CLIMATE-PROOF

“We can blame the government and politics for the state we are in and even our fatalistic attitude, but in the end, it's our generation and the next who will suffer until we get our act together. The power to transform ourselves from vulnerable to resilient is in our hands. We can start by putting pressure on the local government to take their mandate on creating their LCCAPs seriously and accurately.

The way forward is to become truly resilient. Our waterproof spirit can only take so much beating. It's high time we level up and become climate-proof and climate-smart. | ■



UNITED WE STAND!

Government agencies and LGUs lauded at the 2018 FOI Summit and Awards for supporting Freedom of Information



Masbate Vice Governor Jo Kristine Revil and Pakil Laguna Mayor Vincent Soriano are two of the LGU officials recognized for their efforts in upholding Freedom of Information. In photo with them are PCOO Undersecretary George Apacible, PCOO Secretary Martin Andanar, OES Assistant Secretary Kelvin Lester Lee and FOI Program Director and PCOO Assistant Secretary Kris Ablan

The Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO), through the Freedom of Information-Project Management Office (FOI-PMO), was recognized at the recent 2018 FOI Summit and Awards held at the National Museum Auditorium, National Museum of Fine Arts. The FOI Summit was organized in partnership with the Department of Budget and Management (DBM).

In his speech, PCOO Assistant Secretary and FOI Program Director Kristian Ablan highlighted the mission of PCOO to transform the government to being open and transparent.

PCOO Secretary Martin Andanar, on the other hand, asserted that “the program serves as a formidable tool for fighting fake news and a game-changer in the information-dissemination process, as FOI becomes an efficient mechanism for garnering first-hand and reliable information.”

DBM Secretary Benjamin Diokno also expressed his gratitude to government agencies that continue to serve the Filipino people and enable civic engagement in the Philippines.

Top government offices, organizations, and private individuals were recognized for their participation to the success of the Freedom of Information Program in the Philippines. Government officials present during the ceremony were Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) Chairman Danilo Lim, Commission on Filipinos Overseas Secretary Francisco Acosta, Department of Justice Undersecretary Emmeline Aglipay-Villar, Department of the Interior and Local Government Undersecretary Epimaco Densing III, Department of

Budget and Management Undersecretary Lilia Guillermo, South Cotabato Vice Governor Vicente de Jesus, Masbate Vice Governor Jo Kristine Revil, Pakil Municipal Mayor Vincent Soriano, San Nicolas Vice Mayor Marlon Valdez, and Pasig City Councilor Victor Ma. Regis Sotto. Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines Executive Director Bernardino Sayo and Executive Vice Director Edgardo Pamintuan also attended to receive their awards.

Agencies were awarded for their exceptional contributions to the progress of FOI: the Davao City Water District, the University of the Philippines System, the National Housing Authority, the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority, and the Department of Labor and Employment.

The Department of Budget and Management, Department of Energy, Department of Finance, Department of Health, Bureau of Immigration, Commission on Filipinos Overseas, National Telecommunications Commission, Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines, Light Rail Transit Authority, and Philippine Health Insurance Corporation bagged awards as top requested and performing agencies in the eFOI Portal.

Local Government Units that issued their access to information ordinances were honored for rolling out the FOI Program at the local level. These are the City of Pasig in Metro Manila, Municipality of San Nicolas in Ilocos Norte, Municipality of Pakil in Laguna, Municipality of Bula in Camarines Sur, Province of Bohol, Province of Masbate, Province of Surigao Del Norte, Province of Benguet. ||

For more information and updates, visit www.foi.gov.ph and FOI Philippines’ Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts.



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THE 2030 PROJECT

The next generation who's changing and shaping the future



Youth Leaders from Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao gathered for the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The 2030 Project is a non-profit, youth-led, and volunteer-based sustainable goals initiative in the Philippines, driven by youth leaders from all over the country. It aims to create a network of young leaders and organizations to further advocacies and projects aligned with the United Nation's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Agenda. Its mission is to train the underserved and unserved Filipino youth by encouraging the creation of sustainable solutions in their own communities.

Recently, during the Global Goals month, hundreds of youth leaders from Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao gathered for the Leaders Unite event, which was organized by The 2030 Project.

The Leaders Unit Summit featured 17 exceptional leaders from each major island of the Philippines, who are known as the SDG Youth Champions. They aim to create an impact in their communities through their advocacies, which are aligned with the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals. Aside from recognizing the 2018 SDG Youth Champions, the leaders also shared their experience through a series of panel discussions focused on ending poverty, tackling climate change, and fighting inequalities.

At the event, Leaders Unite 2018 and the 2018 SDG Youth Champions were also recognized by major government agencies, including the Office of the President and Office of the Vice President.

"I am delighted that The 2030 Project has spearheaded this event to create more awareness among our youth about the UN SDGs and to build a stronger network of youth leaders who will champion the interest of their

communities. May this gathering further inspire the participants to become a pillar of support in our region and to pursue their respective advocacies in their localities. To this year's SDG Youth Champions, I trust that you will continue to be agents of hope as you carry out endeavors that will redound to the benefit of our nation," shared President Rodrigo Roa Duterte.

"To the 2018 Sustainable Development Goals Youth Champions, congratulations! This event is a testament to your devotion in creating transformative change in your communities, sacrificing time and effort to stay to your advocacies. I am confident that you will further this culture of excellence as you continue to serve the country," added Vice President Leni Robredo.

The 2030 Project is a great example of a youth organization that can pull off such a huge event with only collaboration and volunteerism.

With regard to the next steps of the organization, Miguel Lopez, founder and president of The 2030 Project, shared: "The third successful installment of Leaders Unite shows that the youth today is committed to creating programs that have greater social value. This is just the beginning as we have programs dedicated to scale up the leadership capacity of the recently elected Sangguniang Kabataan (SK). Through this program, we can ensure that the new generation of SK will be focused on ensuring transformative changes in their *barangays*."

The 2030 Project's #OurGoals is a nationwide capacity training program, in partnership with local government units, which aim to train Filipino youth leaders, helping them to craft and execute sustainable programs for their communities. | ■

For more information, visit The 2030 Project on Facebook: @The2030Project.



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THE STATE OF WORLD POPULATION

The power to choose the number, timing, and spacing of children can bolster economic and social development, new UNFPA report shows

BY MAIELLE MONTAYRE

Imagine a world where “every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe, and every young person’s potential is fulfilled.” This is the mandate by which the United Nations Population Fund, formerly the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), has been operating since 1969. Seeking to promote equal rights and protection on sexual and reproductive health, especially for young women and children, the UN agency provides technical expertise, guidance, and support to over 155 countries and territories around the world.


Last October 17, the UNFPA formally launched the 2018 State of the World Population (SWOP) Report at the EDSA Shangri-La Hotel. The event was organized by the Municipality of Tanay, Rizal, together with the Philippine Commission on Population (POPCOM), a government agency under the Department of Health (DOH). With the theme of “The Power of Choice: Reproductive Rights and Demographic Transition,” the event sought to promote the 2018 SWOP report and ensure equal access to information among all sectors of society.

Iori Kato, the Country Representative of the UNFPA, presented the 2018 SWOP Report, an annual report prepared by the UNFPA. It has found that the power to choose family size stemming from reproductive rights affects many other rights, including the right to employment, health, and education. These findings and recommendations, however, have yet to be wholly implemented in the local setting for the full realization of reproductive health rights for women and children in the Philippines.

IDENTIFYING THE FUNDAMENTALS

“Reproductive rights is not a new concept,” says Kato. According to the 2018 SWOP Report, no country today has yet made reproductive rights available to all. There are still limitations when it comes to the pursuit of reproductive health rights for all, especially women. Couples are unable to have their preferred family size due to lack of economic and social support, or inadequate means to control their fertility.

Kato highlights four main issues in the SWOP Report. The first is the power of choice,



referring to the fundamental right of individuals to freely and responsibly choose the size of their family. This includes the number, spacing, and timing of their children. Second, when choices are made based on information and proper means concerning reproductive health and rights, there is a direct impact on the fertility rate. Today, there is a global transition from high to low fertility as more people are able to freely choose without discrimination, coercion or violence. The SWOP Report recorded a downward trend in the global fertility rate over the last 150 years. Third, these choices make good economic sense based on global evidence. Fertility can either accelerate or impede the progress and development of societies. As the power of choice allows fundamental rights to be fully realized, people tend to reach their full potential. When couples have the power and means to prevent or delay a pregnancy, they can choose to enter or stay in the labor force to sustain or increase their income. Fourth, the SWOP Report and recommendations are limited particularly in relation to women empowerment, labor practices, and teen pregnancies in the Philippines.

GATHERING THE INFORMATION

The 2017 National Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) reported that the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) in the Philippines has declined from 4.1 children per Filipino woman in 1993 to 2.7 in 2017. Dr. Juan Antonio A. Perez III, the Executive Director of POPCOM, said this was due to the increase in the use of modern family planning methods among married women. The implementation of the Responsible Parenthood and Reproductive Health Act of 2012 or the RH Law has also contributed to the faster decline of the TFR. Despite this steady decline, the Philippines' TFR is still the highest among the 10 ASEAN members—the second largest population in Southeast Asia. Thus, the target is to make the TFR reach 2.1.

The NDHS also declares that 75% of women ages 15 to 49 years old have expressed to wanting only two children, while 60% wanted to stop having more children and 15% said they wanted to postpone their pregnancy. Executive Director Perez expressed concern for the high unmet need in family planning. The NDHS showed 17% percent of married women want to practice family planning but do not have the access and information to such methods, while the survey shows 49% of sexually active, unmarried women have unmet needs in family planning. This reflects a decline from the 30% unmet need in 1993.

However, the goal of POPCOM is to have zero unmet need. “Millions of Filipinos would benefit from having the power to choose whether and when to have children, and how many children to have,” Kato says. “If you can plan your family, you can plan your life,” the UNFPA Country representative adds.

ANALYZING THE EVIDENCE

In some nations where there is a rapid decline, particularly in Europe, there is a demographic transition that contributes to economic growth. In Asia, there is a strong decline in the fertility rate of countries which had national family planning programs. As more women gained access to modern contraception methods owing to government-sponsored and NGO programs, the fertility levels slowly decreased. In turn, family planning programs were engineered because there was a finding of better economic growth opportunities if couples chose fewer children. “Demographic transition more than suggests that all countries which are undergoing economic development shift from a situation where there is low population growth due to high birth rates and high death rates to a situation where the population growth plateaus due to low birth rates and low death rates,” says Kato.

This population trend matters to the Philippines because the fertility rate directly impacts the country's potential for economic growth based on whether it can transform the window of opportunity into a demographic dividend. This realization of the demographic dividend is found in Chapter 13 of the Philippine Development Plan (PDP) 2017-2022 by the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), anchored on the Zero to 10-Point Socioeconomic Agenda. This demographic dividend entails a situation where there is an increase in the working age

The National Demographic and Health Survey showed 17% percent of married women want to practice family planning but do not have the access and information to such methods, while the survey shows 49% of sexually active, unmarried women have unmet needs in family planning.



UNFPA held a panel discussion on reproductive rights moderated by TV Anchor Annalisa Burgos with Ibdien Philippines Labor Leader Janice Revilla, United Nations Youth Advisory Board Member Dr. Jasmine Diorka Suleik, Likhaan Center for Women's Health Executive Director Dr. Junice Lirza D. Melgar, and Department of Education CSE Focal Person Dr. Rosalie Masilang.

population than the young and old dependents group. Thus, the number of people who are able to economically support is higher than those who need support. "This one-time window of opportunity will be closing rapidly as the dependency ratio rises again with the growth of the family population," Kato says. "The Philippines has yet to enjoy this demographic dividend and if the country does not do something by way of programmatic and policy intervention now, it might miss this golden opportunity," he adds.

The enjoyment of the demographic dividend is also highly policy-dependent. It is necessary to develop and draft more policies towards health, education, and employment, particularly on skills development and employment generation for young adults, and also on gender equality and women empowerment in the workplace.

“For this country to reap a demographic dividend for economic prosperity, there is an imminent need to invest more in health, education, and employability of young people and on gender equality. - Kato”

According to Kato, this is what the so-called 'East Asian tigers' did in the late '70s to '80s like Hong Kong, Singapore, Republic of Korea, and Taiwan.

To fully realize and maximize demographic dividends, three conditions must be met. First there must be improvement of the health of women and children as this contributes to the continued survival and an increase in the working-age population group. Second, an increase in the working-

age group due to investments in health and education results in saving of fiscal space by having fewer children. Third, better education and health opportunities lead to well-paid jobs and decent work. In the Philippines, the first condition has already been met. However, there is still a challenge with regard to the high unemployment and underemployment in the Philippines, especially of the youth.

SELECTING THE BEST ALTERNATIVE

The 2018 SWOP Report makes recommendation for all countries based on their level of fertility and stage of demographic transition. To fully realize reproductive rights and maximize the demographic transition, as well as achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the UNFPA made five policy recommendations for the country.

First, the Philippines must fulfill the commitment to reproductive rights recognized during the 1994 ICPD. Second, the country must get to zero unmet need with nationally-owned and funded family planning programs. More than four in five worldwide involve women with unmet need and national family planning programs that aim to reach most marginalized are needed. Third, there is a need to prioritize and close the disparities in reproductive health services, which should be comprehensive, high-quality, and accessible to all both national and local. Likewise, labor and health services should be integral to primary health care. Fourth, the country must provide universal comprehensive sexuality education, and do more to reach youth and adolescents. "People need to know how to exercise their reproductive rights and to make choices regarding their family size and this



Commission on Population (POPCOM) Executive Director Dr. Juan Antonio A. Perez III discussing the Philippines' fertility rate, emphasizing the importance of implementing family planning methods.



UNFPA-Philippines Country Representative Iori Kato as he presented the State of World Population Report 2018, titled "The Power of Choice: Reproductive Rights and the Demographic Transition."

knowledge should be imparted to young people before they become sexually active," Kato says, highlighting the importance of age and development-appropriate comprehensive sexual education (CSE). "The CSE, because of the word 'sexuality,' has a misconception because it is not always about sex," Kato explains. "It is also about relationships, negotiation, and communication. It is also about self-esteem and respect for yourself and for others," he further adds. Finally, the UNFPA recommends achieving gender equality on all fronts through eradication of gender-based violence including child marriage and sexual harassment in the workplace. "Shortfalls in women's rights are closely linked with the shortfalls in reproductive rights. Neither can be achieved without the other," declares Kato. Economic disparity in terms of low wages and child care should also be addressed to make for a healthier and productive workplace.

These recommendations serve to help the Philippines achieve the reality of choice for all—choice in terms of Filipinos having their desired number or size of the family as they wish or choice in terms of reaching their full economic potential. | ■

1 IN 10 OF FILIPINAS AGED 15 TO 19 have already begun bearing children

1 IN 5 AGED 19 ARE EITHER PREGNANT or have already given birth

TEENAGE MOTHERS MAY NEED TO DROP OUT from school and are less likely to be able to obtain a good job

MORE THAN HALF OF THE POPULATION is 24 years of age or below – the biggest working-age unemployed population group

44% OF FILIPINOS AGED 15 TO 24 are not in the labor force

7 OUT OF 10 UNEMPLOYED are women



BEST LAID PLANS

Respected Architect and Urban Planner Felino A. Palafox, Jr. weighs in on the current urban planning challenges in the Philippines and what we can do to progress as a nation

BY MAIELLE MONTAYRE
PHOTOGRAPHS BY DANIEL SORIANO

Master Development Plan of Clark Freeport Zone

“In areas prone to flooding, let houses be built to float or built on stilts, elevate the electrical system, and interconnect the buildings with elevated walkways and elevated monorails.”



With every endeavor, Palafox works closely with his team of talented engineers and architects



Rome was not built in a day; it took some time and judicious urban planning. Now, take a look at Metro Manila, a booming metropolis. Tall buildings and condominiums rise to occupy empty lots and dot the skyline. Road works, repairs, and construction of flyovers and bridges appear at each street corner. Signs of progress can be seen everywhere, but do these address the perennial heavy traffic, lack of public transport, and constant flooding in the metro?

Architect and Urban Planner Felino A. Palafox, Jr. sheds light on the basics and purpose of urban planning.

LAYING THE FOUNDATION

Founded in 1989, Palafox Associates is one of the country's top architecture firms today. In 1999, it was the first Filipino architectural firm cited in the World's Top 500 Architectural Firms of the London-based *World Architecture* magazine. Over the years, the firm has received more than 200 awards and recognitions. It has accomplished more than 1,510 projects in 40 countries, overseen the planning of 25 billion square meters of land, and designed the architecture of 12 million square meters of building floor area. Palafox himself has worked as Architect-Urban Planner with Ayala Corporation and Ayala Land, Inc. From 1977 to 1981, he was name-hired by Sultan Khalifa Al Habtoor of Dubai, UAE as Senior Urban Planner-Architect working in a multinational and interdisciplinary team. He was the only Southeast Asian and the youngest professional. "My best experience in urban planning was in Dubai. I was hired to help bring Dubai to the first world in less than 15 years," Palafox says.

Urban planning is a weighty concept covering several aspects. It begins with determining land use, then conceptualizing the infrastructures and circulation routes necessary for transportation and utilities. The firm then proposes road transport corridors; that is, one-third of the road cross-section should be designated for trees and landscaping, one-third for pedestrians and bicycles, and the remaining third as traffic lanes for vehicles. "It takes a minimum of 10 trees to recover the oxygen of the carbon monoxide per car. For larger vehicles like buses and SUVs, they should plant more trees per car," Palafox points out.

Apart from this, urban planning also involves housing for its residents and managing urban sprawl. It also touches on urban design concerning the aesthetics of architecture, landscapes, and open spaces. Another aspect involves healing the city through risk and disaster management. "It is 90% cheaper to address the hazards before they become disasters, aside from saving human lives and infrastructures. It is 10 times more expensive to do rehabilitation," Palafox stresses. Urban planning also addresses economic development by taking care of jobs and businesses. Thus, it covers a wide range of disciplines.



The firm's visionary practice covers comprehensive planning for 50 to 100 years. There is an immediate action program to address the first year or the next three years. Afterwards, the planning is staggered through short, medium, and long-term periods. "Planning must be comprehensive in terms of time, area coverage, and employing different professionals and disciplines like architects, engineers, urban planners, urban designers, interior designers, landscape architects and environmental planners, economists, business management experts, project managers, and so on," Palafox summarizes.

"Everything we do, we think of the next generation, so we should be mentors of the next generation," he adds. After the catastrophic 2015 earthquake in Kathmandu, Nepal, Palafox collaborated with the Taiwanese-based Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation to design schools and hospitals to last 1,000 years or for 40 generations. Likewise, in Dubai, urban planners plan for 50 years, and continue planning for the next 50. "Here in our country, when I talk about 100 years, people are very skeptical," he says.

DRAWING FEASIBLE PLANS

Palafox Associates is currently doing consultative work for the Metropolitan Davao Urban Master Plan, the Tourism Master Plan of Siargao, Pampanga Megalopolis, and Clark Development

Plan. The firm's previous projects include Tourism Master Plan of Metro Ilocos, Tourism Master Plan of Panglao in Bohol, La Mesa Ecopark in Quezon City, Liloan Master Development Plan Study in Cebu, and the Conceptual Development Plan of Puerto Princesa City in Palawan. "By doing emerging cities outside the Metro, you are helping Metro Manila because we need urban growth centers as counter-magnet to the congested Metro," Palafox says.

The plans drawn by Palafox Associates propose six kinds of infrastructure for a progressive nation. First, there is the progressive infrastructures, which are the international airports and seaports, international schools, international-standard hospitals and hotels; second, the heart infrastructures are the roads and utilities; third, the soft infrastructure is the ease-of-doing-business without corruption and red tape; fourth, green and sustainable architecture; fifth, digital infrastructures, which are ICT (information and communications technology) and artificial intelligence; and, sixth, the institutional infrastructures, which are the institutions that serve to implement the plan.

In line with this, Palafox's firm designs "smart cities" towards the smart growth and development of urban areas. "Creating more compact development with mixed land uses; more walkable, more bikeable, integrated places to live, work,

shop and dine, learn, and worship with 24-hour-cycle activity centers,” Palafox says. The following are the components of a smart city: smart manufacturing, smart government, mobility and WiFi, digital citizens, open data, smart health, smart farming, smart buildings, smart energy and utilities, and smart transportation.

Palafox once asked the American Institute of Architects, of which he is a member, “Why do you call it ‘smart?’ They answered that it was because, until the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) oil crisis in 1973, they have been doing ‘dumb growth.’” After the crisis, there were movements of new urbanism and smart growth to correct the mistakes of the past.

Palafox also proposes adaptive architecture towards saving and preserving localities. In Marawi, Palafox has suggested that the government build around the ruins of the city like in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan. The ruins brought on by the Battle of Marawi could instead become tourist attractions. In areas prone to flooding, he suggests, “Let houses be built to float or built on stilts. Elevate the electrical system. Interconnect the buildings with elevated walkways and elevated monorails.”

The firm has proposed to the city of San Juan the construction of three levels of access: the street-level sidewalk, the elevated walkways interconnecting

all the buildings, and the elevated monorail to interconnect with MRT-EDSA and LRT-Aurora. Road expansions should also not affect existing landscapes such as century-old trees. “Instead, they should create an island of trees and place the widening on the other side of the trees,” Palafox states. He explains that the recreation value of a 50-year-old tree amounts to P9 million. This includes the oxygen it gave for 50 years, the rainwater harvested, the cooling effect it gave, the fertilizer made, and its natural beauty. “This is why we teach road engineers and public works because it is also an advocacy on our part to help preserve the environment.”

SURVEYING THE PRESENT STATE

Without a doubt, urban planning plays a key role towards the progress and development of local government units (LGUs). Because of its comprehensive scope, it guarantees the mechanisms of a city to run smoothly like a well-oiled machine. However, the challenges to urban planning remain to be corruption, red tape, and bad politics. The lack of implementation is also problematic, as well as short-term and opportunistic planning instead of long-term and visionary.

Having visited more than 2,000 cities, Palafox states, “The success formula of those more



Davao Samal Bridge



King Abdullah Financial District

progressive cities and countries is visionary leadership, strong political will, appreciation of good urban planning and design, and good governance. This formula requires the city's leader to be an intellectual with a vision for planning and design; a person of integrity with an understanding for good architecture and engineering, and capable of urban management."

President Rodrigo Duterte has strongly advocated the "Build, Build, Build" program. As a result, Palafox says the Philippines is catching up with the rest of Asia in terms of its urban planning. "In the '70s, we were ahead. We were the example for other Asian countries," he recounts. "Consultants from Japan, South Korea, and Vietnam used to visit the Philippines and look at Highway 54 or EDSA,

because it has the three landscaping islands—one in the middle and two at the sides, apart from the service road and sidewalks."

In 1976, the World Bank funded the Metro Manila Transport Land Use Development Planning Project. One of the best metro-plans in the world at the time, it was an inter-agency project with the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), the then-Department of Transportation and Communications (DOTC), the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), and several other government agencies. Palafox was Senior Planning Team Leader for Development Planning. "Had the plan been followed, Metro Manila would be like Singapore or Hong Kong today," he says. In 1984, the Philippines had one of the best light rail transit (LRT) systems in Asia. Palafox was one of the first to propose a rail system that would have seen eight completed lines by 1992.



"The success formula of those more progressive cities and countries is visionary leadership, strong political will, appreciation of good urban planning and design, and good governance. This formula requires the city's leader to be an intellectual with a vision for planning and design; a person of integrity with an understanding for good architecture and engineering, and capable of urban management."

Palafox has also proposed 10 circumferential roads in Metro Manila, connecting Calabarzon with Central Luzon and Cavite to Bataan. The main corridor of EDSA functions as eight roads: (1) a major arterial road, (2) minor arterial road, (3) collector road, (4) residential access road, (5) shopping center access road, (6) military access road, (7) schools access road, and (8) cemetery access road. According to the master urban planner, EDSA needs eight more parallel roads to decongest it. He suggests opening up military camps and private subdivisions to allow access to the public and ease the traffic in EDSA.

The Philippines currently follows an outdated automobile-oriented urban planning similar to Los Angeles—where the work district and residences are miles apart—unlike the walkable and compact development of New York and Hong Kong. “It might have been better for the Philippines to have been inspired by the top cities of the world, even Asian cities like Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Tokyo, instead of copying Los Angeles erroneously,” Palafox says.

After designing Rockwell Center in Makati, the firm conducted a survey and found that locals only walk as far as 400 meters due to dangerous sidewalks, and ‘stop-anywhere’ tricycles, jeepneys, buses, and vehicles. Traffic signals are also a problem because it used to be 99 seconds for the automobile and nine seconds for the pedestrian. “If you are in high heels, you’ll never make it,” he jokes. In good urban planning, pedestrians should be able to walk a distance of five to 10 kilometers safely like in New York, Boston, and Singapore.

In 1991, Palafox worked with the European Economic Community for the planning of Boracay. “We said, do not build on the sand because once you put concrete, it becomes mud. You also block wind direction. It might have taken thousands—if not millions—of years to make that fine sand,” he says. In 2006, Palafox worked with the Philippine Tourism Authority to create the Boracay Integrated Master Plan. He recommended the construction of sewerage treatment plants and sewer interceptors around the island. The firm also gave their recommendations to address the “uglification” of Boracay—removing the overhead wires, posts, and signage—and not just the rehabilitation of the island.

The country’s flood control system is also only designed for 25 years of flooding and typhoons. Instead, it should be designed for a hundred years since typhoons and heavy rains are now a common occurrence. In the ’70s, the proposal for the Manggahan Floodway and Parañaque Spillway was conceptualized, but only the former was constructed.

“Laguna Lake is like a toilet without a flush. It’s like a big bathtub with 23 faucets without a drain; 22 rivers and the Manggahan Floodway all draining into Laguna Lake,” Palafox says. “During Typhoon Ondoy, the floodwaters from the mountains reached around 5,000 cubic meters per second, but the capacity of the Pasig River is only around 600 cubic meters per second. Where did the rest go? It flooded the 80,000 hectares of urban land in Metro Manila.”

Palafox believes the surrounding areas of Laguna Lake can become smart cities. The lake can be dredged to deepen it; anything dredged can be used for reclamation as additional real estate, open spaces, and wave breakers for tsunamis and storm surges. “At the right place and right time, reclamation can be used,” he cites. Furthermore, a circumferential linear park can be created around Laguna Lake, and an airport can be constructed to relieve congestion in NAIA. More housing can be made for urban development with 30% units for the urban poor like in Boston, Massachusetts. Through socialized housing provided by the government, the rising number of informal settlers will also be addressed not only around Laguna Lake but also in Metro Manila. Palafox recommends relocations to be the last option. Instead, there should be urban renewals on-site before near-site relocations. Should relocations be done, it should include transfer of livelihood, schools, and hospitals; and in places not prone to flooding or landslides.

In sum, the Philippines has many outdated and obsolete practices in urban planning. “But there are good examples in the world. We don’t have to reinvent the wheel; they are already there. That’s why I write about revolutionary ideas and global best practices in architecture, urban planning, and real estate development,” the master urban planner says.

CONCEPTUALIZING VISIONARY PLANS

“Manila is a fragmented metropolis,” says Palafox. “We have a long way to go towards a more progressive nation that efficiently employs urban planning,” he adds. The LGUs need more qualified and expert consultants for their urban planning and design contracts, which undergo competition and bidding. These conceptual development plans should also be implemented properly, looking forward towards sustaining the future generations and the world changes to come.

As the buildings rise and the roads are paved, the Philippines likewise continues to progress as a nation. “Under this administration, there is still opportunity for urban planning. They seem to be more serious with it,” Palafox notes. Changing paradigms and envisioning smart growth is part of the all-encompassing field of urban planning, architecture, design, and engineering. It requires plenty of inexhaustible vision and audacious optimism to change the aesthetic, structures, and blueprints of cities. It’s a tough job but someone has to do it. | ■



INVESTING IN EDUCATION

Congressman Greg Gasataya's vision: every family in Bacolod should have a college graduate.

INTERVIEW BY MARCO NICANOR
PHOTOGRAPHS BY RICKY LADIA

Coming from a humble family and bestowed with the opportunity of a proper education by the government, Congressman Greg Gasataya is out on a mission to pay it forward and envisions that every Filipino family should have a college graduate in their midst. He represents the lone district of Bacolod City, which garnered the top spot in Visayas with the highest competitive index among highly urbanized cities, and placed 8th overall in the country, besting even many other cities from the National Capital Region (NCR).

Let's get to know the honorable congressman up-close in this Q&A:

1 How did you get into politics?

I am a very simple and ordinary person. I came from a very small family in Bacolod. My father was a driver and my mother was a teacher, but she resigned from teaching and worked full-time at the church. We grew up on a hand-to-mouth way of life. I used to sell bottles, goodies, just to have additional income. We were renting a small place. Basically, *galing sa mahirap na pamumuhay*. Probably because of the opportunity given to me to study and get a degree, a lot of things happened to my life. Before politics, I worked as a broadcast journalist for eight years at a radio station

in Bacolod. I used to handle the primetime programs.

Come to think of it, we are not a family of politicians. It never entered even my wildest dreams that I would join politics.

In 2001, I was given the opportunity to run as councilor. Out of 69, I landed number 10. I handled the committee on transportation as a tribute to the profession of my dad. In 2004 and 2007, I was already the number one councilor and I handled the committee on education.

I took a break from politics in 2010, but I worked as director of Bacolod City Water District. In 2013, the Party asked me to run for Vice Mayor. I was very hesitant because I was away from politics for a couple of

years, but by God's grace, I was given another opportunity to serve. In 2015, the mayor was suspended, so I was the acting mayor for three months. And in the last elections, I ran and got elected as the congressman in the lone district of Bacolod.

2 **What is your leadership style? Why do you think you are effective as a leader?** *Nakikinig ako* (I listen). Every person that we meet has a story to tell, has opinions, and has inputs, so I like to listen and know what they have to say. I don't like it to be too formal. You can just approach me anytime and anywhere. That is my style of leadership, probably because of my experiences from the grassroots; I prefer that people can easily talk to me. My advocacies and my policies come from these conversations.

3 **What advocacies are dear to you and how are these reflected in your programs/policies?** My main advocacy is education. Because of the privilege given to me by the government, I was able to finish high school and college as a scholar. I'd like to replicate it and give others the same opportunity that was given to me. I focus on education, scholarship programs, and TESDA trainings. I have had this vision since 2004, that every family in Bacolod should have a college graduate. It is not easy, but with the approval of the law, which requires all the SUC's tuition and miscellaneous fees shouldered by the government (of which is I am one of the co-authors, as I was the Vice Chairperson of the Committee on Higher and Technical Education), that vision is now achievable.

“ Education is the greatest equalizer. When I am old and gray already, I want to look back and know that I was instrumental in changing the lives of families because I helped them get a diploma. ”





Another advocacy of mine is health. I remember when my mother got sick, she was constantly in and out of the hospital for more than two years. I had no choice but seek financial aid from people I knew. So when I was given the opportunity to be representative of Bacolod, I focused on this advocacy—prioritize funds in government hospitals which can be utilized by those who are in need.

4 As congressman, what are some of the projects and/or bills that you’ve authored/ supported that you are very proud of and why?

It definitely is the universal access to free tertiary education. I believe this is a landmark law that will be able to help a lot of Filipinos achieve their dreams in life.

For Bacolod City, I am now pushing for one college to become a state university, and also for the expansion of the capacity of the regional hospital. We are also working on the establishment of various government offices such as the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), the Professional Regulation

Commission (PRC), and many more.”

On the national scale, I also authored a lot of bills but education and health are the ones closest to my heart.

5 What are some of the challenges that Bacolod is facing? How do you aim to address them as congressman?

As with any other highly urbanized city undergoing continued progress, Bacolod is also experiencing what the others are experiencing—the increase in vehicle volume which results in traffic congestion, the concreting of the bigger percentage of the land area, which basically affects the drainage of a highly urbanized city, and the opening of new growth areas.

We are now implementing the construction of the Bacolod-Negros Highway, which will serve as a new growth area, because the city center is already congested. We have to

expand and provide new highways for new growth areas.

Bacolod is now the 8th most competitive highly urbanized city in the country and that includes the big cities in NCR; we are number one in the entire Visayas. Bacolod has a lot of potential—from infrastructure developments, to investments coming in, and side-by-side with that are the social services we provide the people.

6 Are there any key programs/projects/bills that you are pushing for this year?

It is the continuation of the budget and appropriation of the Bacolod-Negros Highway and its supporting programs of development. And then the improvement of the drainage system of Bacolod City.

7 What can other LGUs emulate from Bacolod?

Maybe it’s the way of life in Bacolod. We are a highly urbanized city, yet we still are able to maintain the provincial feel. If you want to go fast, you can go fast. If you want to just lay back, you can also do so. That’s why it is very pleasant

to live in Bacolod. There are lots of families coming from different parts of Visayas who transfer and stay in Bacolod.

I think it would be great if people could still maintain their way of life and still relax, while cultivating progress and economic development. In Bacolod, we do not have beaches, but our food is delicious, and our way of life is really good. We are trying to preserve that because that is the reason why people come here. Another thing about our city is, we are friendly to investors.

8 How has social media become a tool for advancing your services and communication with your constituents as congressman?

Communication is definitely much faster now. I personally handle all my social media accounts, and if I have time, I read all the messages and comments. It allows me to communicate with the people of Bacolod. That is also their channel for informing me about their feelings, experiences, what they need, and what would be beneficial to them. I must admit that there are some drawbacks, but I focus on the positive

things—like how social media makes it easier for me to communicate and interact with our constituents.

9 If you were not into politics, what would you be doing now?

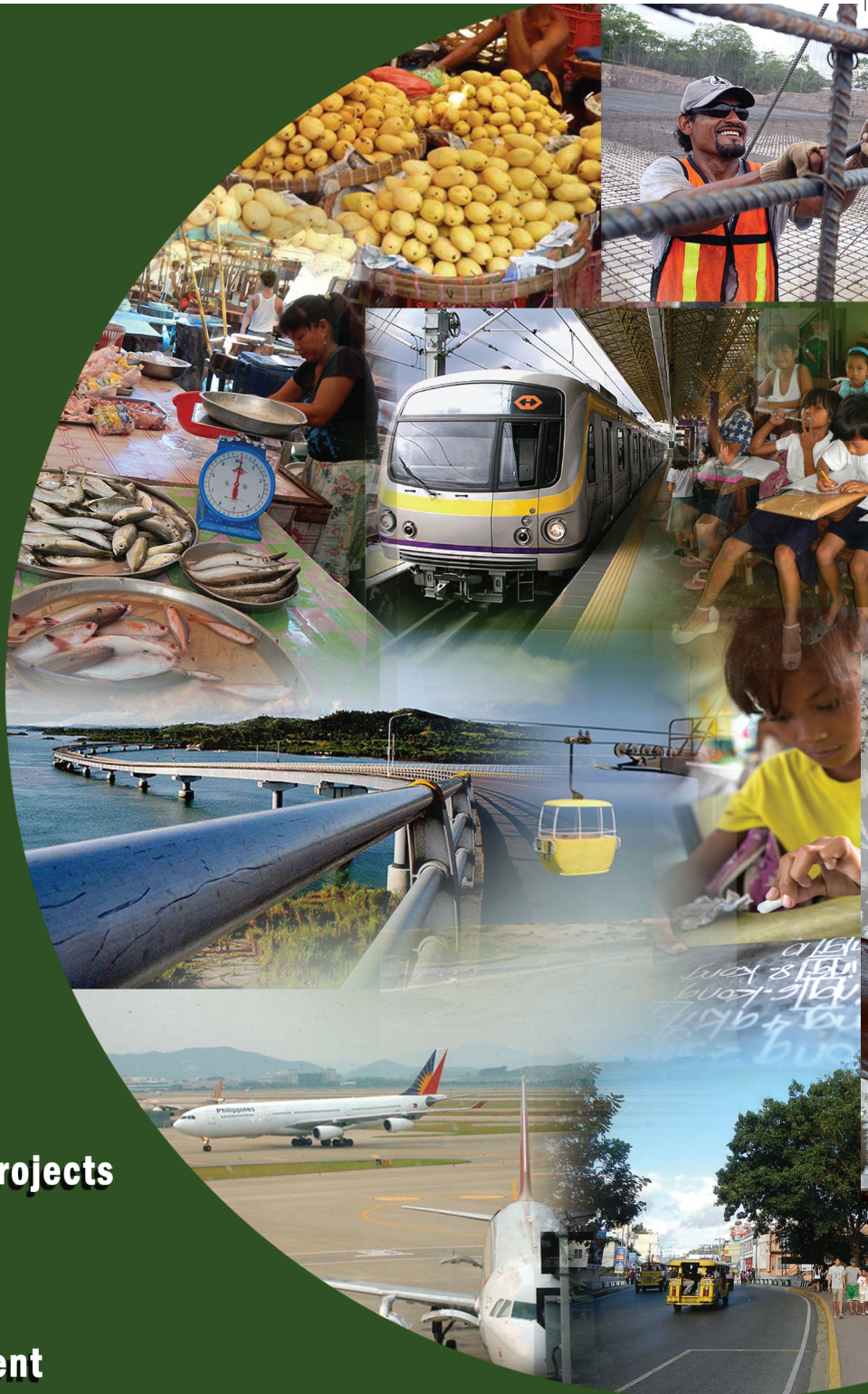
If I were not into politics, I'd most likely still be in public service. I am now on my 25th year as a public servant, I have served in different capacities. This is my way of thanking the people for the opportunity that was given to me. So what I have right now, especially the position given to me, I want to use it so that many will be helped, many will experience the quality of improvement in their lives, and achieve their dreams for their families.

10 What is your vision for your career and for Bacolod?

To help as many as I can to graduate from college. I want that to be my legacy because I believe that once a family has a college graduate, it will definitely improve their lives and it will be paid forward. Education is the greatest equalizer. When I am old and gray already, I want to look back and know that I was instrumental in changing the lives of families because I helped them get a diploma. | ■



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FEATURES



In the southwest corner of Metro Manila, the highly urbanized city of Muntinlupa stands tall. It is regarded as the gateway to one of the country's important economic zones, and home to the busiest commercial establishments and most expensive residential communities.

Envisioned as a city soaring into progress through public service, Manuel Amorsolo, son of national artist Fernando Amorsolo, was commissioned to create the then municipality's seal, which features a Philippine Eagle. The strongest and the highest-flying bird of the Philippine Republic symbolizes the citizenry's aspiration to make Muntinlupa one of the leading investment hubs in the country, and inspires its current leadership to deliver excellent public service.


"The City of Muntinlupa has realized unprecedented development and changes over the years," Mayor Jaime "Jimmy" Fresnedi tells LEAGUE. "Our current projects on education to empower our youth and infrastructure projects to catalyze economic and social growth, are all part of our roadmap to actualizing the vision of making Muntinlupa one of the leading investment hubs in the country with educated, healthy, and God-loving people." The lawyer has been at the city's helm for three consecutive terms and has pillared his plans on his Eight Point Program of Governance that is focused on education, health, peace and order, social welfare and housing, local governance, economic development, clean and green environment, and urban housing.

Mayor Fresnedi considers his multi-sectoral involvement as one of his biggest





tinlupa... Then and Now

**CELEBRATING
100 YEARS** 



PROMOTING AND CHAMPIONING PUBLIC SERVICE IN MUNTINLUPA

BY JOYCE REYES-AGUILA
PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROMEO PERALTA JR.



achievements. His approach includes establishing relationships and connections with sister cities, local and abroad, where he and partners facilitate linkages to open up opportunities.

The Fresnedi government reports an estimated and astounding 2.3% growth in business over the past five years with an estimated growth of capitalization of new businesses at 250% from 2014 to 2017.

It attributes its progress to the “booming landscape” of dealers, retailers, and service-oriented establishments. The city government says it complements the trust business groups place in the city by being a growth driver for business thereby encouraging more investments and increasing employment opportunities. This local economic development is sustained through participatory governance – that is working with other local government units (LGUs) to “open productive avenues for tackling common concerns” so it can “advance local economic



development” to its stakeholders.

“The City of Muntinlupa has realized unprecedented development and changes over the years. Our current projects on education to empower our youth and infrastructure projects to catalyze economic and social growth are all part of our roadmap to actualizing the vision of making Muntinlupa one of the leading investment hubs in the country.”

THE CITY MEANS BUSINESS

The development of the city’s business climate is predicated on one of Muntinlupa’s missions: to promote broad-based economic growth and a business-friendly environment for sustainable development. In 2015, it streamlined business permit processing through the introduction of the Single-Window Transaction Program that entails just one interaction between client and city government frontline personnel. In the process, it eliminated red tape.

Muntinlupa also established the Business Permits and Licensing Office (BPLO), Point of Sales (POS) terminals, allowing the city to accept payments through debit cards from



any bank. In a report, the city administration explains that “an essential component of easing the conduct of trade and commerce” are various technological tools that facilitate the “the seamless quality of transactions in the local government.”

This is also seen in the alternative payment modes now made available to taxpayers, like the Muntinlupa Online Real-Property Payment System (MORPS). It is a “web-based scheme capable of handling real-time collection of real property tax payments through a Landbank ATM account” that will soon be supplemented by online payment options for online business permit applications that can be settled through mobile, bank, and non-bank payment centers.

The city’s Quick Response (QR) Code on business permit certificates enables businesses, their customers, and other stakeholders to verify the authenticity of licenses, as well as prevent the counterfeiting and falsification of the same. Future plans include opening kiosks in malls and other commercial centers for permit applications. Aside from providing convenience, the city government aims to prevent corruption through zero client contact.

In recognition of such efforts, Muntinlupa received the award for being the “Most Friendly LGU” from the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry during the 44th



As proof of this commitment to education, Muntinlupa has constructed 44 school buildings, 330 classrooms, and two public libraries in the past five years. A report states that since 2014, a total of P1.25 billion has been allocated for scholarships for around 58,000 students from the elementary and college levels.



Philippine Business Conference and Expo in 2018. Its technological offerings earned it second place for the award for Best in eGOV Government Inter-operability (G2G) that is given by the Digital Cities Philippines Awards for Best Practices in eGovernance for Local Government Units, the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT), the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), and the National ICT Confederation of the Philippines (NICP).

Muntinlupa promotes itself as a “strategic bridge between the National Capital Region and the progressive locales in Cavite, Laguna, and Batangas.” The latter three form an economic zone that continuously attracts foreign and local investments. Within Muntinlupa is the Alabang Central District that the local government has made more conducive to business through traffic management and infrastructure initiatives. Its infrastructure programs were recognized in the 2018 Luminaries Award of the Manila Electric Company (Meralco) for its contribution to nation-building.

For Mayor Fresnedi, the city’s “numerous infrastructure projects will catalyze the economic and social growth of Muntinlupa in the coming years.” He adds, “These projects are all part of my roadmap to actualizing the vision of making Muntinlupa one of the leading investment hubs in the country.” Under Fresnedi, Muntinlupa established a city-wide Traffic Management Plan to free its streets of “obstructions and gridlock, specifically in major thoroughfares and its Central Business District.” It implements a traffic code and utilizes automated traffic lights, closed-circuit television (CCTV) monitoring, recalibrated traffic scheme, and has a systematized traffic control plan supported by integrated traffic engineering, traffic education, and traffic enforcement.



The city government also shows how it values micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) that want to open shop in Muntinlupa. Together with the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), it offers a multi-faceted assistance scheme through the Negosyo Center for business registration, business advisory services, business information and advocacy, and monitoring and evaluation.

Aside from the economy, the main areas of Muntinlupa's mission are environmental sustainability and resiliency, social development, and participatory governance. The development goals of the city are outlined in the Comprehensive Land Use Plan (CLUP) where investment is directed towards identified growth notes and viable new industries.

CITY COMPETITIVENESS

Education is another key priority area for Mayor Fresnedi. "Hope lies in our youth, particularly in their education," he shares.



"This is why I have put paramount importance on it throughout my political career. There is no greater investment that can beat the education of our youth – providing them the means to go to school and finish their studies and give hope and light to the succeeding generations of Muntinlupenos. I want to leave a legacy to the youth who will eventually become successful members of the society.



The Muntinlupa Care Card is one of the many ways local government engages stakeholders and attract investments in new technologies that also include cashless system, electric vehicles, renewable energy, green building, robotics, and quality codes, among others.



They will be trailblazers and leaders of groups and even governments.”

As proof of this commitment to education, Muntinlupa has constructed 44 school buildings, 330 classrooms, and two public libraries in the past five years. The city has a local university, a local institution for engineering, a science high school, and two business high schools as well. A report states that since 2014, a total of P1.25 billion has been allocated for scholarships for around 58,000 students from the elementary and college levels.

Muntinlupa also targets to educate its citizens on business through the Joint Resources Financing Program-Tulong Negosyo. The micro-financing scheme provides “sustainable financial assistance at 0% interest, and training sessions on product development, technology transfer, business planning, skills, marketing, financial management and others.” Its participants are “provided with shared service facilities, as well as mentoring and counseling services, and are engaged in a micro-savings program to inculcate the value of financial literacy.” Over 6,000 micro-entrepreneurs have been assisted by the program that like similar instruments aim “to improve productivity and increase income, especially among the disadvantaged.”

To further assist its most vulnerable sectors, Muntinlupa has put in place programs like Jobstart, Vocational Summit, Trabaho Para Sa Kapwa Muntinlupeño, free work immersions for scholars, and collaborations on livelihood, environmental sustainability, and entrepreneurship through its Public-Private Partnership for the People (P4). It engages with groups like the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry-Muntinlupa and the private sector to further its development plans.

Another P4 initiative is the Muntinlupa Care Card (MCC). Initially a benefit card with health and social privileges, and exclusive discounts provided to over 130,000 Muntinlupa residents, it has now been upgraded to the MCC Plus, a smartcard and PayMaya VISA debit card in one. It is one



of the many ways local government engages stakeholders and attract investments in new technologies that also include cashless system, electric vehicles, renewable energy, green building, robotics, and quality codes, among others.

CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

With all these in place, Mayor Fresnedi calls on his constituents to exhibit self-discipline and conscientious participation to facilitate social change. “I encourage them to be responsible and disciplined in doing their part to effect change in their communities,” the Muntinlupa native turned city leader

says. “The thrusts of the local government are on the welfare of the people and it cannot be done by the government alone. Their full and active participation is needed in creating safe spaces, healthier children, better homes, and brighter smiles.”

As a firm believer of transparent and effective public service, Mayor Fresnedi’s government partnered with the Development Academy of the Philippines to introduce groundbreaking solutions that can notably impact the quality of public service delivery through the Innovation Laboratory project. It also established a Muntinlupa Integrity Circle with the European Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines for a multi-sector program to foster “a culture of transparency, accountability, and, foremost, integrity.” The initiative seeks to create and implement “integrity mechanisms centered on preventing and reducing, if not completely eliminating, avenues for corruption, dishonesty, and other related acts among government employees, as well as other members of the society,” a city report states.

With all sectors covered and the introduction of innovative means to serve its citizens, Muntinlupa is well-placed among local governments which aim for excellent, responsive, and effective public service. | ■







SOCIAL MISSION

Masbate Vice Governor Jo Kristine ‘Kaye’ Celera-Revil is determined to stomp out poverty and violence and uphold peace, progress, and positivity

BY MARIDOL RANOA-BISMARK
PHOTOGRAPHS BY SILVERMOON STUDIO

There’s something about an esteemed ancestor that makes you want to level up. Masbate Vice Governor Jo Kristine “Kaye” Celera-Revil didn’t get to meet her paternal grandfather, Adolfo Celera Sr., a lawyer-politician who worked as a Provincial Board Member and Land Transportation Office Chief. Unfortunately, he was assassinated in their home province a year before Revil, his first grandchild, was born.

Revil, who’d rather be called VG (which stands for “Very Good,” how she wants people to see her), grew up hearing stories about how well-loved her grandfather was. In order to live up to his honor, she tries her best to lead as he would have led had he been alive.

Revil followed in the footsteps of her *lolo* and continued his legacy. She took up Law from Ateneo de Manila University and passed the Bar. Like her grandfather, she’s determined to make life better for her countrymen.

It’s been an uphill climb. But she chose to continue down this path as she sees it her duty to inspire greater good as a public servant. “I’m a Masbateña, raised and studied in Masbate from pre-school to high school, I love my province. I know of its many issues and I feel it’s my calling to help come up with

solutions, and work for its peace, progress, and development,” she declares.

Masbate’s previous reputation as a province, which lacked clean water, paved roads, and jobs due to corruption didn’t help. Almost 10 years ago, it ranked eighth on the list of the country’s poorest provinces.

Given this condition, Vice Governor Revil immediately set out to take on the herculean task in front of her. “I put a lot of effort toward instilling in the people’s minds that we’re not less than the others, that we’re neither pathetic nor poor. I tried to reverse the image (of Masbate) as a violent place,” says Revil.

She did her best to change this victim-mentality into something positive by telling Masbateños that they have three Ks— Karapatan (right), Kagandahan (beauty), and Kabutihan (goodness).

ECONOMIC BOOST

Revil, also a BS Tourism graduate from the University of the Philippines, knows how important tourism is to her work as Masbate’s chief ambassador of goodwill. She’s made it a point to join all expos, and create a lot of videos to promote Masbate.

When Cebu Pacific introduced a new plane and asked the public where they wanted to fly, Revil seized the moment. She mobilized the youth and asked them to post beautiful

pictures of Masbate on their social media accounts. Thanks to the youth's frequent posts, Masbate trended on Twitter, and Cebu Pacific noticed.

Revil then pitched the idea of introducing Cebu Pacific flights to Masbate to the Gokongweis. "I showed all my efforts to promote Masbate, while Cebu Pacific did its own market research," recalls Revil. The result: the airline company launched two flights a day to Masbate. Needless to say, it was a big boost for local tourism, with new resorts opening and bringing job opportunities for the people.

Revil again tapped the power of social media when she gathered Masbateños for a makeover and asked them to pose for photos with the province's tourist destinations as backdrop. The Masbateños were only too glad to post photos of their new look on their social media accounts.

Revil repeated this technique of hitting two birds with one stone by holding

volleyball tournaments in various Masbate tourist spots, and asking people to upload the photos on social media. She reached out to print and online media and showed them the beauty of Masbate. "Good publicity erased the province's negative image. It boosted the people's morale and sense of pride and belonging," says Revil.

More jobs stimulated the economy and fueled the engine of progress. So Revil tied up with the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) and held a job fair for her constituents. She also tapped her wide network to launch capacity-building projects that gave livelihood training to the people. Revil's office partnered with TESDA (The Technical Education and Skills Authority), which offered courses in plumbing, weaving, and others.

She also launched the Kusog Masbate Province Card that gives discounts and privileges to Masbateño taxpayers, encouraging many business establishments to warm up to the idea.



CLIMATE SMART

Revil's Climate Smart project is an offshoot of her wide network and negotiating skills. "You can't separate environment from tourism," she points out. So this Harvard alumna tapped technocrats from the Harvard Club of the Philippines to talk about disaster resilience and other allied topics before officers and staff of Masbate's local government units (LGUs).

She also taught them how to make project proposals. This way, the LGU can ask the Climate Change Commission for a portion of the People's Survival Fund to bankroll some of its environment-friendly projects. Revil is happy to report that representatives from other provinces visited Masbate to study Climate Smart and replicate the program in their own areas.

In addition, this one-time global ambassador for the International Young Leaders Assembly installed solar lanterns in a *barangay* with no electricity at all. The model of renewable energy impressed judges of the nationwide Brigada Eskwela campaign (it aims to do repairs, maintenance, and cleanup of government-run grade school and secondary schools), Revil says they chose the *barangay* as one of last year's awardees. Revil is just as proud of supporting three Masbate high schools that also won Brigada Eskwela awards.

EMPOWERING THE YOUTH

Revil has high hopes for the youth of Masbate. It is for them that she launched the Outstanding Young Leaders Awards, where each high school chooses one exemplary young woman from among the graduating batch as representative.



“ I put a lot of effort toward instilling in the people's minds that we're not less than the others, that we're neither pathetic nor poor. I tried to reverse the image (of Masbate) that it is a violent place.”

”



The winner gets a cash award, a medal, and the privilege of attending a leadership training workshop led by US-based mentors. In so doing, Revil is passing on her knowledge as a fellow of the Young Southeast Asian Leadership Initiative (a US-government project), where she met these mentors who are only willing to help her out.

As education is also an advocacy she believes in, Revil has initiated numerous initiatives, donating supplies to Brigada Eskwela. She also regularly donates library books to schools like the Amatog National High School in Aroroy, Masbate, via the Teacher's Gallery sponsorship.

Three secondary schools in Masbate which Revil supported have won national awards.

FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

Transparency is of utmost importance to Revil. It lets the people know what their government is doing for them.

“It will help government get the people’s cooperation, because they trust their officials,” explains Revil.

So she passed the Freedom of Information (FOI) ordinance in Masbate, at a time it was not yet enacted into law.

As a result, Masbate is the first province in the Bicol region and the third in Philippines (after Ilocos Norte and Bohol) to pass the FOI measure.

WOMAN EMPOWERMENT

In the name of woman empowerment, Revil came up with a series of modules for women vice governors, board members, vice mayors, councilors, *barangay* captains and Kagawad officials. The UP National College of Public Administration (NCPAG) experts taught them how to become more effective leaders and create more laws that matter.

These local officials realized they can go out of the box and push for legislation on their own. They need not rely on the dictates of their superiors and push for changes themselves.



Pregnant women got free check-ups and much-needed advice on nutrition through the Buntis Congress last November, when Revil herself was also eight months pregnant. The event was supervised by health officers who volunteered their services.

CLOSER TO THE PEOPLE

Revil brought government closer to the people by holding job fairs that reduced unemployment. Her staff distributed wheelchairs to persons with disabilities and senior citizens in provincial and district hospitals, where they also gave away vitamins.

A tie-up with the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) provided mobile passport services. Teachers taking their licensure examinations no longer had to leave Masbate. Revil's office launched a mobile PRC (Professional Regulation Commission) that helped them with their papers.

WIFE AND MOTHER

On top of all these, Revil finds time for family. The vice governor and her husband, Atty. Vince Revil, former Masbate governor and a three-termer vice governor, have four children, ages 16, 11, 10 and 9. As of this writing, she's expecting another child in December.

Revil is not ashamed to admit she got married at 19, when she was in third year college. But she's proud of the fact that she never stopped schooling and graduated on time.

She only took a two-year leave of absence from law school when she campaigned for her husband.

Revil is definitely not resting on her laurels. In 2019, she plans to level up by running for Congress in the second district of Masbate, the biggest in the province.

She continues to learn, taking up further studies and capacity



enhancement sessions. She passes on the knowledge she gains to her constituents through public forums and events that promote meaningful discussions.

That's because Revil wants to be known simply as VG — or “Very Good.” That's a goal her mom instilled in her while she was growing up. That's also her pledge to the Masbatenos she vows to keep on serving. |

IN PURSUIT

After considering its limitations and building on its strengths as a convergence hub, Binalonan is transforming itself into a dynamic municipality, one that has built a niche economy as a university town under the leadership of Mayor Ramon V. Guico III.

**BY MAIELLE MONTAYRE
PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROMEO PERALTA, JR.**

Marked as a crossroad for cultural and agricultural exchanges of Pangasinan, the Ilocos, and the Cordilleras, the town of Binalonan, a first-class municipality in the province of Pangasinan, has transformed from an uninhabited forested area to a lush agricultural community to a burgeoning rural town. Bordered by bustling municipalities and cities of eastern Pangasinan, Binalonan strives to make a name for itself. With growing infrastructures, developing services, and connecting roads and highways, the town is catching up to its vision of becoming a progressive university town.

TAKING ROOT

The current mayor of Binalonan, Ramon V. Guico III, answered the call to public service when he ran for Vice Mayor in 2007. He was elected later as Mayor in 2010, a position he holds until now. “It’s my hometown,” he simply says. “I wanted to give back to my roots and prove that when you have a clear vision of what you want to do, you can achieve it.” With a doctorate degree in Public Management from



OF EXCELLENCE



The small but terrible Small Action Force in Binalonan, a testament of Mayor Guico's respect for equality and diversity, and his way of empowering the differently abled.



Binalonan prides itself for being the Cleanest and Greenest town in the Philippines.

Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Maynila (PLM), he set about the task of further improving his hometown.

Founded in November 10, 1834, Binalonan consists of 24 *barangays* spread over its 8,400-hectare land area. Its name is derived from the Ilokano term *balon*, in Tagalog *baon*, which means “packed lunch.” It is said that the workers of a Spanish land-owner would rest and have their lunch underneath the trees located at heart of the land where the municipality stands today. Binalonan is a term in Ilokano and Pangasinan signifying a place where people come to bring and eat their lunch. The town traces its roots to the Ilokano people who migrated due to the drastic effects of colonial policies involving taxes and to find greener pasture in the uncultivated lands of eastern Pangasinan.

Since then, Binalonan has risen from a poor town to a promising agricultural municipality with rice crops as one of its main products. It continues to produce sugar cane, an ingredient used for *basi* (sugar cane wine), *suka* (vinegar), and muscovado (dark brown sugar), which are some of the town’s top products. It was in 1989 when the third-class municipality of

“ We do not have the mountains, the beaches, the sea, or any natural attractions. Therefore, the best resource is the people. ”

Binalonan graduated into a first-class municipality, owing to its rising income and population. “But I told myself that we should not stop with just being a first-class municipality,” Mayor Guico says.

Dwarfed by the more progressive and populous City of Urduyana and Municipality of Pozorrubio, with its high overseas remittances and high purchasing power, Binalonan fought to compete with her neighbors. “The challenge was how to make it more progressive, how to invite more establishments and such; because, before, there were only these mom-and-pop establishments, mga *karinderya* (small food stores), and anything you need you just buy from the market,” Mayor Guico says. Inspired by his travels locally and abroad, and armed with a Master’s Degree in Education from the University of the Philippines (UP), Mayor Guico dreamt of transforming Binalonan into a university town.



Mayor Guico III gamely wears a floral dress on Women’s Day and a vampire costume during a bloodletting event, to support their municipality’s advocacies.



Mayor Guico III gives a speech at the inauguration of the Convergence Metasculpture created by Victor Secuya. The sculpture symbolizes what has become of Binalonan—a crossroad of cultures, that propelled it to become a progressive town.



“

I believe so much in people empowerment—identify the talent, find the people who have the heart for public service and are willing to make sacrifices, group them together in a way that they complement each other, and finally, cast the vision and train them for it.”

”

Mayor Guico III during the investiture ceremony, welcoming him as President the University of Eastern Pangasinan (UEP).



TAKING OFF WITH EDUCATION

Binalonan is a landlocked municipality in the central plains of Luzon. “I said we should identify the best resource of the town. We do not have the mountains, the beaches, the sea, or any natural attractions,” Mayor Guico recounts. “Therefore, the best resource is the people.”

In the early aughts, Binalonan experienced a problem when students, after finishing high school, went to Baguio and Manila for college. Eventually, they looked for work outside the municipality. “There was a ‘brain drain, even the skilled workers were scarce’ and all we had left here were the skilled workers because the professionals and educated went outside the town,” the local chief executive says. To entice them to return and also make the local Binalonians stay, Mayor Guico decided to turn Binalonan into a vibrant and bustling educational town similar to Los Baños, Laguna, and Baguio City. Mayor Guico also drew inspiration from Boston and Cambridge, Massachusetts where Boston University and Harvard University are located, respectively; and South Bend, Indiana, where Notre Dame University is.

Thus, the University of Eastern Pangasinan (UEP) was established in 2005 by the municipal government of Binalonan. A higher education institution, UEP offers undergraduate programs recognized by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and technical-vocational courses accredited by the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA). With the goal of providing quality and accessible education to all, the UEP was previously subsidized by the municipality. After the promulgation of the Unified Financial Assistance System for Tertiary Education Act (UniFAST) or Republic Act (R.A.) No. 10687, Binalonan applied for Student Financial Assistance Programs (StuFAPS). Under the law, the modes of StuFAPS include scholarships, grants-in-aid, student loans, and other specialized forms. The Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act or R.A. No. 10931 signed by President Rodrigo Duterte also grants budget allocation for state universities and colleges (SUCs) and local universities and colleges (LUCs), to which UEP belongs to. CHED also has scholarships under Iskolar ng Bayan and the Tulong Dunong Program, and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) also offers education assistance.

Through these measures, everyone is ensured equal access to quality education.

As a licensed pilot, Mayor Guico also decided to put up an aviation school. Together with the WCC Aviation Company, the WCC Aeronautical and Technological College (WCC ATC) was opened in 2008 after beginning as a training school in 2005. It is the only higher education institution offering undergraduate aviation programs in Regions I, II, the Cordillera Autonomous Region, and Northern Manila. Mayor Guico himself holds a Bachelor of Science in Aviation from the said school. The WCC ATC boasts of, and has access to, a 950-meter privately operated runway, constructed in 2004. “The public university caters to those not interested in aviation and those who are hard up in life since the tuition is affordable or even free if there are available slots,” the municipal mayor explains. “The pilot school is different because it is private with higher tuition.”

Today, the WCC ATC has students hailing from all over the Philippines, and even from Hong Kong, Singapore, and the Middle East. These students, some of whom are children of expats, pass four years of their schooling in Binalonan thereby creating a market demand for basic needs and supplies. “That’s how we were able to create the niche,” Mayor Guico says.

The innovative mayor tailors the town planning according to his vision, making sure there are schools in each area, providing access and connectivity to all. They are developing the Government Center for Education (GCE), a nine-hectare area dedicated to educational productivity. The GCE should contain the UEP, the Department of Education (DepEd) Pangasinan Division II Office, the North Central Elementary School, and the Juan G. Macaraeg National High School (JGMNHS). The Doña Eva M. Macapagal Memorial Library Hub, named after the late Evangelina de la Cruz Macaraeg-Macapagal, former first lady of President Diosdado Macapagal, is found at the JGMNHS. Binalonan is Doña Eva’s hometown and her daughter is former President, now House Speaker, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, who came to the inauguration of the library in 2009. At the town center, there is also a Techno Hub and Community e-Center to provide computer facilities and internet access to the Binalonians.



CONVERGING TOWARDS PROGRESS

The development of connecting highways such as the Tarlac-Pangasinan-La Union Expressway (TPLEX) and the Subic-Clark-Tarlac Expressway (SCTEX) contributed to the advancement of the town. Labeled before as the “Gateway to Manaoag and Baguio City,” Binalonan is today more connected to other regions as it has more access to the airports, the seaports, and the rest of Luzon through the TPLEX and SCTEX.

“We’ve become a convergence town where all the great minds meet,” Mayor Guico proudly states. At the municipal grounds, the Convergence Meta Sculpture was recently installed to mark the significance of Binalonan as a convergence point for other towns and provinces. As a result, the town-wide urban planning included the mass development of its parks and plaza, inviting all both locals and non-locals to stay and stopover in Binalonan. The municipal government also conducts character formation sessions, especially for teachers and government officials; youth empowerment seminars; and other training programs. The Ramon J. Guico, Sr. Sports and Civic Center was built for large assemblies such as the Governor’s Cup, Mayor’s Cup, and Inter-agencies and LGU sports fests. There is also the Tents Event Center to accommodate other big events. The town also plans to build a Sports Complex with a semi-Olympic size pool and a track oval. The track oval is going to be located in the Government Center for Education.

At the Sports and Civic Center, the *Siak ni Carlos Bulosan* musical play was held. Carlos Bulosan, a native of Binalonan who migrated to the US, is a poet, writer, and activist, known for the semi-autobiographical novel, *America is in the Heart*. Serving to promote widespread knowledge of their local town hero, the play also signified the growing appreciation for arts and culture, and the Binalonan heritage. The town also conducted the Pinarsua Art Exhibit and Festival, encouraging the creative minds of the locals. The Heritage Museum and Museum for Modern Filipino Art form part of the long-

term plans of the municipal government. Mayor Guico himself has his own personal art collection to support upcoming and already-renowned Filipino artists.

After finding its identity as a university town, Binalonan developed even further. “When students flock in, you create a need for dormitories, housing, and transportation. There’s a need for supplies stores. That’s where it all started,” Mayor Guico says. This created more jobs for the locals and more opportunities for livelihood apart from agricultural means. “We think of Binalonan as one big campus just like UP, not the traditional notion of a campus which is enclosed,” Mayor Guico explains. “The facilities are spread all over the town so the next challenge is connectivity, so we’re thinking of a loop system like the UP *Ikot* (jeepneys that ply within the university),” he adds.

On October 26, 2018, Binalonan was the third to launch the GrabTrike service after Angeles City, Pampanga, and Balanga, Bataan. It is the first to use the premium tricycle, featuring a three-wheeled Italian-manufactured scooter, larger than the traditional tricycle. Around 100 tricycles with franchises issued by the municipal government participated in a motorcade around the municipality. Available for 24 hours, this serves to promote connectivity and convenient transportation for all. “We’re also promoting walking, which is why we are building a lot of sidewalks,” Mayor Guico pronounces. The municipal

government also fixed existing sidewalks, installed streetlights, and constructed drainage systems. To ensure the safety of the people, Binalonan has a 24-hour patrol and a Quick Response Center. It provides health and rescue services with a Rural Health Unit (RHU), EMS and ambulances, a birthing home, and a dental clinic.

Binalonan is also a clean and environmentally-friendly municipality. Hence, it was awarded as one of the Most Beautiful and Cleanest Town in the Philippines in 1968. As testament to this, the



Grab Trikes are available 24/7 in Binalonan, making transportation convenient.



Last June 8, Mayor Guico III led the inauguration of the PTA-funded “I LOVE JGMNHS” signage at the Juan G. Macaraeg National High School.

Heritage Park inside the municipal grounds has about 48 centennial acacia trees with a promenade featuring a rock garden and a koi pond. The town hosts the annual nationwide Inter-Club Bonsai Exhibition and Competition at the park, together with the Bonsai and Suiseki Alliance of the Philippines, Inc. (BSAPI). The municipal government also practices the Anti-Dugyot Program, which prohibits tarpaulins, promotes alternative means of packaging instead of plastic, and ensures a clean and green municipality. They closed the open dumpsite in one of their *barangays* with plans to convert it into an eco-park. There is also the development of the Green Valley Eco and Adventure Park of Binalonan at the northeast portion of the municipality.

CONTINUING ON WITH EXCELLENCE

“It all starts with a vision and how you cascade that vision down to the department heads, the LGU employees, the *barangays*, and the townspeople—all the stakeholders,” Mayor Guico says. “I believe so much in people empowerment—identify the talent, find the people who have the heart for public service and who are willing to make sacrifices, group them together in a way that they complement each other, and finally, cast the vision and train them for it,” he explains. Highlighting his passion for empowering the people, the municipal government has a Small Action Force, which allows jobs for the little people of Binalonan, neighboring towns, and helps those in the fringes of society.

In November 2018, Binalonan was conferred its fourth Seal of Good Local Governance Award by the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG). The municipality has also received the Seal of Good Housekeeping from the DILG in 2011, the 2nd Runner-up for Most Statistically Developed LGU in the province of Pangasinan from 2013 to 2015, Gold Plaque Awardee under the “CLUP Zero Backlog Project” by the Housing and Land Use Regulatory Board in 2013, the Seal of Child-friendly Local Governance from the Council of the Welfare of Children in 2014, the Most Compliant LGU in the Municipal Category at the PhilHealth Agila Awards in 2015, and the Hall of Fame Award at the

National Quality Corn Achievers Award in 2016, among other numerous awards.

Binalonan continues to improve as more infrastructures are built, affordable healthcare is provided, livelihood is improved, and jobs and education are made accessible to all. “The respect that people give you, because you did a good job in developing the town, outweighs any material benefit, if there is, in public service,” Mayor Guico declares. “It is the love and respect your constituents give you, which is the best legacy.” Guided by its core values of *Maka-Diyos, Marunong, Malinis* (God-fearing, Educated, Clean), this humble municipality remains a Godly town, doing what is right; upholding education to enhance its human resources; and sustaining cleanliness of the body, the environment, and the infrastructure. These values encompass the beliefs and direction of Binalonan, so that these can be passed on to future generations.

“We came up with the battle cry of ‘Binalonan, *Ang Galing,*’” Mayor Guico says. “It is a vision we want to achieve, that in everything, we want to do things with excellence. That’s the only way you can be a cut above the rest.” The municipal government commits to excellence when they do projects and build facilities. At the same time, it is a unified sentiment that all Binalonians know and understand. Everyone is able to express this slogan wholeheartedly, even claiming it as a hashtag on social media. “*Tuloy-tuloy na mas gumagaling dapat ang pananaw sa mga gagawin natin* (Continued excellence should be our view in all that we do),” Mayor Guico concludes. | ■



THE GREEN CITY

Legazpi, Albay moves forward with its efforts on green growth and sustainable development

BY MAIELLE MONTAYRE
PHOTOGRAPHS BY MANUEL GENEROSO





At the foothills of the majestic Mayon Volcano, located on the shores of Albay Gulf, right in the heart of the Bicol Peninsula, lies a fast-growing metropolis. A city that has become almost synonymous to its most popular tourist destination, Legazpi attracts over a million tourists each year who are eager to gaze at the beauty and grandeur of the famous perfect-cone volcano. Apart from tourism, the city of Legazpi, as provincial capital of Albay, stands as a growing business and commercial hub in Southern Luzon. Recognized nationwide for its enduring efforts, Legazpi continues to make progressive changes towards sustainable economies and nationwide competitiveness.

FROM A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Legazpi was originally a *barangay* called Sawangan, a settlement of fishermen and farmers. The town was under the administration of the Franciscan friars of the Doctrina of Cagsawa. The old village was renamed as Legazpi by Royal Decree dated September 22, 1856, in honor of Miguel Lopez de Legazpi, the Basque-Spanish conquistador and governor who

annexed the Philippine Islands to Spain in 1565.

On February 1, 1814, the catastrophic eruption of Mt. Mayon caused devastation in Sawangan, burying many towns. The Cagsawa Ruins, a popular tourist attraction today, are all that remains of the town of Cagsawa. Nevertheless, locals continue to settle around the slopes of the volcano despite the threat of recurring eruptions.

Legazpi became a city under the Becerra Law of 1892, but reverted to being a municipality during the American occupation. After the Second World War, Legazpi became a city for the second time on July 18, 1948, under Republic Act (RA) No. 306. It was to be dissolved again, returning to its status as a town. Finally, on June 12, 1959, Legazpi became a city again, for the third time, under R.A. No. 2234, and it remains such to this day.

The city is also the regional center of the Bicol Region and the capital of the province of Albay. It aims to be one of top five convention destinations in the Philippines for meetings, incentives, conventions, and exhibitions (MICE). In 2016, 91 MICE were held in Legazpi; 140 in 2017; and 87 as of August 2018. The city



The city's environmental program includes planting 10,000 trees each year. Photo shows trees along the stretch of Legazpi Boulevard.



has the Legazpi City Convention Center with 3,000 seating capacity and the Ibalong Center for Recreation with 5,000 capacity, aside from many convention centers and hotels.

The city of Legazpi has garnered many notable awards. In 2007, Legazpi City was named by the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry as one of the most business-friendly cities in Southern Luzon. In 2014, it placed second in the Most Livable Cities Design Challenge by the National Competitiveness Council (NCC) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation. It also received the 2014 Best City Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (CDRRMC) under Component/Independent City category; Gawad Kalasag Hall of Famer in 2015; and the Seal of Good Local Governance in 2016. In 2018, Legazpi was awarded first in Overall Competitiveness among component cities by the NCC. At the 6th Regional Competitiveness Summit, Legazpi ranked first in infrastructure among the 145 component cities in the Philippines and second in economic dynamism.

The incumbent mayor is Noel E. Rosal, who was re-elected in 2013. He began his career as *barangay* chairman of Barangay Gogon before serving as city councilor. He initially won as mayor in 2001, completing three consecutive terms thereafter before his re-election.

GOING GREEN FOR THE ECONOMY

The city government of Legazpi has put emphasis on green economic development (GED) with economic reforms that highlight environmental sustainability. “Ever since I took over as mayor, I have always emphasized the climate change phenomenon because we have to be serious about this,” Mayor Rosal says. “Nobody is safe, even rich countries in the Americas and in Europe. We have to combat the effects of climate change through adaptation and mitigation.”

The local chief executive ensures that all plans and projects of Legazpi are aligned with environmental concerns and policies. First, the city prioritizes the flood control program in the construction of main roads, allotting a five-meter setback for future expansion of drainages. Second, Legazpi has environmental programs that include planting 10,000 trees each year on watersheds, certain *barangays*, and at the foot of Mt. Mayon. They have also planted trees along the stretch of the Legazpi Boulevard.

“When you say green, it is not only the planting. It is also about programs which have an effect, especially on waste management,” Mayor Rosal states. Legazpi focuses on proper garbage disposal, practicing a “no segregation, no collection” policy. It is one of those few cities in the Philippines with an engineered sanitary landfill. Located in Banquerohan, this landfill was financed by a P120-million grant from the government of Spain through the Spanish Cooperation Agency for International Development (AECID). The Banquerohan landfill allows the city to generate renewable energy from the treatment of waste. There is a constructed pipeline, which can be used to collect methane and convert it for additional income. Biodegradable waste, on the other hand, can be converted to organic fertilizer. Legazpi already signed a partnership with Okada Manufacturing Company of Japan for such an endeavor with both parties investing more than P20-million in the project. “But what is important is to make the farmers patronize the product. On the first phase, we can give it to them for free. But on the second phase, we can sell it for a price,” the mayor says.

The city of Legazpi has many projects towards green economy. “Although the plans are not perfect, at least, we have started our efforts and it means we have adapted,” Mayor Rosal says. The local government is converting major land areas into parks, like the Dapdap Open Park, instead of constructing more buildings. It has a grant of P11-million from President Rodrigo Duterte for such projects. The city has also begun utilizing solar panels and LED lighting, going insofar as to grant credits and exceptions to schools or households that use solar panels. Mayor Rosal plans on making City Hall itself a green building by using solar energy.

Legazpi also has a public-private-partnership (PPP) with regard to septic tanks and sewage treatment plants (STPs). Local residents no longer need to pay additional fees for services because the city already offers siphoning as a service. For each monthly bill, P40 to P80 is billed and the private partner siphons the tanks once or twice every three years to ensure cleanliness of the environment.

The city is also planning on constructing a proper sewerage system. Rosal also discusses the Clean Air Act, with Legazpi creating a task force to promote it. “Even if it is not



yet a concern now, we are already making precautionary measures,” Mayor Rosal says. “This is why, in the past five years, we are credited as one of the best in the country when it comes to environmental programs and climate change adaptation.”

TOP OF THE GAME

Fresh from Legazpi City's victory for being the No. 1 Competitive City under the Component City Category, Rosal says, "We finally bagged No. 1. We were No. 5 last year, the previous year No. 3. But now, I see Legazpi rising to the top." The NCC's competitiveness index rating measures best government practices through four parameters—infrastructure, economic dynamism, resiliency, and government efficiency.

Legazpi has invested billions of pesos for the development of its infrastructure projects, particularly in the southern portion of the city to pave the way for more investments. "That is the essence of what we're doing—to give more opportunities for investment, business, and, of course, to do it for the people," Rosal says.

The mechanism for flood control in Legazpi is one of the best in the country. The city has also built a four-kilometer seaside boulevard connected to the Legazpi port. There are also plans to further construct a four-lane concrete road linking the southern villages of Legazpi with an access route to the international airport currently under construction.

Rosal hopes that through infrastructure projects, Legazpi will become more attractive to local and international investors and tourists. "You can see that Legazpi has really evolved this year. The infrastructure we have now will make Legazpi become a hub for investments and tourism," Rosal adds.

The main economy of Legazpi revolves around trading, tourism, and services. The local chief executive himself explains that this

is because they do not have factories, which require power and raw materials. Legazpi's port services also suffer because the city faces the Pacific, and not the South China Sea. Nevertheless, the economy of Legazpi is booming because of the many PPPs present. "This is something we are proud of, placing at No. 2," Rosal says.

Through the PPPs, more than P10-billion have been spent over the last 10 years in the construction of tourist spots, call centers, and commercial malls; Ayala Corporation and SM Group of Companies are now also present in Legazpi. As a result, hundreds of jobs have been generated. "We were able to entice investors and put up businesses, to strengthen the economy and the opportunities for labor," the mayor says. "This is now the whole package of Legazpi. We have adopted a system of shared responsibility where it is not just the government that is involved but the private sector and the multi-sectoral groups as well."

Legazpi also broke its tourism record. There were a million tourists recorded in 2015, 1.19 million tourists in 2016, and 1.27 million in 2017, indicating that the city's tourism is also growing, thanks to the improvement of existing tourist sites, as well as adding tourist activities like riding an ATV around Mt. Mayon, zip-lining, skydiving, and scuba diving.

In terms of resiliency, Legazpi has withstood many typhoons, volcanic eruptions, and other calamities. "Legazpi has a zero casualty rate in the last 10 years," says Rosal. Under its efficient disaster management, Legazpi has two important elements in its program—



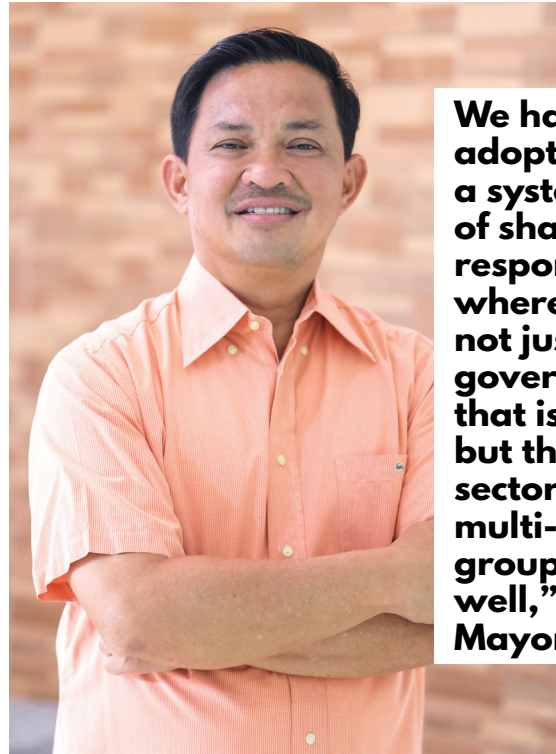
administration and operations. These have been aligned together with the programs of the 70 *barangays*. “The roles of the father, the mother, the son, even the *barangay* officials have been cascaded down to them. There is a system in place. Even if I am not present, it will continue running,” the Legazpi mayor says.

The city government is currently developing its own version of 911 for emergencies. It is also continuously upgrading its equipment and checking its inventory to ensure everything is complete. Apart from the city proper, these measures have been extended to the designated danger zones for flooding, landslide, tsunami, and lahar. “When we were hit by Sisang and Reming, I thought we wouldn’t make it. We were down but we survived,” the mayor recollects. Typhoon Sisang was a category-5 typhoon that struck Bicol in 1987, causing many casualties and destruction. Typhoon Reming was another strong typhoon that hit Legazpi in 2006, a category-4 with heavy rains that resulted in mudflows and volcanic landslides killing thousands. “But according to the Asian Institute of Management, Legazpi is now in a better state than it was before Reming. Therefore, it means, we were able to transform our city and rise above the devastation, and strengthen ourselves even more,” he adds.

Legazpi also continues to improve its government efficiency by upgrading its systems, particularly in the collection of real property tax, business tax, and issuance of business permits. It has also begun to digitize its operations. Another project it has is the e-peso, which allows local residents to conduct city-related transactions outside the City Hall for their convenience and to decongest the long lines. The city also aims to promote ease of doing business by reducing processing time, eliminating long lines, and having one signatory - provided that all requirements are complete. This aims to promote shared responsibility between the city and its residents in the area of public services.

PROGRESSIVELY GOING FORWARD

Legazpi stands as one of the oldest cities in the Philippines, yet it continues to be a developing city. Throughout the years, Mayor Rosal has marshalled the city towards becoming the most competitive city and becoming a GED leader. “It was a challenge for me because we have a diverse set of people coming from different backgrounds. It was a challenge to rally everyone into a cohesive force,” he says. To overcome that, Legazpi enrolled in the Institute for Solidarity in Asia



We have adopted a system of shared responsibility where it is not just the government that is involved but the private sector and the multi-sectoral groups as well,” says Mayor Rosal.

(ISA), where it garnered the Gold Trailblazer Award for Performance Governance, one of the highest recognitions of the ISA for governance system. “I was able to rally them to work and be a part of the city’s decisions,” Rosal says.

As Legazpi remains steadfast in its commitment towards economic growth, sustainable development, and efficient delivery of basic services, it also envisions a progressive community with opportunities for investments, business, employment, and tourism. “We did not stop dreaming; we kept on aspiring; we kept on moving. And now, we are here. Having reached the top, the next challenge is: How do we sustain this?” Mayor Rosal posits.

The local mayor believes in the principle of shared responsibility, believing that both the government and the people have roles to play. The government has prescribed laws and ordinances in providing services, but the people requiring the services must also follow necessary rules and requirements. Together, they work hand-in-hand toward achieving the city’s mission and vision.

“I started by making those things that were not done by my predecessors. You have to be a step ahead. You have to get everyone involved, to let them believe in themselves in the field of public service,” Mayor Rosal states. “We need to lead by example, and to showcase innovativeness. It is very easy to just let the people follow, but to be a good leader, you have to show that you can do it. That is true leadership for me,” he declares. | ■

Z FOR ZANIGA

Located at the western side of Mandaluyong City, Barangay New Zaniga is proud to serve as a model *barangay* for the city. From its humble beginnings, today the *barangay* boasts of many accomplishments, owing to the joint efforts of the current Punong Barangay Liza Cruz, and her predecessor, Edwin E. Cruz.

BY MAIELLE MONTAYRE
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANIEL SORIANO



Barangay New Zaniga power couple:
PB Liza Cruz and former PB Edwin Cruz

Barangay New Zaniga is one of the 27 *barangays* of the City of Mandaluyong. Historically, the area used to be a low-lying marshland known as Saniga. The concretization of roads led to the urbanization of the neighboring areas, which was dubbed New Zaniga, while the original was called Old Zaniga.

Today, the *barangay* has a land area of about 1.95 hectares, and a population of about 11,000 including children/youth. During the day, there are more people because of transient students and workers. They have one private school, the Good Shepherd Christian School.

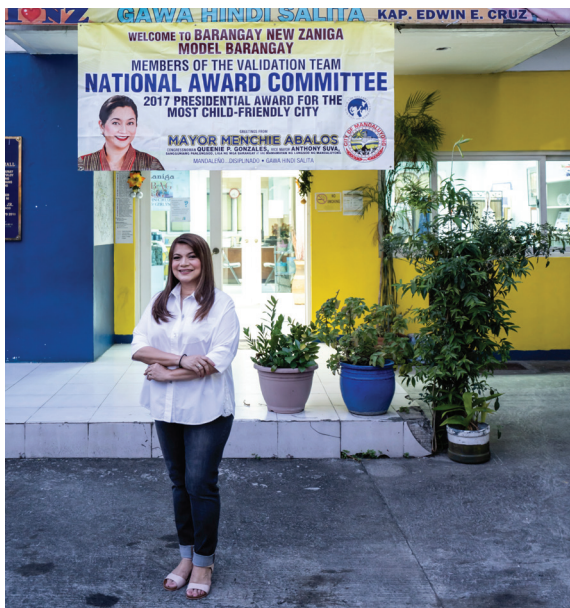
MR. AND MRS. CRUZ

Punong Barangay (PB) Liza Cruz was elected to position in May 2018. She was previously elected as a Barangay Kagawad (Barangay Councilor) and was awarded one of the most Outstanding Kagawads of the City in 2014. She was also the first Barangay Nutrition Action Officer (BNAO) of Mandaluyong City, under the leadership of then CNAO (City Nutrition Action Officer) and now Mayor Carmelita Abalos. Through her involvement as a helpmate of then PB Edwin Cruz, she became known throughout the *barangay*. She is a graduate of Silliman University with a degree in Political Science, and of Jose Rizal University/Philippine Law School with a degree in law.

“[My husband] has the street smarts, I have the attitude,” she jokes. “Only because my husband entered public service did I join, but there was no guarantee [that I would win]. My passport would have been my credibility as a public servant.” Edwin Cruz, the previous PB, was elected into position in 2007, and has since served three full terms. He is currently the head



PB Liza Cruz with former Mandaluyong City Mayor Benjamin Abalos, Jr.



of the Anti-Smoke Belching Unit of Mandaluyong City (ASBU), a position of trust and confidence.

Much of the groundwork in New Zaniga was laid by former PB Edwin Cruz, commencing with the construction of the existing *barangay* hall. “We only had a small office in our residence, which served as the *barangay* hall,” says Liza Cruz. It was where council meetings, assemblies, medical missions, and other *barangay* activities were held. “It was my primary goal to have our own *barangay* hall and without it, I would not have accomplished anything,” Edwin Cruz says. Thus, he vowed that he would not cut his hair until their *barangay* would have its own seat of government. An endeavor two years in the making, the *barangay* hall of New Zaniga was inaugurated on July 18, 2010. Then-Mayor



Benjamin Abalos Jr. came to the event to personally cut off the long ponytail of PB Edwin Cruz. The four-storey structure is deemed to be a towering achievement for New Zaniga, evidence of perseverance towards realizing one’s dream.

FEATHER IN THEIR CAP

New Zaniga is the cleanest *barangay* as recognized by the Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA). The Barangay Power is an MMDA-sponsored competition for all the *barangays* in Metro Manila. New Zaniga beat out 1,565 *barangays* and became the grand champion. There are different criteria for the competition—based on size and budget of the *barangay*, solid waste management and recycling. “We are the gauge of the other *barangays* with regard to cleanliness,” Liza Cruz says. New Zaniga has its own street sweepers, aside from those hired by the city, who work until 10PM to maintain the cleanliness of the *barangay*.

Mandaluyong City has also declared nutrition as a top priority and New Zaniga also espouses the same belief, hoping to eradicate malnutrition in the Philippines. The Barangay Nutrition Committee (BNC) stepped up to this task, as evidenced by the absence of under-nourished children in New Zaniga. Over the years, they have supported the nutrition program of Mandaluyong City. They recently participated in

the city-wide Veggielympics last July 30, during the 44th Nutrition Month. The Presidential Award for the Best in Nutrition or the Nutrition Honor Award (NHA) is a prestigious award requiring LGUs to be a three-year Green Banner awardee and a three-year Consistent Regional Outstanding Winner in Nutrition (CROWN) awardee. In all of these competitions, New Zaniga had been evaluated in the regional and national level. Then Child Representative and now Kag. Chico Cruz presented a novel concept in nutrition, that of



the organization of the Barangay Nutrition Club for the Youth (BNCY), an organization like no other, thus he was requested by the evaluators to present it before the other *barangays*, so it can be replicated.

“We have also been the consistent finalist to regional Lupong Tagapamayapa Incentive Award (LTIA),” Liza Cruz says. “We have been finalists, and now, we have been inducted into the Hall of Fame.” With the goal of lauding the speedy administration of justice at the *barangay* level, the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) awards those showcasing excellent performance in settling neighbourhood disputes. “We are helping the courts and the legal system to be decongested if we can already solve it at this level.” They also received the Outstanding Lupong Tagapamayapa Award from City of Mandaluyong in 2017. PB Edwin Cruz himself was once the youngest *barangay lupon* at 28-years old, handling 186 cases. Many residents would request him to handle their cases because he would solve the disputes through practical means.

In addition, providing greater security and confidence to its residents, New Zaniga maintains its peace and order by setting up gates around the *barangay*. “We are the first *barangay* with gates at all entry and exit points, which is why they refer to us as a subdivision,” PB Liza Cruz states. Edwin Cruz also received commendations from the DILG, the Office of the Mayor, and the Philippine National Police (PNP) for aiding in the capture of criminal gangs. He also appointed younger *barangay tanods*, who would help discipline younger criminals. He employs social media in capturing criminals who get away. “When he started, the reputation was *striкто 'yung kapitan diyan* (the captain there is strict). He promised cleanliness and peace and order. Once he achieved that, everything fell into place,” Liza says of her husband.

To maintain order, the *barangay* regulates the parking along the streets. After having the ordinance approved, other *barangays* followed suit. New Zaniga also has ordinances regarding the motorcycle riding-in-tandem, the Code of Parental Responsibility which was authored by Councilor Charisse Marie Abalos-Vargas and *Aso Mo, Itali Mo* project to further maintain the peace and order in the *barangay*. “*Kailangan din sariling innovation para pamunuan ang barangay* (You have to find innovative means to lead the *barangay*). *Kailangan mag-isip ka ng paraan* (You have to find ways),” says Edwin Cruz.



Policarpio Street in Barangay New Zaniga has become a city-ordained tourist spot, known for its row of houses decorated with spectacular Christmas lights, Santa Claus figurines, *parols*, poinsettias, and ornaments.

A STREET CALLED POLICARPIO

There's a famous street in Mandaluyong known for its row of houses decorated and illuminated from roof-to-ground with spectacular Christmas lights, Santa Claus figurines, *parols*, poinsettias, and ornaments. This is Policarpio Street in Barangay New Zaniga, which has become a city-ordained tourist spot. An event that has been going for more than 20 years, the *Pasko-Pasko sa Policarpio* is an annual affair that attracts many visitors to this transformed Christmas village, which spans 150 meters. Each house adopts a certain theme from the House of Light to the House of Santa Claus, featuring the largest Santa Claus collection in Metro Manila. A large nativity scene greets visitors, highlighting the importance of the *belen* in each family home. One of the houses is owned by Norma Lim, who decorates her home's facade with a futuristic feel.

There used to be a *tiangge* along Policarpio Street with food stalls and many vendors. It was beneficial to the *barangay* because it brought income through the need to register for permits. However, former PB. Edwin Cruz had to enforce order when things grew chaotic and the homeowners' privacy and property were violated. The *tiangge* was instead moved to the Masilyo Circle, under the jurisdiction of Mandaluyong City. Former Mayor Benhur Abalos decorated the entire city hall with lights, thus it is another tourist spot for families to head to. Edwin Cruz himself sat on the board during its early stages because he had experience managing the *tiangge* on Policarpio Street. Today, the tradition of this tiny Christmas village continues as houses on Policarpio Street in Barangay New Zaniga showcase the breathtaking spirit of Christmas throughout the holiday season.

Aside from this, the Guinness World Records' holder of the biggest *siopao* (steamed bun) can also be found in New Zaniga at the PVL. Nearly the size of an adult's head, the super jumbo *siopao* is a local highlight that many order. What





Center and Food Center, which many locals and non-locals enjoy.

LAUDABLE PROJECTS

As the new *punong barangay*, Liza Cruz is a proactive leader and trains her staff well. New Zaniga is the only *barangay* in Mandaluyong that issues newsletters detailing their projects, events, and awards. “It is one way of reaching out to the residents because we cannot expect them to always join our activities so we give out the newsletter, and that is how they are able to keep up with what happens in New Zaniga,” Liza Cruz declares. The newsletter was her brainchild since 2005 of which she is the editor, contributor and layout artist all rolled into one.

Apart from this, she is also recognized for the D’yario Bags, featured in the Husang Balangay by the Local Government Academy-DILG. It features the best model *barangay* practices in governance, environmental management, employment and livelihood, peace and order and public safety, and social services utilities and infrastructure. Of the over 42,000 *barangays* all over the country, 33 *barangays* were chosen, and the D’yario Bags was one of the best practices in the field of economic development. Also called the Bags for Life Program, it is an exclusive livelihood project by New Zaniga, through the Rotary Club of Greater Mandaluyong, for non-working or part-



D’yario Bags provide a source of livelihood to the women of Barangay New Zaniga

time working residents so they can be productive. Through training, the d’yario bag makers are able to create and form an enterprise by converting old newspapers and magazines into “beautiful works of art.” The program solves the problem of garbage in the community, alleviates poverty among the residents, uplifts the local economy, and prompts learning and development of individual skills. More than P500,000 have been earned in gross sales and more than 250 people trained. Through the program, New Zaniga also collaborates with other institutions like the Center for Mental Health, Women’s Correctional Facility and City Jail, churches and other non-government organizations. “I, myself, know how to do it and teach as far as Cainta and Davao,” Liza Cruz says. “Our livelihood Coordinator is BNAO President Gerlyn Lagleva and we don’t have to market it anymore because we have buyers from the various Rotary Clubs, walk-ins, and the city itself will order as giveaways for guests.”

Aiming to deal with the issue of garbage in the community, New Zaniga has begun their foray into making eco-bricks. PB Liza Cruz has tapped Ecobricks.org, a Global Ecobrick Alliance Earth Enterprise, having conducted a seminar with 45 participants. “People thought it is just filling up the plastic [bottle] and you’re done, but there is a technical and scientific approach to it,” she says. With plans to conduct the training seminar every two weeks, she is encouraging all the residents of New Zaniga to keep their plastics. “I know that garbage will destroy the earth because six years from now, our garbage will be 3.5 million tons. That’s 2kg per person and where will you put that?” she prompts. Thus, she seeks to help reduce garbage and find solutions for solid waste.

Another goal that PB Liza Cruz has is aimed towards the protection of the children. Mandaluyong is vying for the Presidential Award for Child-Friendly Municipalities and Cities (PACFMC) against four other cities. The last time they competed for the PACFMC was in 2012 where the City was awarded the PACFMC and New Zaniga was one of the four *barangays* evaluated. In every city, there is a model *barangay* that has to undergo a series of evaluations from the city regarding child protection. These include the presence of a daycare, and projects geared towards the care and health of the children. “I am hoping Mandaluyong wins because New Zaniga has been chosen as the model *barangay*,” Liza Cruz expresses. “I am so anxious [for the results] because you only get the model *barangay* award once.” It is only conferred once because having the same model the succeeding year defeats the purpose of the award and proves no changes have occurred in the municipality or city. During the two-day evaluation, PB Liza helped the other BCPSs prepare for the interviews.

THE FUTURE OF NEW ZANIGA

Of the many positions in government, the *barangay* captain is the most powerful because the position has executive, legislative, and judicial function. “Mayors and other politicians look to *barangay* captains to help run the LGU, because we are the ones who have direct contact with the people,” Liza Cruz says. “But not all *punong barangays* have this degree of ascendancy or respect,” she adds. Each captain heads the *barangay* in their own way. For his part, PB Edwin Cruz ruled New Zaniga with an iron fist softened by the ministrations of his wife. “*Takot sila ’ng lahat sa kanya* (they are scared of Kap). *Ako daw ’yung Virgin Mary* (They say I am like the Virgin Mary), no one goes to the father except through me,” PB Liza says. “*Ang respeto hindi nababayaran at hindi kaya kunin sa tao* (Respect cannot be bought, and it cannot be taken from the people),” her husband adds. “It must be earned.” Married for 28 years, they are called the *mag-asawang kapitan* (married *barangay* captains). Their son, Chico Luis P. Cruz, is the youngest *kagawad* in the city.

Throughout the years, New Zaniga has achieved many good deeds in its small nucleus district—a small stone creating a ripple effect in the ocean of the Philippines. True to form as a mother of three, PB Liza aims to focus on the protection of children and solid waste

New Zaniga is the cleanest *barangay* as recognized by the Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA), besting 1,775 *barangays*. In 2015, it was awarded as the Cleanest and Best *Barangay* in Solid Waste Management of Metro Manila.

management during her term because these will leave the most lasting impression. “I am always keen on looking for projects in solid waste because in 20 years, I will be leaving Mother Earth to my children and their children,” she explains. In the wake of her husband’s public service, producing many accolades and achievements for the *barangay*, PB Liza Cruz is eagerly optimistic to prove her worth and make a name for herself. With the help of her Council, Kags. Marlon Lagleva, Soc De Castro, Jimmy dela Cruz, Lito Fernando, Fermin Romualdez, Jose Castro, and her son, Chico, the Sangguniang Kabataan led by SK Chair Michael Cula, SK Kags. Dave Arias, Bea Yuzon, Raymark Perez, Ryan Suguitan, Justin Noda, Jayvee Lobitana and John Paul Refareal, she shares, “I’ll do the best I can in making New Zaniga reach its full potential.” | ■





SURROUNDED BY WATER

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When heavy rain and floods occur, citizens' safety is placed at risk. Many residents in flooded areas are forced to evacuate, leaving homes and other property prone to the destructive powers of the elements. For a country that experiences calamities of this kind year in and year out, we should be experts at disaster management by now.

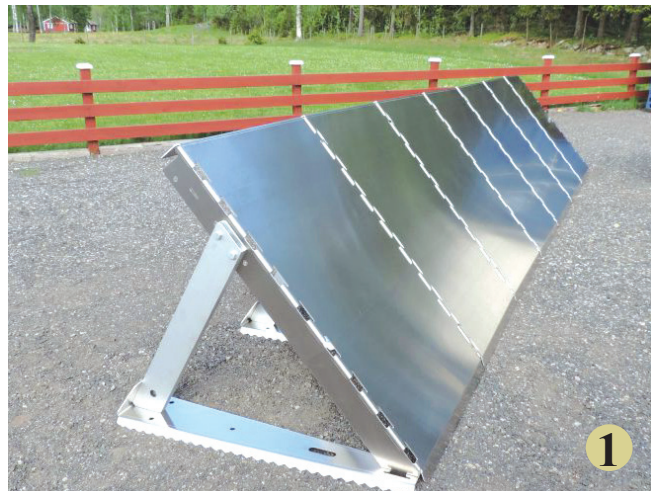
Several factors, however, get in the way of employing effective solutions. Rapid and unabated urbanization without rhyme or reason or even the slightest indication of urban planning has been deemed responsible for the state of chaos that aggravates the crisis when disaster strikes. Irresponsible property developers have been known to build projects over existing canals and creeks, thus blocking the flow of water within the city. And, of course, the recalcitrant informal settlers who treat the city's waterways as their public toilet and dumping grounds continue to contribute to the constant flooding.

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