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Our world is changing at a rapid pace. Keeping up requires our adaptability and agility to simply ride along with these changes but create innovative, impactful, and sustainable improvements to better our lives.

Still reeling from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, this is even more challenging to do now. But, as our featured hardworking public servants in this issue have shown, nothing is impossible. We can heal and rise as one. We may have encountered the phrase “Kapit lang,” and this is really the spirit that we ought to embrace.

This issue recognizes the hardworking public servants, who have selflessly dedicated themselves to bring about significant changes in their community and government functions.

Millennial Mayor Donya Tesoro of San Manuel, Tarlac is a shining example of how the youth can usher and empower a community towards purposeful governance and sustainable change. Through technology and modern governance, this humble town is on its way to a brighter future.

Navotas City Mayor Toby Tiangco didn’t stick to traditional strategies. Instead, he went the extra mile in uplifting the lives of their citizens and prioritizing the education of their youth.

Sablayan, Occidental Mindoro Mayor Andres Dangeros underscored the importance of clear foresight and constant consultation with various sectors in coming up with sound solutions to the challenges they are facing.

We also talk about revolutionizing government services—people, events, laws, and other matters to bring about fundamental or extensive changes in the way government fulfills its various functions.

We look at landmark laws enacted in the past four and a half decades and how these brought about changes in important aspects of our life—from buying medicines and availing of healthcare services, to electing national government officials. These are lasting proof that well-crafted laws can stand the test of time and remain relevant long after they are enacted.

We shed light on the controversial Anti-Terror Law and examine how it can help in our country’s fight against terrorism and how it can work for or against protecting our rights as citizens.

We likewise feature the valiant efforts of the Department of Education in delivering alternative education modalities to every Filipino child.

Finally, we set our eyes on private initiatives that have created a significant impact on the lives of Filipinos. We take a look at Nanette Medved-Po’s Generation HOPE, which is building classrooms across the Philippines through the help of HOPE in a bottle, and Jason Buensalido, an award-winning architect who is reimagining a future that addresses climate change head on.

We hope you find something inspiring, informative, and empowering within the pages of LEAGUE Magazine to help you better serve your respective communities.

If you wish us to put a spotlight on your province, city, municipality or barangay, feel free to message us on LEAGUE’s Facebook page.

Godspeed!

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

**JAVIER P. FLORES**  
Publisher



San Marcelino



Function Hall



San Bernardo



Lower Ground



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## ROUND UP



### PHILIPPINE REAL ESTATE MARKET AMONG MOST IMPROVED IN TRANSPARENCY

Among 99 countries, the Philippines ranked 44th in the Jones Lang Lasalle (JLL) Global Real Estate Transparency Index. This is a spot higher than its 2018 ranking at 45, and makes the Philippines among the top 10 improvers worldwide.

“Sustainability, including a rise in the number of green-certified buildings, contributed to the Philippines’ improvement. Developer focus on sustainability in the Philippines will be further boosted by the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Act 2019, which includes guidelines on energy-conserving designs on buildings,” said JLL Philippines Head of Capital Markets Ryan Isip.

Another factor for improvement is the country’s initiative towards digitizing land registry—that is, easier access to quality records. “India, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam are among the index’ top improvers due to regulatory reforms, enhanced market data, and sustainability initiatives,” the report states.

However, the report also mentioned that while these semi-transparent countries have made “steady improvements in the recent years,” they still need to “address issues around corporate governance and regulatory enforcement if they are to progress into the ‘transparent’ tier.”

According to the report, global investors are looking to invest around USD\$40 billion in dry powder capital in the Asia Pacific Region, making it more important than ever for countries (including the Philippines) to improve real estate transparency.

“While investment in commercial real estate has inevitably paused during the pandemic, the overarching trend toward rising allocations to this asset class will continue,” said JLL Head of Capital Markets Research for Asia Pacific Regina Lim. “As investors look to allocate more capital into real estate in this region, transparency becomes even more important, as will the enforcement of robust regulatory frameworks.”

### PALAWAN VOTED THE WORLD’S BEST ISLAND

Garnering a score of 94.83 over 100, Palawan is hailed as the World’s Best Island 2020 according to a *Travel + Leisure* survey.

“Roughly 270 miles long and just 25 across at its widest point, on a map Palawan looks like an arm extending from the Philippines to Borneo. It’s dramatic at sea level, with mountains rising directly from the ocean palm-edged beaches,” the report states.



### DAIRY BUFFALO PROCESSING HUB SOON TO RISE IN SOUTH COTABATO

The first dairy buffalo processing hub in Region 12 (SOCCSKSARGEN) is expected to open before the end of 2020.

Located in the town of Surallah, South Cotabato, the P3.6 million facility is a project of the Department of Agriculture-Philippine Carabao Center (DA-PCC). In collaboration with the provincial government, construction for the hub started on July 8.

According to the PCC-Region 12 Center Director Benjamin John Basilio, the hub is a part of the Carabao Value Chain Improvement Network or the Accelerating Livelihood and Assets Buildup (ALAB-Karabawan) program. The nationwide initiative is launched for carabao and water buffalo farmers in the country, including other carabao value-chain stakeholders.

“With the help of this facility, we can now further boost our milk production and produce quality milk products here in our region,” Basilio said.

Surallah Mayor Antonio Bendita praised the program, saying it will boost buffalo and carabao dairy production in the upper valley region of the South Cotabato region. He further added that it will help secure stable livelihood for farmers and boost the value of local dairy products. “We can now innovate and maximize the produce of our dairy farmers,” Bendita said.



The report also cites the islands’ World War II wrecks, rainforests, and the famed longest subterranean river in Puerto Princesa. Fans of Palawan can’t help but sing praises, saying, “The landscape and scenery are just gorgeous. It offers the most beautiful beaches, resorts, and scenery anywhere.”

Other islands in the Asia Pacific region that made it to the top 10 are Sri Lanka (90.00); Koh Lanta, Thailand (89.41); and Langkawi, Malaysia (88.76).

## MANILA CITY RECOGNIZED FOR COVID-19 RESPONSE

The National Task Force (NTF) on COVID-19 praised the local government of Manila City for its pandemic response efforts.

During the courtesy visit at the Manila City Hall, the NTF also handed over medical equipment to aid the city in its containment efforts, including 10,000 pieces of personal protective equipment (PPE). Senator Manny Pacquiao, through a representative, also turned over around 5,000 test kits.

“*Malaki ang magagawa ng Maynila* (Manila can do so much),” NTF on COVID-19 Chief Implementer Secretary Carlito Galvez Jr. said in a press conference. “*Ang Manila ay modelo na kung saan nakikita natin kung gaano kaimportante ang leadership ng mga mayor. Magkakaroon ng vision at direction* (Manila is a model that shows how important the Mayor’s leadership is, with his vision and direction).”

NTF on COVID-19 Deputy Chief Implementer Vince Dizon also commended the City of Manila. “*Napakalaki ng binibigay na authority sa ating mga local chief executives dahil sila ang nakakaalam kung ano ang dapat gawin at paano ito magagawa nang mabilis, kasi ang key ay yung speed* (Local chief executives are given plenty of authority because they are the ones who know what needs to be done and how to do it quickly. Speed is the key),” Dizon said.

Mayor Isko Moreno expressed his gratitude to the task force and assured the people that he and all other local chief executives



are working together in the fight against COVID-19. “While we always argue, debate, and share ideas [during Zoom meetings], at the end of the day, we act as one,” Moreno said.

On July 20, the City of Manila launched its first walk-in COVID-19 testing facility at the Ospital ng Sampaloc. The week before, Manila also launched two drive-thru testing facilities: in front of the Andres Bonifacio Monument (near the Manila City Hall) and Quirino Grandstand. All testing expenses are shouldered by the city government and are open to both Manileños and non-Manileños.

“*Gusto naming akapin lahat ng pwedeng akapin*. But one thing is for sure, *hangga’t may supply kami*, we will never stop, *hangga’t ang COVID-19 vaccine ay natagpuan na* (We want to help everyone that we can help. But one thing is for sure, as long as we have supplies, we will never stop helping until a vaccine for COVID-19 is discovered),” Moreno said.

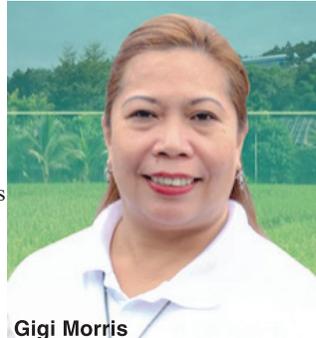
## WOMEN OF THE FUTURE AWARDS SOUTHEAST ASIA 2020

Ten talented women from across the region were chosen as winners of the Women of the Future (WOF) Southeast Asia Awards at the organization’s first-ever virtual awards show.

WOF Awards celebrate the most innovative, determined, and talented young women from Southeast Asia.

From a shortlist of 48 candidates representing 10 countries across the region, two Filipinas snagged the WOF Award in their respective categories. Gigi Morris, Founder of MoCa Family Farm Learning Center, won in the Mentor category, while Lucille Dejito, Director of Legal Interventions at the International Justice Mission in Cebu, won the award for the Professions category.

“Extraordinary times call for extraordinary leadership and our 2020 WOF SEA Awards exemplify how talented female leaders are paving the way and affecting positive change in so many professions, industries, and sectors. I am hugely inspired by your work and the way in which so many of you are shattering stereotypes and inspiring the next generation of women across SEA,”



Gigi Morris



Lucille Dejito

said HRH Sophie, the Countess of Wessex. “Now more than ever before, when it can feel that challenges are insurmountable or when our traditional communities and support structures have been shaken—we need to find ways in which to connect, learn from each other, and collaborate on a local and global scale so we support this generation of female leaders and the next.”

Chaired by Vicki Treadell, the British High Commissioner to Australia, the panel of judges included professionals such as Nichola Rastrick (Consumer Insights Director Asia, Netflix), John Lombard (CEO of NTT Global), and Peta Latimer (CEO for Mercer Singapore).

The award-giving body was founded in 2006 by Pinky Lilani (Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire Deputy Lieutenant) and headlined by sponsor Aviva. The WOF Awards recognizes the inspirational young females of this generation.

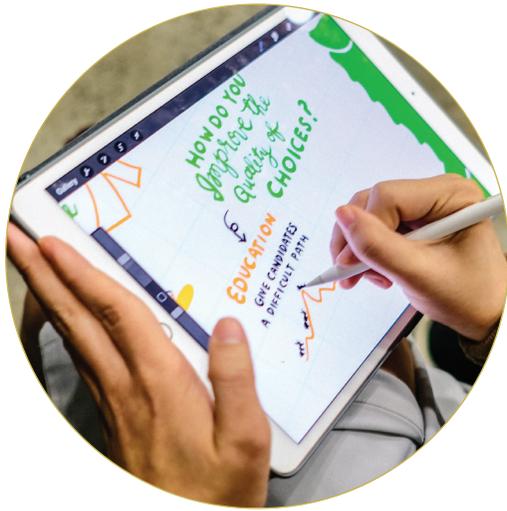
## DAVAO CITY TESTS 7 NEWLY-INSTALLED DISASTER WARNING SYSTEMS

The Davao City Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (CDRRMO) conducted a city-wide test using the newly-installed Public Alert and Warning System Project, just in time for the National Disaster Resilience Month. The simultaneous city-wide testing was done to check the sirens’ range, reach, and to test functionality and calibration.

“We need to observe the range of the sirens, especially in densely-populated areas. If it doesn’t reach them, we will suggest for additional sirens in those areas,” CDRRMO Head Alfredo Baloran said in the vernacular.

Baloran revealed that the seven new disaster warning systems were installed in Barangays Panacan, Vicente Duterte, Sirawan, 23-C, Maa, Talomo Proper, and Bucana. These barangays were chosen due to their classification as disaster-prone areas.

The sirens are to alert Dabawenyos of a weather disturbance or natural calamities, such as a storm surge, flooding, landslide, and more. The Davao CDRRMO encourages every family to prepare an emergency bag, which may include essential items such as a first aid kit, medicine, important documents, etc.



# REVOLUTIONARY LAWS

BY JOAQUIN ATIENZA

*Not all laws are created equal. Some are deemed more revo-law-tionary than others.*

Laws are like the government’s love letters to citizens. They are the ultimate expression of the government’s roles as a protector and as provider. As leaders come and go, they leave as part of their legacy those laws that ultimately change government service for the better. Let’s look back at some revolutionary Philippine laws and their impact in our lives.

## 1. Republic Act No. 7160, the Local Government Code

The landscape of local government in the Philippines changed forever with the enactment of the Local Government Code. This code is a response to the highly centralized nature of government during the presidency of Ferdinand Marcos, as well as an operationalization of the 1987 Philippine Constitution, which favored genuine and meaningful local autonomy for the country’s territorial and political subdivisions. Through decentralization, local governments are given more power, authority, and responsibility to be more responsive to the people’s needs.

Enacting this law was not easy. It took almost five years for Congress to approve it, and was signed by President Corazon Aquino a short eight months before she stepped down.

While the code was revolutionary in the 1990s, local government units (LGUs) have had their share

of complaints. First, the smaller percentage of LGUs in the internal revenue collection, second, the devolution of responsibilities from national to local without corresponding funds, and third, the LGUs’ lack funds to implement additional programs and services that the code required.

## 2. Presidential Decree (PD) No. 851, the Thirteenth Month Pay Law

Yes, it was nothing short of revolutionary that in 1975, President Ferdinand Marcos required private employers to pay all their employees a thirteenth month pay. However, the additional compensation given every December had specific beneficiaries: only those employees who received a basic salary of Php1,000 a month. It was under the term of President Corazon Aquino that this law was expanded, and the Php 1,000 monthly salary cap was removed.

How did this law revolutionize government service? It provided Filipinos with something to look forward to—and be happy about—during the Christmas holidays. Government employees are noticeably happier during the Christmas season as well. For sure, that can only mean good things for government service, even at the local level.

## 3. RA 9189, the Overseas Absentee Voting Law

Voting is an essential right of every Filipino. Thus, the government should ensure maximum participation of all Filipinos of voting age in elections in the Philippines, whether they are in the country or not. As a country with one of the largest number of overseas workers in the world, the enactment



The Overseas Absentee Voting Law in 2003 ensured that OFWs could exercise their right to vote.



In 2019, over 300,000 out of 1.8 million registered overseas voters participated in the polls.

of the Overseas Absentee Voting Law in 2003 meant that none of our OFWs are disenfranchised or deprived of their right to vote.

Overseas Filipino workers have been voting since 2004, and turnout has been increasing, albeit slowly. In 2019, a total of 334,242 out of 1.8 million registered overseas voters participated in the polls.

#### 4. RA 9502, the Cheaper Medicines Law

Before the passage of RA 9502, medicines in the Philippines were among the most expensive in Asia. For ordinary Filipinos, getting some of their most needed prescription medicines was enough to break the bank. The Cheaper Medicines Act of 2008 changed this, as the law sought to halve the price of commonly bought medicines by the poor, make these medicines available nationwide, and require the production and adequate supply of generic drugs.

This year, President Rodrigo Duterte issued EO No. 104 to further improve access to medicines by regulating medicine prices at the retail level, ensuring that the price of selected essential medicines are reduced by 56 percent of current market prices.

#### 5. RA 9485, the Anti-Red Tape Act

It has been common knowledge in the Philippines that you need to “know someone” or “pay someone” to get a license, a permit, or any official document from the

government in the least amount of time. Otherwise, you will have to suffer long delays. This governmental red tape, essentially piecemeal corruption, complicated government services that Filipinos need.

In 2007, the Anti-Red Tape Act or ARTA was passed to combat this corrupt

behavior and improve frontline services in the government. The idea was to simplify processes related to obtaining permits, documents, and other necessary procedures that Filipinos regularly access. A maximum processing period of 5 days for simple transactions and 10 days for complex transactions were established, and signatories were limited to a maximum of five.

ARTA also introduced the “No Noon Break” policy, which guarantees that frontline services of the government are not hampered by lunch breaks, ensuring uninterrupted public service delivery.

#### 6. RA 10354, the Reproductive Health Law

The Reproductive Health (RH) Law has been one of the most contentious

pieces of legislation that ever passed Congress. The first of many RH bills was filed in 1999, but the bill was only signed into law in 2012. The law called for universal access to modern family planning methods, which was fiercely blocked by the Church and conservative politicians. While the bill passed, it was almost immediately questioned in the Supreme Court and took another two years before it was declared not unconstitutional.

President Duterte issued EO 12 in 2017 that intensified and accelerated the implementation of critical steps to attaining “zero unmet need for modern family planning,” which is integral to his socioeconomic agenda.

#### 7. Executive Order No. 2, s. 2016, the Freedom of Information Order

Two days after President Duterte delivered his first State of the Nation Address, he signed Executive Order No. 2, a Freedom of Information (FOI) program that covers all government offices under the executive branch. The order requires the disclosure of public records requested by the public except for matters affecting national security. This is President Duterte’s response to calls for more transparency in the government, so that the citizens may help serve as a watchdog to fight corruption in the government.



The Freedom of Information Law requires the disclosure of public records requested by the public, except for matters affecting national security.



Students and parents are given greater relief with the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education act, with free education at local and state colleges and universities.

While this is a landmark order in the long fight for an FOI law, it is very limited: it only covers the executive branch, and the list of exceptions is very long. It remains to be seen if an FOI law that includes all of the government branches will ever see the light of day, but President Duterte's allies believe that the FOI law remains one of the president's priorities.

**8. RA 10931, the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act**

This law aims to promote universal access to college education by scrapping tuition fees in the country's state colleges and universities (SCUs) as well as local colleges and universities (LCUs). Principally sponsored by Senator Bam Aquino, the law was signed by President Duterte in 2017.

The cost of college education has been prohibitive in the country before the passage of the law. Even those enrolled in SCUs and LCUs, where tuition and other fees were much lower compared to private schools, had to grapple with other expenses. According to the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), only 33

out of every 100 Filipinos who should be studying in college are currently enrolled. Through RA 10931, it is believed that more Filipinos across the country will get their degrees.

**9. RA 11292, the Seal of Good Local Governance Law**

The SGLG was first launched in 2014 to promote responsive and robust governance among the country's LGUs. Excellent performance and transparency were incentivized—LGUs awarded the seal receive performance-based grants from the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG).

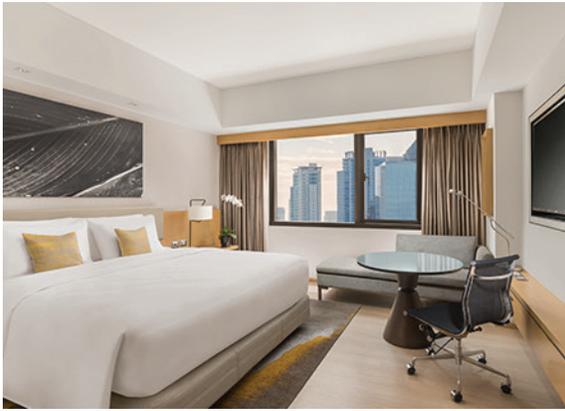
Congress recognized the effectiveness of the DILG program by enacting a law institutionalizing such. Through this, the SGLG is assured funding, and acts of good local governance, which should be the norm in the first place, are given the praise they deserve.

**10. RA 11223, the Universal Health Care (UHC) Law**

Since 1995, the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth) has been tasked to implement universal health insurance coverage in the country. The social insurance program ensures adequate healthcare support for its members. Enrollment to the program was not comprehensive until the passage of the Universal Health Care (UHC) Law in 2019. The UHC Law guarantees equitable access to quality and affordable healthcare for all Filipinos by automatically enrolling citizens into the National Health Insurance Program and expand PhilHealth coverage to include free medical consultations and laboratory tests.

While real universal healthcare in the country is still far from reality, it is a relief for citizens to know that the government is doing its best to protect them from the strain caused by emergency healthcare requirements. As they say, a majority of Filipinos are one hospital bill away from abject poverty. | ■





## SEDA HOTELS CONTINUES RAPID EXPANSION

**The Philippine hotel brand now has 11 properties around the country, including city hotels, resorts and serviced apartments**

Ayala Land's Seda hotel brand is going full-swing with its expansion program in key destinations around the country. Since its founding in 2012, this six-time winner as "Philippines' Leading Hotel Group" in the UK-based World Travel Awards (2014-2019) has built up its room inventory to more than 2,700 rooms spread over 11 properties in Bacolod; Cagayan de Oro; Cebu City; Davao City; Iloilo; Laguna; Makati; Palawan; Quezon City; and Bonifacio Global City (BGC), Taguig.

Senior Group General Manager Andrea Mastellone attributes the brand's aggressive expansion plans to high demand and positive market response. He explains, "Guests appreciate the vibrant locations of each hotel and its easy access to shopping, dining and entertainment options in an Ayala Land mixed-use development. We have stylish, modern facilities and our trademark Filipino hospitality combining service excellence and remarkable efficiency benchmarked with industry global quality standards."



**Seda pertains to silk, a luxurious fabric that represents the brand's commitment to providing a seamless hospitality experience**



Its first five hotels took the number one slot in their category in each of their cities. Its next generation of city hotels in Makati, Taguig, Cebu, and the Bay Area in Parañaque are bigger in terms of number of rooms, with added facilities befitting the location. The expansion has already seen the brand develop its first large-format hotel, Seda Vertis North with 438 rooms, and the 301-room Seda Ayala Center Cebu. Its first and flagship property, Seda BGC, now offers more than 520 rooms or almost three times its original inventory after the completion of an expansion tower.

The brand has also ventured into resorts and serviced apartments. Seda Lio is the first complete facility to cater to travellers in the Lio Tourism Estate in El Nido, Palawan. Seda Residences Makati, which opened mid-2019, consists of 293 serviced residences at the northern part of Ayala Avenue. Other ongoing developments are the addition of a new tower to Seda Nuvali, a hotel in the Bay Area, Paranaque, and another in Arca South, Taguig.

"Our ability to serve different markets through a range of product lines will allow us to quickly meet demand in underserved locations in the country. That is the advantage of our being a flexible homegrown hotel brand," says Mastellone.

But if there is one thing that Seda prides itself in, it is service, calling itself the "home of Filipino hospitality" where the best of tradition is applied to a modern-day setting. Seda is the first hotel brand to be named a Certified Gold Service property in Asia by the American Hotels and Lodging Educational Institute (AHLEI), affirming that Seda front-liners fulfill the highest international standard of service.

For hotel details and reservations, please visit [sedahotels.com](http://sedahotels.com).

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### HOTEL LOCATIONS

Capitol Central, Bacolod | Centrio, Cagayan De Oro  
Ayala Center Cebu, Cebu | Central Bloc Cebu, Cebu  
Abreeza, Davao | Atria, Iloilo | NUVALI, Laguna  
Residences Makati, Makati | Lio, Palawan  
Vertis North, Quezon City | BGC, Taguig

# MAKING **HER**STORY

BY HELEN HERNANE

*Women empowerment has always been a struggle. But we say #ChallengeAccepted and charge on –making history, changing lives, and leading the people.*

**W**omen in the Philippines, and all over the globe, have come a long way from past traditions and boundaries. And we did not get to this point in history by watching time pass. The fight towards gender equality began centuries ago, and continues with the #MeToo, #ImWithHer, #ChallengeAccepted, and other movements on social media. Today, with still more stories of women fighting for their rights, it's clear that the struggle is not yet over.

## HISTORY: HER STORY

In the early 1900s, various women's movement groups were formed in the Philippines in support of women's right to vote and run for public office, and other socio-civic matters. This led to the special plebiscite on women's suffrage on April 30, 1937. Out of over half a million registered voters, roughly 90 percent voted in favor of women's suffrage.

In the local elections held that same year, women ran and won—changing the course of Philippine history. The trailblazing female public servants were Carmen Planas (City Councilor of Manila), Ines Serion (Mayor of Vallehermoso, Negros Oriental), Demetria Buslon (Mayor of Sierra Bullones, Bohol), and Guadalupe Adaza (Provincial Board Member of Zamboanga). Four years later, Elisa Ochoa was elected as the first congresswoman. But Ochoa was not able to assume office as the representative of Agusan because of the war. In 1947, Geronima Pecson was elected as the country's first female senator.

Almost four decades later, the Philippines' first female president—Corazon Cojuangco-Aquino assumed office. And in 1998, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo became the first female Vice President of the Philippines, serving for three years before becoming president herself in 2001. Under the current Duterte administration, some of the notable female government officials are Vice President Leni Robredo, Education Secretary Leonor Briones, and Tourism Secretary Bernadette Romulo-Puyat.



**CARMEN PLANAS**  
City Councilor  
of Manila

**INES SERION**  
Mayor of Vallehermoso,  
Negros Oriental

**DEMETRIA BUSLON**  
Mayor of Sierra  
Bullones, Bohol

**GUADALUPE ADAZA**  
Provincial Board  
Member of Zamboanga



**ELISA OCHOA**  
First Congresswoman

**GERONIMA PECSON**  
First Female Senator

**CORAZON  
COJUANGCO-AQUINO**  
First Female President

**GLORIA  
MACAPAGAL-ARROYO**  
First Female Vice President



**LENI ROBREDO**  
Current Vice President

**LEONOR BRIONES**  
Current Education  
Secretary

**BERNADETTE  
ROMULO-PUYAT**  
Current Tourism Secretary



## FEMALE SENATORS OF THE 18<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS

### REPRESENTATION MATTERS

According to the 2020 Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum (WEF), the Philippines ranks 29th in political empowerment, with seven female senators and 79 women in the House of Representatives. Out of the past 50 years, 15 were under a female head of state, which places the Philippines at the 6th spot globally.

In the report, each country is judged by the gender gap on political empowerment, economic participation and opportunity; educational attainment; and health and survival. Since 2006, the Philippines has consistently held a spot in the Top 10 list of the WEF report.

But how important is bridging the gap to national and local governance? According to a 2002 study by Georgetown University professor Michele Swers, the gender of Congressional representatives matters because it influences policymaking.

Following the People Power Revolution of 1986, the first female president, Corazon Aquino, decided to replace the 1973 Constitution with the 1987 Constitution that our country uses until today. Article II, Section 14 of this constitution states that “the State recognizes the role of women in nation-building, and shall ensure the fundamental equality before the law of women and men.”

The constitution also stresses the need for women representation through the party-list system, (women as one of

the nine marginalized sectors). Lastly, Article 13 (Social Justice and Human Rights), Section 14 (Women) states that the country “shall protect working women by providing safe and healthful working conditions, taking into account their maternal functions, and such facilities and opportunities that will enhance their welfare and enable them to realize their full potential in the service of the nation.”

Other notable laws that support women and gender equality are the 1988 Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law, which allows Filipinas to rightfully own land, the 1990 Daycare Law which requires the presence of a daycare center in every barangay, and the 1995 Anti-Sexual Harassment Law, which declares sexual harassment in work, academic and training environments unlawful. The recently approved Expanded Maternity Leave Act grants women 105 days of paid leave; while the Safe Spaces Act or “Bawal Bastos Law” penalizes more forms of sexual harassment in public places and online spaces, expanding the original 1995 law. Both acts were championed by Sen. Risa Hontiveros, Chairwoman of the Senate Committee on Women, Children, Family Relations and Gender Equality.

Despite the current gender gap that we continue to face, there is still hope for the country and Filipinas. Out of all the countries in Asia, the Philippines has the highest score in the gender gap. And according to the World



CYNTHIA VILLAR

GRACE POE



RISA HONTIVEROS

PIA CAYETANO



IMEE MARCOS

NANCY BINAY



LEILA DE LIMA

Economic Forum, it will take more or less one century for all countries to be gender equal on all sectors. Hopefully, when the gender gap in political empowerment is closed, more laws will be enacted to help and improve the lives of women in the Philippines. | ■

# LIFE IN THE 'NEW NORMAL'

THE LIFE WE ONCE KNEW UNFORTUNATELY NO LONGER EXISTS, AND HAS BEEN REPLACED WITH ONE THAT FOCUSES ON PROTECTION, PREVENTION, AND THE MITIGATION OF THE INFECTION. EVERYTHING HAS CHANGED—FROM THE WAY WE WORK, HOW WE GATHER, AND HOW WE COMMUNE. HERE'S LIFE IN THE NEW NORMAL.

It's been eight months since the discovery of the novel coronavirus or COVID-19, which originated from Wuhan, China. And the world is still reeling from its effects, with many nations grappling in their national responses to address the spread of infection and reduce fatality.

However, bit by bit, countries are also making positive advances, taking pieces of new information about the virus and applying these to new life-saving habits in the new normal.

There is much to study and understand about the coronavirus, with policies and recommendations changing continually with every new piece of information. But nations are united in sharing the knowledge and adopting the best practices to help yield the most positive outcomes for their people.

These collective habits and efforts have become part of the "new normal."



Photos by: Basilio Sepe



**MANY GOVERNMENTS** are encouraging and/or mandating their people to use face masks – whether cloth or surgical – whenever outside their homes. This is seen to bring down the rate of infection rate by a significant 85%. Wearing of face shield when riding a public utility vehicle is likewise mandated by authorities in the Philippines.

These safety precautions, along with social distancing, further reduce a person's risk of infection.



Photos by: Jatin Surya (@jatin.surya.photojournalist)

**IN THE PHILIPPINES**, public transportation has been restricted, with a combination of city-wide and localized lockdowns being implemented by the local government to prevent the spread of infection.

While movement is limited, the use of pick-up and delivery services such as those offered by Angkas, Lalamove, Grab, Mr. Speedy, and the likes have been highly promoted. This is to further discourage people from going out of their homes.

Malls and markets, on the other hand, are open but are operating at limited capacity with a skeleton crew. For now, the businesses that continue to operate are those that deal with the manufacturing of essential goods and services.



**THE TRAVEL AND TOURISM** industries have taken a big hit due to the pandemic, with many national borders closed off to tourists to protect their citizens. This in effect has resulted in significant restrictions on air travel, with many national carriers and related businesses left floundering or filing for bankruptcy.

In the Philippines, there are a few flights, however, many of these are not loaded to full capacity and are simply scheduled to shuttle OFWS home and back to their countries of work. Complying with the new health and safety guidelines, and thorough disinfection is done regularly at the airport with flight crew and personnel required to don face shields, masks, and even PPEs for the duration of a flight.

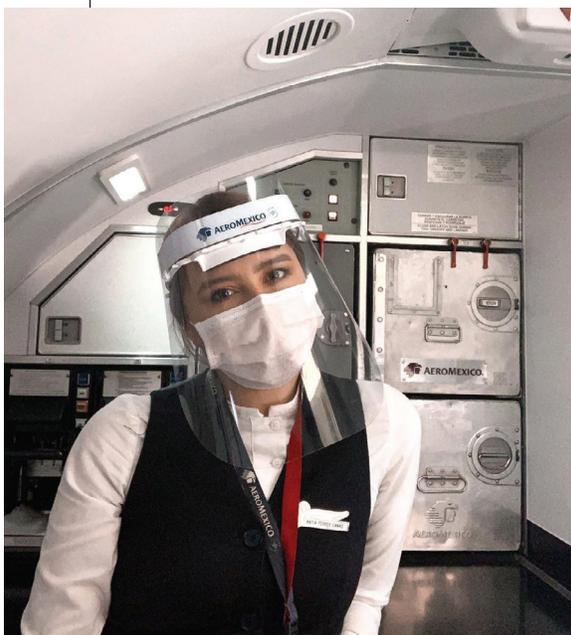


Photo by: Katia Ferrer (@katiaterrerc)





**AS RECENTLY REPORTED**, the Philippines is now heading towards recession, with the national GDP having contracted by 16.5% in the second quarter of 2020. The government's priority now is to protect the lives and livelihoods of its citizens.

The government is cautiously pushing for the gradual reopening of the economy by using a combination of localized lockdowns and screening. Employees, before being allowed back to work, must undergo testing. However, the efficacy and accuracy of the rapid antibody testing, in particular, has been highly contested.



Photo by: City of Amsterdam (@gemeenteamsterdam)



Photo by: Councilor Dorothy Delarmente



Photo by: All About Us

**BIG GATHERINGS** such as conventions, leisure trips, and even weddings are prohibited, and have been replaced with more intimate gatherings limited to 10 persons at maximum.

In lieu of in-person meetings, many offices and organizations have transitioned to the digital space, using many online platforms such as Google Meet, Zoom, Skype, and even Facebook to host their meetings and conferences.

The government itself is becoming more responsible and is holding hearings, plenary meetings, and votations via video conferencing.

With the new school year starting this June, teachers and students are also transitioning to online learning.



Photo by: Christian Andaya



Photo by: Dennis De Vicente (@dennis\_devicente)

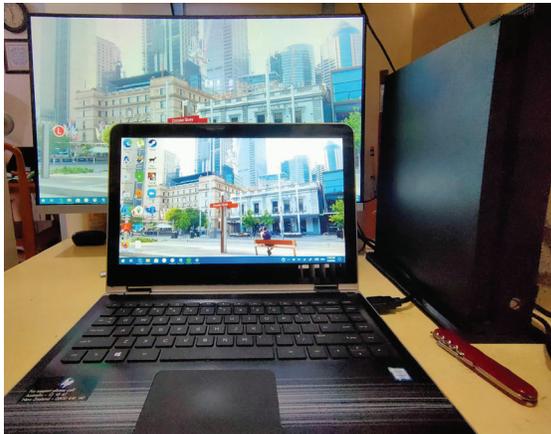


Photo by: Justin Luna



Photo by: Shaira Javier

## PROPER ETIQUETTE FOR ONLINE MEETINGS

**BE ON TIME** While many may have the convenience of working from home, people are encouraged to respect the time and schedules of their colleagues.

Log in a few minutes before the meeting to ensure that your link, presentations, and the like are working and to avoid causing delay for others.

**REMOVE DISTRACTIONS** The home is a place of many distractions, so block your schedule and find a quiet, secluded area for your meetings. During meetings, be present and avoid multi-tasking and leaving your seat.

**DRESS APPROPRIATELY** Though at home, attend business meetings appropriately dressed. This is a means of showing respect to others as well.

**ONCE ONLINE, STAY MUTE.** Unless you are the host of the meeting or it's your turn to talk and present, always default to mute to prevent distracting others with any unnecessary noise.

To encourage more meaningful engagement and connection, do opt for meetings with video. Visual communication is a major part of any meeting. You may opt for video, but on mute. This allows others to better pick up on other cues during discussion.

**SET DOWN GUIDELINES** Others may be new to video conferencing, so take a few minutes at the beginning of the meeting to introduce new members and to lay down guidelines to help others contribute to the discussion.

You can go through how to use the basic tools, how they can properly raise questions and concerns during discussions, and how they can take part in the discussion in an orderly and constructive manner. |

# LOCAL OFFICIALS SHARE HOW TECHNOLOGY IMPACTS THEIR GOVERNANCE

INTERVIEWS BY SHIMICO DIANNE NAKAMURA

Since our barangay is in a mountainous area, it's a bit hard to fully use and adapt to technology. Our barangay health workers use the computer for encoding and printing documents, for monthly monitoring reports regarding the health of the children in the community, and more. We are encouraging farmers to attend seminars and trainings in order for them to use modern agricultural equipment like tractors, water pumps/sprinklers, grass shredders, and many more. The community can borrow these tools from the barangay. Our schools already have a lot of educational tools like computers and television for the teachers and students. For communication, the use of cellphones greatly impacts and contributes to the progress of the barangay. It has made communication easier especially during emergencies and important events.

**Brgy. Chairperson Mario D. Malinias**  
BARANGAY DINWEDE EAST, CERVANTES, ILOCOS SUR



Technology has prompted various types of advancements, which aid us in so many ways. One of the few technological advancements that has been beneficial especially to our barangay is social media. It serves as a platform that helps us reach out to our citizens, enabling access to information and facilitating communication in a more systematic and swift manner. It provides transparency for both the officials and the residents. To maintain peace and order in our barangay, security cameras are installed in different locations. The barangay aims to provide what is best for our constituents and we have to learn and adapt to changes that come with continuing modernization.

**SK Chairperson Tom Cesar V. Vergara**  
BARANGAY POBLACION II, TAGBILIRAN CITY

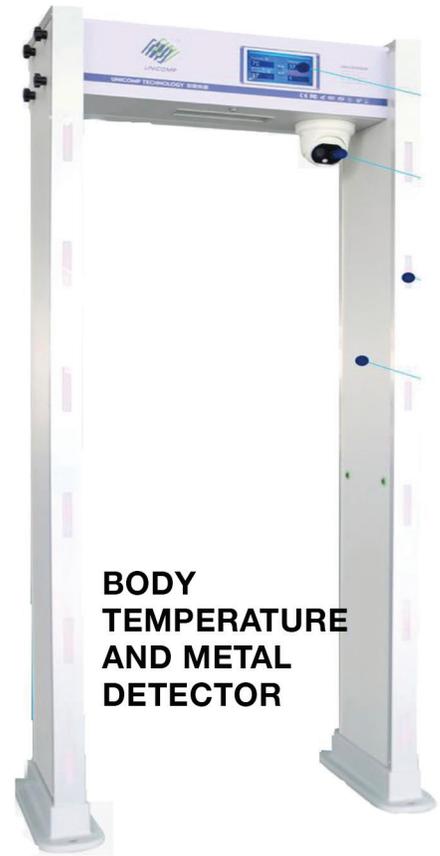
Our barangay promotes digital empowerment through our Barangay Management System, which we believe will help build a stronger, resilient, and more developed community. Technology opens opportunities for us to serve our constituents better through the computerization of documents, such as barangay clearance, certificate of indigency, barangay permit, letters, and annual reports. An office management system also hastens the transactions performed by the barangay, improving the delivery of public service.

**Brgy. Chairperson Rod "Cocoy" Herrera Fernandez**  
BARANGAY POBLACION DOS, PAGSANJAN, LAGUNA





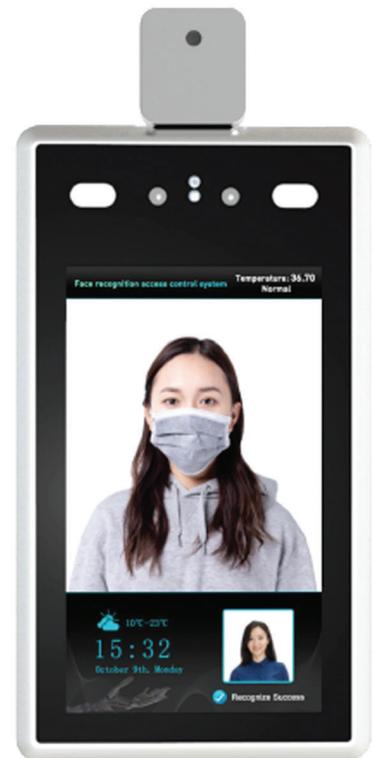
**BODY TEMPERATURE  
DETECTOR AND  
DISINFECTING INSTRUMENT**



**BODY  
TEMPERATURE  
AND METAL  
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*Nanette Medved-Po may have hung up the iconic red and gold of Darna, but she still is a real-life superwoman. Through Generation HOPE, she's making an impact that's changing the way we do business.*

BY HONEY BAUTISTA

In today's competitive landscape, it's not enough for a company to have a good product, excellent customer service, and an overall positive company culture—these are all expected, after all. A new era of sustainability has paved the way for consumers to demand more from corporations, aligning themselves to those who integrate eco-friendly and ethical efforts into the business structure. “At our core, we all want to live in a world of purpose and ultimately live a life of impact.” And this is what multi-hyphenate Nanette Medved-Po strives to do.

If you're a child of the '90s, chances are you are quite familiar with Medved-Po's striking face. She's one of the many actresses who had donned the iconic red and gold of the beloved Filipina superhero, Darna. After starring in multiple films, which catapulted her to stardom, Medved-Po bid farewell to her showbiz career to focus on her passion projects and advocacies.

She is currently busy managing Generation HOPE Inc., her non-profit organization of nearly eight years.



Her humble enterprise distributes bottled water, aptly called *HOPE in a Bottle*, among 2,000 retailers nationwide, from which 100 percent of all profits are donated to their partners in education and agriculture initiatives across the country. “My greatest joy has been to witness the real enthusiasm people have to be involved in building social good,” she says. “It is such an inspiration to watch all the pieces come together to deliver hope.”

#### WOMAN OF THE HOUR

Medved-Po is quick to admit that what she lacks in formal training, she makes up for through her aggressiveness. Having no background in consumer business, she didn't take this as an excuse to not take the leap. Instead, she got creative. Leveraging on her popularity as an *artista*, she made use of her platform, opening an avenue for developing a system that integrates social good with business.

In real life, Medved-Po keeps mostly to herself. But don't let her quiet demeanor fool you. In fact, her humanitarian efforts with Generation HOPE have already sparked

international attention. She was one of the speakers invited to the 2016 TEDxADMU talk on the topic, “Is it enough just to be profitable?” The following year, she was named one of three Filipinos who made it to *Forbes Magazine*’s “Heroes of Philanthropy in Asia.” More than that, she’s been featured in countless magazines, digital channels, talks, and conferences all across the globe. Ever the humble woman, Medved-Po never forgets to emphasize that more than just her personal achievements, HOPE is the result of a team’s hard work.

### HOW IT WORKS

Well-versed in the workings of other nonprofits, she knew fundraising for a cause comes with its own set of challenges: it’s time-consuming and highly competitive. Enter *HOPE in a Bottle* where 100 percent of its proceeds are donated to the building of public school classrooms. Choosing education as her primary advocacy was a no-brainer for Medved-Po for she believes that connecting societal problems (education) to something tangible (building) in their day-to-day experience creates that bond necessary for an individual to take action. Moreover, during HOPE’s inception, there was a clear need for these classrooms to boost school engagement.

With only her wit, aggressiveness, and desire for change, Medved-Po went out and introduced Generation HOPE to various retail partners such as Starbucks and 7-Eleven, and had them distribute their products. Consumers who buy a HOPE bottle from these brands create profit for the company, which in turn is used to build schools identified by the Department of Education (DepEd)’s Adopt-a-School program. This kind of setup works for all parties involved: Generation HOPE gets the profit they need, while providing these corporations with a CSR opportunity.

### LITTLE THINGS, BIG IMPACT

To this date, at least 91 classrooms have been erected, primarily in the Mindanao region. On a macro level, Medved-Po agrees that there’s still a long way to go. But on the individual school level, she remains content with their progress as she sees that students are more empowered now that they know there are people interested in investing in

their future. According to DepED, there’s still a need for 84,000 classrooms to fill the gap in the country’s classroom deficiencies.

“I know we talk about HOPE in terms of how many bottles we sell, but the truth is, we don’t really see ourselves as a water company—we see ourselves as an impact company,” reveals Medved-Po. “We just so happen to sell water to build our classrooms. If we decide to sell something else, instead, it would be totally fine, as long as there is impact for social good.”

Carefully treading a fine line between profit and purpose, Generation HOPE is the first Philippine company to have earned the distinction as a Certified B Corporation—an honor given to companies that meet the highest standard of positive global impact. More than classroom building, Medved-Po also feels strongly about integrating sustainability into her company’s DNA. HOPE works with suppliers like Green Antz Builders, which use eco bricks from post-consumer plastic as building



## SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY



material for the schools. “We didn’t want to help solve one problem in education by creating another in the environment,” says Medved-Po. “This may not be the perfect solution, but given the options present now in the Philippines, we wanted to do something rather than nothing—until there is a better solution. Good shouldn’t be the enemy of great.” But of course, Medved-Po always wants more.

With the goal of reducing HOPE’s carbon footprint, the company eliminated 100 percent of its plastic packaging footprint by way of introducing non-plastic solutions like boxed water, and reusable containers. It also launched out-of-the-box ideas like HOPE in a Star, an online fundraiser held in partnership with various Filipino celebrities, which allow donors an opportunity to meet and bond with their idols.

Ultimately, the goal here is to open the conversation about social and environmental accountability. HOPE aims to engage corporations, especially big businesses, to make smarter decisions by making sustainability accessible and by offering viable, relevant solutions that establish a personal connection. To help sustain the momentum, Medved-Po launched

HOPE X, a plastic credit exchange that allows scale plastic removal.

Medved-Po believes in the power of collaborative efforts. The road to creating a culture of hope around sustainability within businesses involves many complicated interchanges. One individual action won’t even make a dent, but if we mobilize them at scale, systemic change will follow. So how do we do this? By addressing important social issues that are manageable and positive. Engaged individuals can make these changes habitual. For Medved-Po, so as long as the interest and intent to take action is growing, no action is too little and no action will go unnoticed. |





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# ART BEHIND BARS

*Unlikely artists find their way to the canvas—  
and the freedom they yearn for—through the help of  
Tagaytay City Jail Warden Aris Williamere Villaester.*

BY CHIN ANN OBIEDO

PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
RENJIE TOLENTINO

**‘K**ain, tulog, kain, tulog; paggising mo, kakain na naman, tapos matutulog” is how Warden Aris Williamere Villaester describes a day inside a prison to an outsider. The thought of being in a cell for the long haul can have a serious toll on the mental state of persons deprived of liberty (PDLs). Villaester knows this for sure as he has seen it firsthand.

To make every day bearable for BJMP Tagaytay City Jail detainees, Villaester, more fondly called “Warden” by the people around him, organized a project that shines an artistic light on the detainees through painting. “*Ang buhay sa loob ng preso ay nakakalungkot kaya ang pag-paint nila ay magandang pampalipas-oras.* It’s therapeutic and they get to express themselves. *Kaya may mga painting na malungkot, may painting na masaya.* It’s because it’s a reflection of how they feel inside.”

“Bago ako naging warden, I was with the Philippine National Police Academy and I was a member of the council of artists. ‘*Di ko na siya masyado napa-practice ngayon* and I don’t personally paint, but I believe that I have an eye for art. *Tinitingnan ko ‘yung*

“I AM VERY PROUD TO SAY NA MAY MGA PDL NA NAGSASABING MASAYA SILA NA SA TAGAYTAY SILA NAKULONG, BECAUSE THEY LEARNED A LOT OF LESSONS NA THEY CANNOT LEARN OUTSIDE. NATUTO DAW SILANG MAGDASAL BAGO KUMAIN AT PUWEDE PALANG MANGARAP SA LOOB.”

quality and I can tell if sellable *ba* or *hindi*,” shares Villaester.

From among the different approaches to rehabilitating (PDLs), he saw painting as the more effective medium. “Painting is therapeutic, *kapag nasa loob ka lang ng cell mo, wala kang ginagawa* the whole day, you’ll get bored. *Baka mag-iisip ka pang tumakas*, so with this program, you find something worthwhile to do while you’re inside. *Lumilipas ang araw na hindi mo iniisip ang kaso mo.*”

While looking at the paintings, you get a glimpse of their lives and feel the longing and yearning in each stroke. One piece shows a perspective of someone looking upwards at the trees, perhaps missing the fresh breeze and free sunlight that freedom provides outside. Another shows the homely face of a mother, perhaps the painter’s way of remembering his own mother who waits for him at home. And another is more playful and vibrant, the artist’s way of showing that creativity does not die within the confines of the jail cell.

## BREAKING THE STATUS QUO

This revolutionary idea of using art to transform and rehabilitate PDLs while giving them real solutions to help them out with bail is an idea that came from the PDLs themselves. Buboy Cordovez, a professional artist who was detained for around five years and released recently, brought up the idea of engaging in painting and making it a source of livelihood for the PDLs.

“Before, we only sold the paintings for medicine, for the improvement of the jail, or for any other program that we’re doing in Tagaytay.” But this time around,

the warden wanted to focus and concentrate on the Sponsor-a-Release program, because it was a better cause and had a better impact on the community. “Some of the inmates have no capacity to pay their fines [that come with] the plea bargaining. So *sabi ko* let’s try something ourselves *kasi* over-congested *na rin, pag inantay pa natin* ‘yung government to take action, it might take longer. So, having this kind of project *na puwede namang magbenta* at ‘yung

proceeds will be for the release for these PDLs is really good.”

As for who gets to receive the assistance, Warden Villaester is strict, only picking the most deserving candidates. “Only those who are qualified and deserving *ang pinapalabas namin*. Qualified, *ibig sabihin* pag drug-related ‘yung case, you will undergo a drug dependency test, and *dapat pumasa ka doon*. *Ibig sabihin, ang pinapalaya namin hindi na* drug dependent. With these cases *kasi*, when they get out, they tend





to re-offend, *gagamit pa rin sila sa labas*. So, *ini-interview sila ng psychologist bago lumaya*. And the second one is good behavior, *dapat wala silang violation ng any rules sa loob ng jail*,” explains Villaester.

The PDL-artists get a tangible exchange for their hard work and talent. Warden Villaester explains the breakdown of where the proceeds actually go after an art piece gets sold. He shares, “We have the 30-30-40 [formula]. Thirty percent actually goes to the one who painted or did the artwork. The other 30% goes to the operational expenses, like the canvases, the frames, and everything else. The 40% goes to the project: the Sponsor-a-Release program. Not necessarily *‘yung gumawa ang makakalaya*, but it will help

someone who deserves it.” The warden also values quality above anything else, saying the art works which normally go from Php1,000 to Php10,000 should justify their price tag. “*Ayoko na gumawa sila ng paintings or any product na bibilhin lang ng mga tao* out of pity. So *sabi ko gawin natin nang maayos*, quality that goes with the high price also.”

To ensure this, the Warden has even extended invitations to professionals to help train those who want to learn and enhance their gift. “I invited some of my friends from UP Fine Arts, and one of the deans from the UST Fine Arts to hold a workshop. They also invite others to go to jail *para magturo din*. May science *din diyang sa art*, *may mga terms and fundamentals* that they need to know,” he points out.

## A LEADER WHO SERVES

The program has received a lot of support, both from the government and private benefactors, and more importantly, has made a significant and positive impact on the lives of PDLs, those who have posted bail and also those who are still inside. “*Lumalabas ‘yung kanilang natural talent*. They want to help you, *kasi nga alam nilang nakikinig ka*,” he quips.

His somewhat unorthodox leadership style was brought about by a memorable experience with a PDL who made the warden realize that the only way to start changing a person for the better is to first listen to what they have to say. “I had met this guy named Hilboy. *Siya ‘yung known na mamamatay tao, magulo, bank robber, drug user, everything na negative*. Every time *na may commotion sa jail or may mga infractions, lahat itinuturo ‘dun sa PDL na ‘yun*.”

One day an incident occurred inside the jail and immediately everyone pointed to Hilboy. “*Pero hindi agad ako nag-judge—nakinig muna ako sa kanila*. I said let’s go to my office and *i-settle natin ‘to*. And it turns out, it wasn’t his fault.”

“*Alam mo, sabi niya sa akin, ‘Sir, this is my first time na nagkaroon ng gulo na tinanong muna ako kung ano’ng nangyari, na hindi ako ji-nudge and talagang pinakinggan ‘yung side ko*. Because of that sir, I really appreciate you.” Because of that exchange, the Warden was reminded that PDLs, regardless of their crimes, deserve to be treated humanely, too. “He also said that he wanted to help me help the PDLs. So *‘yun ‘yung parang turning point niya na maging maayos. Ginawa ko siyang trustee. Ibig sabihin, puwede siyang lumabas at maglinis ng aking mga*

*gamit* and that includes my office and my barracks. *Wala namang nawawala, wala namang nasisira or nanakaw.* I told him that the very reason *na ginawa ko 'yun ay dahil sinasabi nilang siya ang pinakamasama. Pero napatunayan kong may kakayahan siyang magbago* and that he is a new man. So with that, *nagkaroon ako ng idea na sa ganitong process lang pala puwede natin silang mabago and puwede na natin silang matulungan.*”

From then on, he's made it a mission to help PDLs turn their lives around and help them find new meaning within the confines of the prison cell. “We have to guide them and their thinking, *kasi galit sila sa gobyerno, galit sila sa buhay nila dahil sa nangyari,* and that's why we are here. We, the BJMP officers, are here to correct that. *Sabi ko, oo nga kinulong kayo pero hindi naman kayo pinabayaan eh. Binantayan kayo, pinakain kayo, binigyan kayo ng programs. Ibig sabihin, mahalaga ka pa rin sa lipunan at 'yung government ay tumutulong pa rin sa'yo.* Not only should you listen as a leader, you should also inspire them to do great things. *Kasi andiyan ka na sa loob, ano man lang 'yung kausapin mo sila, i-inspire mo sila na it's not the end of the world dahil nakulong ka.* Maybe *may purpose ang Diyos sa'yo kung bakit ka andito ngayon.* Siguro *mas mapapahamak ka sa labas* that's why God wanted you in; He wanted you to learn some lessons. And I am very proud to say *na may mga PDL na nagsasabing masaya sila na sa Tagaytay sila nakulong,* because they learned a lot of lessons *na they cannot learn from the outside. Natuto daw silang magdasal bago kumain at puwede palang mangarap sa loob.*”

### CONTINUING THE GOOD WORK

Extending their helping hand starts inside the prison, but it doesn't stop there. The warden also shares that they go so far as to look for jobs for those who rejoin the community because it can be challenging for them. “Not only do we have the Sponsor-a-Release program, *meron din kaming second chance program. Kapag na-release sila,* what I do is coordinate with my friends

“THE DILEMMA OF BEING A PDL, PAGLABAS WALANG TRUST ANG TAO. SO NOT ONLY DO WE HAVE TO TAKE CARE OF THEM, WE HAVE TO SHOW THEM RESPECT, WE SHOULD ALSO TRUST THEM NA MAKAKAPAG BAGONG BUHAY SILA. BECAUSE THE MOMENT WE GIVE THEM THAT, MAGKAKARON NG TOTAL TRANSFORMATION 'YUNG TAO.'”



*na farm owners, may-ari ng school, na tanggapin itong mga tao.* Because the dilemma of being a PDL, *paglabas walang trust ang tao.* So not only do we have to take care of them, we have to show them respect, we should also trust them *na makakapag-bagong buhay sila.* Because the moment we give them that, *magkakaroon ng total transformation 'yung tao.'”*

As for future plans, the warden's only goal right now is to raise awareness for the program as much as possible and make it sustainable. He shares, “I want this program to function even when I'm no longer connected with the Tagaytay [City Jail]. The program should continue, and we should expand it. There's a market for paintings. *Nakakatuwa kasi unti-unti na kaming nakikita.* These paintings not only offer a ways and means to freedom, but it also opens up a second chance for people to change.” ■

GROOMING BY FLOE TAPAYAN

# BUILDING A HOPEFUL FUTURE

*In the face of climate change, award-winning architect Jason Buensalido describes how architecture and design can pave the way for a more sustainable tomorrow.*

**BY FIDELIS TAN**  
**PHOTOGRAPHY BY**  
**JAR CONCENCO**

It was the birth of Architect Jason Buensalido's daughter, Annika, that made him think about climate change. "Before, it wasn't an immediate reality for us," Buensalido admits. "More than a decade ago, this concept (climate change) was very vague. It didn't feel real."

But the intense upheavals in the environment do pose a real concern not only for this generation, but the ones to follow. "So the issues have become more focused and relevant, all the more now that I have a daughter. What kind of earth is she going to live in? It became even more important to me, not only as an architect, but as a person," says Buensalido, a graduate of architecture at the University of Santo Tomas (UST).

Buensalido is the founder of Buensalido+Architects, an architectural, interior, and urban design firm that is committed to introducing unique and innovative concepts to the local design setting. He has been serving as its



Principal Architect since it launched in 2006.

In 2009, the firm won the ‘The Pinakamagandang Bahay sa Balat ng Lupa’ Competition, by La Farge Cement and the UP College of Architecture, which challenged Filipino architects to design an affordable green house.

Among the firm’s accolades include the KOHLER’s Bold Design Awards in the Cultural Spaces Category in 2018, and the Metrobank Art and Design Excellence Anthology Architecture Awards in the Commercial Category in 2018.

### BUILDING BETTER

According to the award-winning architect and many other environmental advocates, there are many ways to address climate change—through policy, environmental initiatives, and letting go of plastic straws, among others. One does not usually consider how the design and construction of a building impacts the environment, but the implications are enormous.

The building industry is one of the largest contributors of consumption of energy in the world, with the entire process of constructing a building requiring the wholesale transportation and processing of material and manpower. If the materials are sourced from abroad, the question is: how will these be brought to the site? Even travelling to meetings and constructing mock-ups take energy.

“The life cycle of architecture is from the intangible to tangible,” Buensalido says. “For example, a client approaches us and says, ‘Build me a house—I don’t care whatever resource we would consume for that output.’ We, as architects, have a responsibility to make them aware that whatever intangible decision



they make will have such a large impact in the tangible expression of those objectives.”

“So we use architecture to basically influence other people, directly or indirectly, that whatever they introduce into this world would have a lasting impact,” he quips. Although it is a mindset that hasn’t been widely adopted in the Philippines, Buensalido notes that there are ways to become more efficient and conscientious about the building process.

For instance, there’s Buensalido+Architects’ project to build a club house in Pampanga.

“What’s the prevalent material there is the first thing we ask. Second is what is the labor or skill that is prevalent in the area. Then we try to combine that and use it in a new way when we apply it to the structure, so

the structure is really of the place,” Buensalido elucidates.

In Pampanga, they’ve found an abundance of *lahar*. Therefore, *lahar* was integrated into the building process, and in the specifications of the design.

The limitations of the local labor force were also considered. “If you design a building that is made from stainless steel, that is very exacting, but it has to be prefabricated and so on. The local labor is not able to deliver that, so you’d have to bring it in from somewhere else. And the energy again that you need to consume to deliver to that area is another thing we have to consider,” he adds.

The result is not only built from the natural assets of the area, but in so doing has a far smaller carbon footprint.

“THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE—THROUGH POLICY, ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVES, AND LETTING GO OF PLASTIC STRAWS, AMONG OTHERS. ONE DOES NOT USUALLY CONSIDER HOW THE DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION OF A BUILDING IMPACTS THE ENVIRONMENT, BUT THE IMPLICATIONS ARE ENORMOUS.”



## RISING ABOVE

Architecture should not only consider how to lessen its own environmental impact, but how to deal with the environmental impacts that already affect people.

Project RAFT in Marikina is a residential area designed and constructed to deal with flooding in the area, which reached record levels of devastation during Ondoy. “Architecture and design is all about responding to a certain set of parameters. Architecture should simply respond to them; design in general is all about solving problems,” he says.

Of course, if one expects to be flooded, the best thing to do is build away from a flood-prone area, Buensalido says. Unfortunately, not everyone has the financial capacity to just get up and leave whenever they want.

“The objective was to create a solution that can help a lot of people in the Philippines who live in flood-prone areas,” he says. In this case, the problem was that of rising waters, which left residents stranded on their rooftops, and their cars lifted away.

“To address those two issues, we did what we called the RAFTs (Regenerative Amphibious Floating Terraces).” The design of the houses themselves was inspired by the *bahay kubo*.

“The *bahay kubo* is lifted up on stilts, so we lifted the entire house, so that on the ground floor there’s nothing there except a *silong* and a car port.”

From the ground floor, one might expect to enter the living area on the second floor, and the bedrooms on the third floor. But in the case of Project RAFT, the layout was flipped around.

“For a lot of us, our expensive stuff like your TV, ref, range, are in the lower floors. But what if the flood levels rise higher than the last one? *Masisira na naman yung TV mo, yung couch mo*. So we flipped it so that the living area is on the third floor, and the bedrooms are now on the second floor. On the ground floor, there’s nothing. In the event that the flood level goes higher, it’s only your mattresses and clothes you have to save.”

An additional feature on the second floor is the RAFT itself. “For the house to be affordable we can’t introduce high-tech innovations, because once we introduce them, it will become expensive, and that defeats the purpose of helping people in that area,” he says.

On the second floor, the architect designed RAFTS, balconies that can detach and use as real rafts to row yourself to the nearest evacuation center.

These RAFTS are made of plastic pontoons, the same material used in floating docks, so they’re sturdy and effective. A similar RAFT was designed for the cars, that would remain out in the open during a flood.

If it floods, the raft where the car is on will simply float in place. It will go up and down depending on the flood levels, with the limitation of the highest flood level in that area. There are rails and the rafts are attached to that rail by a chain, so the car will never float away.

Buensalido adds that these affordable and accessible innovations can be applied in other projects as well. “In fact, people were saying, what if other people start copying your solution? By all means, that is the whole purpose.”

While the designs of the Pampanga Club House and Project RAFT are good responses to climate change, the Philippines has a long way to go to becoming architecturally climate change-proof.

It, however, doesn’t come from lack of knowing how to do it. “I think the research is available,” Buensalido says. “Our government doesn’t really need to go in depth into research, because the technology and design innovation is available all over the world. It’s just a matter of implementing it.”

However, good ideas encounter friction every step of the way towards reality. It's the whole system that makes it challenging to make already available and proven effective innovations to be used in communities, he says. "No matter how learned the architect is, in terms of design, there's always a wall. With whoever's controlling the development, there's always a wall," he observes.

For example, he shares, they had proposed new technology. "However, the contractor said, 'I don't know how to do this, let's revert to old construction methodologies.' If he does try to experiment with the new process, it's going to cost a little bit of money. So he'll head back to the developer and say '*huwag nalang*', all I want is to be able to sell."



#### A PEEK INTO THE FUTURE

Despite the difficulties, a good idea goes a long way. The traditional definition of architecture is that of both an art and a science of creating structures and organizing space.

"But for us, there is so much more potential," Buensalido says. "For us particularly, it's a potential for it to be a conduit for positive change. It's also a potential to change lives, to improve lives of the people we serve."

With The Terraces at Dao in Marikina, Buensalido+Architects took the idea for a standard box-shaped warehouse and transformed it into a colorful, striated structure that draws the eye and makes you question, "Is that really a warehouse?"

The effect on the locale has been transformative. The addition of this expressive new structure has fostered a sense of vibrancy in the once sleepy



neighborhood. "What was once a quiet street now became very lively, because people started to put up micro businesses along the streets," Buensalido observes.

In part, this shows the power of architecture to inspire and to foster spaces for connection. But more importantly, it gives people the power to visualize a better future.

The discourse surrounding climate change has frequently been depressing, painting a picture of a world that is too late to save. With architecture, Buensalido asserts that hope is not lost.

"In the middle of nowhere you have this super vibrant expressive structure that seems like it was imported from the future—not only any future, but a better future compared to the one we have now. When you see great architecture and experience it, it gives you a little bit

of hope that there is a better future that somebody believes in," he declares.

For Buensalido, architecture is never just about the construction of buildings. "Architecture is a source of energy, a source of hope," he says. "It's an expression of life." | ■

NAVOTAS MAYOR TOBY TIANGO

# NOWHERE TO GO BUT UP

BY LOUISE NICHOLE LOGARTA

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JO IVAN LLANETA



*While many choose to stay on the beaten path and stick to what they know, Toby Tiangco, incumbent Navotas City mayor, had long decided to venture further and uplift the lives of their citizens.*

**A** political life was far from the mind of the young Toby Tiangco, who hails from a family that has business in fishing, cold storage, and shipyards. “My entire family are all businesspeople,” Tiangco shares. “So much so that my training, my college course, was Business Management.”

However, in 1998, he ran for vice mayor of Navotas, much to his parents’ disapproval. They tried to persuade him to just go into business, but Tiangco had solid reasons behind his running for public office: “I had a chance to be part of the solution. If I didn’t take that opportunity, then I have no right to complain about government service.”

“*Kahit ano namang bagay pwedeng maging marumi, pwedeng maging maayos (anything can be dirty work or you can make it fair),*” he points out. “*Kung aayusin mo ang pagserbisyo sa publiko, hindi masama ang pulitika.* On the other hand, *kahit anong profession mo, kung hindi mo gagawin ng maayos, e di masama din ‘di ba?* (If public service is done properly, politics will not be bad. On the other hand, whatever profession you are in, if not done the right way, will be harmful).”

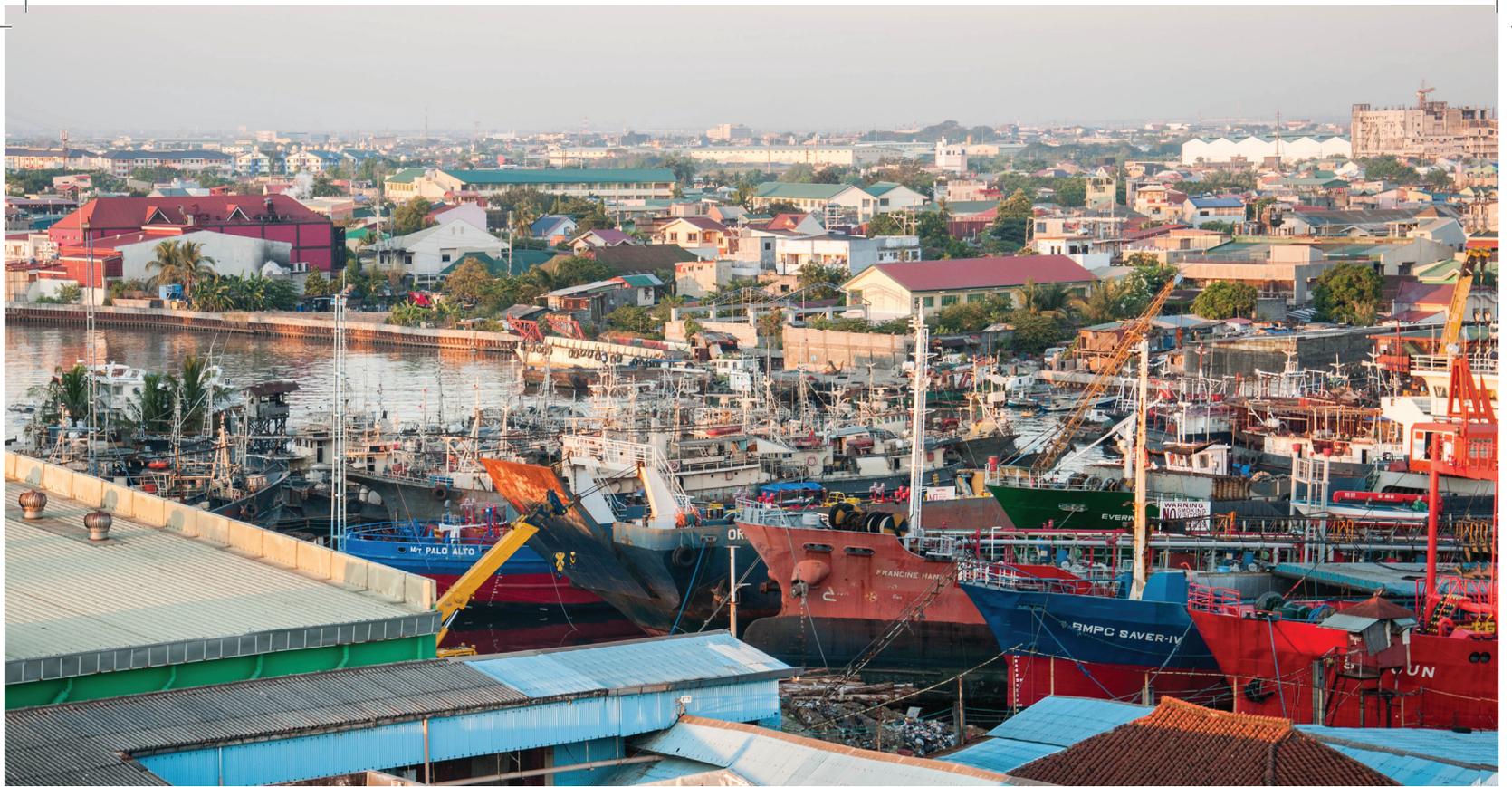
Tiangco adds, “It’s not the profession that is bad, per se, it’s how you will do it.” With this reasoning, he committed himself to serving his city and its people.

In the year he ran for vice mayor, both parties that ran for chief of the city accused the other of cheating, leaving Navotas without a proclaimed mayor. In the heat of rallies and protests, the municipal hall was burned to the ground. Tiangco suddenly found himself the acting mayor. “This was my first job in public service,” he recalls, mentioning that this lasted seven months.

His biggest challenge at the time was rebuilding all public records, which took about a year. This was a high priority task, for they could not conduct matters such as tax collection, having no previous record of how much citizens paid previously. When Navotas finally got its mayor, Cipriano Bautista, he passed away a little over a year after assuming office. It was then that Tiangco assumed officially his first post as a mayor, serving until 2010.

Because Navotas City sits below sea level, it’s constantly plagued by floods. One hundred days of the year, the city is





flooded due to high tide. “Life cannot go on like this,” Tiangco says. He explained that the old solution was to elevate the roads; he, however, knew that this would only cause the water to flow down from the elevated road to the lower level area.

This hands-on mayor then visited the barangay with the deepest flooding and tried out what is now the famous *Bombastik* water pumping station. “We installed a river dike, pumping station and flood gates,” he explains. “This was the first project, and although it was successful, *kailangan tutukan; araw-araw talaga ako pumupunta doon* (it needed to be watched; I went there every day).”

He checked the entire barangay for possible entry points where water might flow. “A solution can be the right one, but *kung wala kang tiyaga na hanapin lahat ng butas, wala rin* (if you do not persevere and try to find the holes, it’s all for nothing).” After the first successful *Bombastik* pumping station, the rest of the *barangays* all wanted one, too.

This posed the challenge of speeding up the process of installing the pumping stations. “Today, public officials can spend a calamity fund in preparation for a calamity,” says Tiangco. “*Dati, hindi* (Before, that was not the case).”

In the past, the local government code says that a “state of calamity” must be declared before the calamity fund is spent. Building a structure that could effectively save lives, prevent the loss of property, and eliminate the need for evacuation, was, in his view, a wiser way to spend money. Tiangco and his legal advisors solved this small issue by saying there would be “imminent calamity.” Tiangco calls this common sense: “Damage to property can be rebuilt. Damage to life cannot be. I try to save lives.” Today, there are 56 stations all over Navotas City.

Because garbage exacerbates flooding, Tiangco ordered a total cleanup of Navotas. Sidewalks were recovered, discipline was

enforced. He stresses that they are strict with rules. “Why? We want to remind people that *paglabas mo ng bahay mo, may mga batas na kailangan sundin* (When you leave your home, there are laws that must be followed),” says the seasoned public servant.

“We’re a small drop in the bucket, but all of us have to cooperate,” Tiangco says in response to his view about climate change. Both citizens and local government units (LGUs) have to work together to ensure proper disposal and form laws to limit carbon emission and other factors that worsen climate change. He is pleased to announce that Navoteños are more aware of this global phenomenon now, and are more cooperative with regards to matters that can help curb it, like segregation.

When his term ended, Tiangco enlisted his brother, John Rey, to run for mayor, so that his projects may be continued. Toby Tiangco, on the other hand, went on to become congressman, serving from 2010 to 2019. “Continuity is important,” he says. During his brother’s term, all Navotas constituents were eventually enrolled into PhilHealth, and housing was widely expanded. Four livelihood training

centers were also established during John Rey's term.

Tiangco says: *"Importanteng magkaroon ng kabuhayan ang mga Navoteño* (It is important that *Navoteños* have their own livelihood)." Apart from social services, they are provided avenues, such as skills training, to generate their own income. Shielded and metal arc work is popular due to the many shipyards present in the city. On Navotas Day, top 10 fisherfolk families are chosen and one child of each will become a scholar. From 2010 to the present, Navotas has educated 4,000 scholars.

In line with this, Tiangco places great importance in the nurturing of youth. "The best contribution the youth can give (to their country) is their education," he declares. His line of thinking is simple: *"Kung hindi sila nakapagtapos mag-aral, ano'ng makukuha nilang trabaho? 'Pag wala silang trabaho, mahihirapan silang suportahan ng siyudad. Pero kung sila'y nag-aral, makakakuha sila ng trabaho.* (If they

do not finish schooling, what kind of job will they get, if any? If they don't get a job, the city will have a hard time supporting them. But if they finish their studies, they'll be able to get a job. They will be an asset to the city.)"

He adds, "I always say: Don't think of grand things you can do for the city. If you do grand things, but you don't finish schooling, you will not be able to sustain it." Nonetheless, Tiangco makes sure they develop their youth's talents. Their scholarships include sports and arts, not just academic.

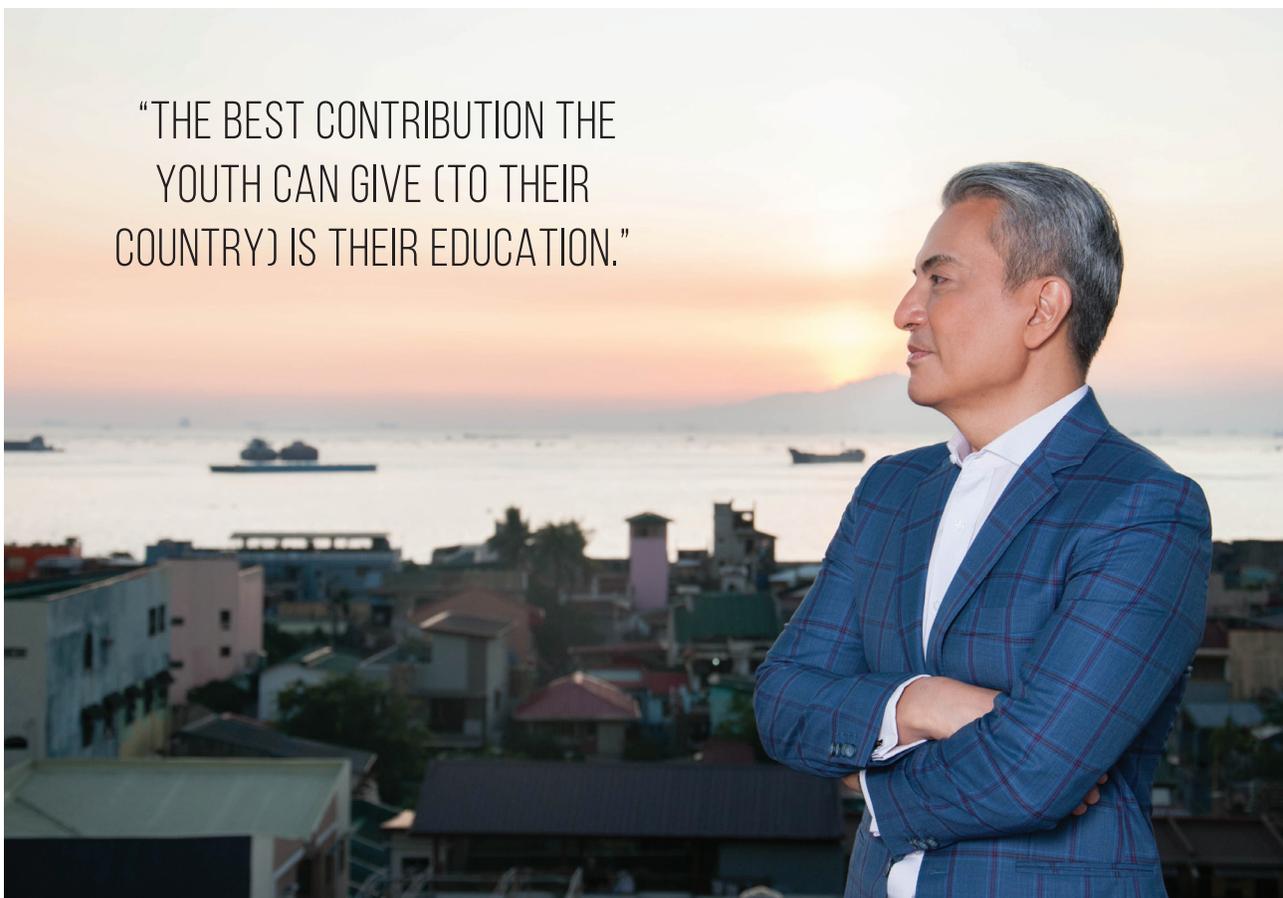
In the city schools, Tiangco is targeting for two-shift classes to be reduced to one; that is, the number of classrooms must be increased. "We have 460 classrooms, 24 public schools, all are Wi-Fi zones," he shares. He also introduced the NavoTours bus, used by public school students for field trips. "This is so that their world grows bigger beyond Navotas," he explains, citing that this is essential in forming worldview and ambitions.

Tiangco notes that transparency and accountability of the local government is highly necessary. Navotas is the only city in Metro Manila that received an "unqualified opinion" from the Commission on Audit (COA), reportedly the highest rating a city can get. "This assures the people that their money is well-spent," says the Navotas chief.

With the advent of social media, it's now easy to send a message to the mayor. Originally, he wanted phone calls, but it was a tedious process to apply and have a landline installed. Instead, he opted to create a text message line called "TEXT TOBY." This showed the significance he placed on the people's involvement in his governance.

Tiangco exercises his leadership in three ways: "Exercise political will at all times by always doing what is right and best for the people, even if it is not the popular thing to do. Discipline is important in all aspects of governance.

"THE BEST CONTRIBUTION THE  
YOUTH CAN GIVE (TO THEIR  
COUNTRY) IS THEIR EDUCATION."





Leadership by example must be shown not only by the mayor, but by all public servants of the city. Therefore, no one is exempted from any law or ordinance, and fines cannot be waived.”

This emphasis on discipline and strict obedience of the law has proven critical, especially as the city battles the COVID-19 pandemic.

Due to the rising cases in Navotas, in July, Tiangco called for a city-wide lockdown. And those who disregarded the health and safety protocols were immediately dealt with. The city had even went to the extent of filing charges against a family that had hosted a house party and violated quarantine restrictions.

### **LEADERSHIP IN THE TIME OF CRISIS**

True leadership and character are brought to light in the face of new challenges. And the pandemic has only made clearer the type of leader Tiangco is – one who is responsive and empathic.

“There is no one perfect way to address the pandemic,” he says calmly. “Even countries that have ‘flattened the curve’ have experienced a resurgence of cases after a while. What is important is that we do what we can, despite our limited resources and capabilities, to protect and save each and every Filipino.

“We need to rally the support of our people in our fight against COVID-19. Everyone should learn and understand that it is COVID-19

that is making our lives difficult and therefore, they need to do their part to stop the further transmission of the virus.”

Limited funds have hindered the city from providing financial assistance to those who had lost their jobs or are unable to work. For this, Tiangco shares that they depend on the emergency subsidy under the Social Amelioration Program of the national government. “On my part, I donated my salary from April 2020 until the end of my term in June 2022 for indigent families who did not qualify for SAP, while our social welfare office will determine the beneficiaries of the P3.29 million fund.”

The pandemic’s reach has become wide and deep, with the spread of infection growing exponentially. But the local LGU is doing what it can to keep their citizens safe.

The city is continuously and stringently implementing safety protocols necessary to combat the pandemic. These include strict imposition of ordinances on proper wearing of face masks; practice of social distancing; 24-hour curfew for residents below 18 years old; and an 8pm–5am curfew for everyone except those who are working and running businesses.

As part of its mitigation approach to COVID-19, they’ve also created an app to make contact tracing more efficient and effective, seeking to work

with hospitals and the national government to boost their capacity and capability to test, treat and isolate every case.

As the country has taken a deep economic hit, Tiangco has also laid down his city's plans to help their people bounce back.

On providing jobs and livelihood, he shares, that they have recently established a 5-year partnership with TESDA that will give Navoteños additional free tech-voc courses such as 2D Animation, Advance Microsoft Excel Training, Computer System Servicing, Cyber Security, Driving, Solar Powered Lighting, and Mobile Phone Charging Kit Training. This is on top of the regular courses that the Navotas Vocational Training And Assessment Institute already offers.

Their Navotas Hanapbuhay Center, on the other hand, will continue to provide assistance to aspiring and existing entrepreneurs and provide loans as start-up capital or additional investments. "We are also building an e-commerce site, eANGATPH, to promote Navotas products and services. Furthermore, we have partnered with Grab Philippines to provide qualified Navotenos an opportunity to work as delivery riders, and give local merchants another platform to market their goods." On top of all this, the city will be giving away 90 fiberglass boats, under the Navobangka-buhayan Program, to registered and qualified Navoteño fisherfolks.

On his personal learnings as a leader in the time of crisis, he answers honestly. "It is easy to get tired and burned out in this line of work, especially if despite putting your best efforts, you still receive criticisms and complaints left and right. But I have long accepted that such is the life of a public servant.

"What matters is that you continue to do what is right and stand firm by it. What's right is protecting our people. What's right is keeping them from endangering themselves, their loved ones, and the people around them. What's right is ensuring that they are safe from the disease and giving them the care and assistance they need should they get infected." And this clear, decisive action that is rooted in true, good intentions for the people is truly what every city needs. |



GROOMING BY FLOE TAPAYAN



“DAMAGE TO PROPERTY CAN BE REBUILT. DAMAGE TO LIFE CANNOT BE. I TRY TO SAVE LIVES.”



# LEADING CHANGE

*Mayor Doña Cresencia Tesoro talks about her sustainable development plans for San Manuel, Tarlac and why the world needs millennial leaders.*

**BY LAKAMBINI BAUTISTA  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
JAR CONCENCO**

“WHEN PEOPLE ARE NO LONGER DEPENDENT ON THE GOVERNMENT, WHEN THEY CAN FINALLY LIVE A QUALITY PEACEFUL LIFE, THAT’S WHEN I SAY THAT I STEERED THEM IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION AND THAT I HAVE MADE THE BEST DECISIONS FOR MY TOWN.”

“The power of youth is the common wealth for the entire world. The faces of young people are the faces of our past, our present, and our future. No segment in the society can match with the power, idealism, enthusiasm and courage of the young people.”

Indian social reformer Kailash Satyarthi articulates it best. We need the youth to lead and mobilize the world for they have the dynamism, creativity, and energy to shape a better world.

The people of San Manuel, Tarlac must have seen all these qualities in the then 28-year-old Doña Cresencia Tesoro, when they elected her as town chief in the May 2019 elections.

Although she’s not exactly a newbie in politics. She had served as councilor and as vice mayor, under the leadership of her father, former mayor (now vice mayor) Benjamin Tesoro.

### EMPOWERING THE YOUTH

Tesoro was fresh out of college (she finished Bachelor of Arts degree in Communication in Miriam College) when she started taking on the role as the private secretary of her father, who was then serving his first term as Mayor of the town.

She would assist him in his daily activities and take charge of certain projects on his behalf. “The first task my dad asked me to do was to form the San Manuel Youth Organization. There was no Sangguniang Kabataan elections at that time, so the youth was kind of lost. There were no youth programs,” she recalls.

On her first foray into public service, the then 21-year-old was able to address the real issues



Mayor Tesoro inspects farm animals to be awarded to families under the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps)

concerning the youth. “We provided trainings and scholarships for the out-of-school youths. We went around schools and talked about timely issues like AIDS, mental health, teenage pregnancy, illegal drugs,” she says.

Slowly discovering her place in politics, Tesoro eventually served as municipal councilor and then as vice mayor. She served each position for one term. When his father’s term ended in 2019, she ran and won the mayoralty race.

Now 29 years old, Mayor Doña is the youngest and only female executive in the Municipality of San Manuel.

“Whenever I think about it, I am still overwhelmed by the quick transition from councilor to vice mayor and now mayor,” Tesoro muses. “I thought to myself, I must be doing something right for the people to trust me this much, considering my age and how patriarchal the society can be with their choice of leaders.”

Tesoro admits she never even thought that politics was in her cards. “*Ang gusto ko talaga* is journalism (the field I really wanted was journalism), I had always wanted to be a newscaster. I was very curious as a child and

anything around just interests me,” she shares.

But as time went by, her interest shifted to public service because she realized that she can do so much more if she holds a government position. “You don’t just deliver news or react on social media, but you get to bring real change with all the resources and power that you can have. *Lalo ako*, I am obsessed with solving problems. I believe that it makes life more fulfilling and happy when you get to solve issues and make a positive impact on a larger scale,” she tells LEAGUE.

Her dad’s passion for public service has been a major source of inspiration for her, says Tesoro—seeing lives changed as a result of his projects. “Back then I was thinking, there needs to be continuity in what he’s doing, especially that he’s getting old. So I thought I should continue it,” she quips.

The millennial leader also believes it’s a calling. “*Inisip ng mga tao, pinilit ako*. (People are thinking, I was forced into it.) I wasn’t,” she clarifies. “I felt that I had to do it. I thought somebody should continue whatever my dad had started. Also, it’s not hard to love the job.”

### TAKING SAN MANUEL TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Tesoro notes that his father focused on the basic necessities of the municipality during his term. “When he assumed the mayoralty post in 2010, *sobrang kawawa ang San Manuel* (San Manuel was in a pitiful state). We didn’t have a cultural center, *maayos na* public high school, *maayos na* rural health center (a decent public high school and rural health center). So

he focused on those things,” she says. “Now, the challenge for me is to take San Manuel to the next level.”

The young mayor says her current priorities are programs and projects that have lasting impact on the lives of their people.

“We’ve been very aggressive with our infrastructure projects to attract more investors,” she informs LEAGUE. “We are aiming to industrialize for more employment opportunities and an active economy. We are in the process of establishing industrial zones for investments.”

In the works now are their bypass roads because they are developing an economic zone. “We are developing the area where Nestle Philippines is into an industrial zone. We are offering this to big players like SM and Megaworld,” she says.

But even with her vision of building an industrialized

municipality, the farming sector remains a top priority. She says it’s an advocacy that’s close to her heart, as she belongs to this sector.

“My dad is a farmer, his whole family, too. *Iyan din nakapagpatapos sa akin sa pag-aaral* [it was farming that sent me to school] and provided all my needs growing up. That is why I have a deeper understanding of how they live. I want to make a change in their lives, one farmer at a time,” she elucidates.

During the stint of her dad as mayor, he organized the San Manuel Farmers Association, which provided aid to the farmers. In her administration now, what she’d like to do is build a sustainable future for the farmers.

“We allot a huge chunk of our budget to help make their lives better. Whether it be educational, healthcare, employment, technical support, or infrastructure. Anything that could subsidize and





Mayor Tesoro's "Project Feed. Read. Lead," aims to mold children to be good leaders by supporting their health and literacy skills.

support their living. My dad and I want to empower this sector to be more educated, resilient, and sustainable," she says.

Tesoro says her masterplan for San Manuel is to boost both agricultural and industrial development to create more opportunities for their people. "With the right infrastructure projects in place, we hope to attract more investors and to become the logistics hub of the north," she says.

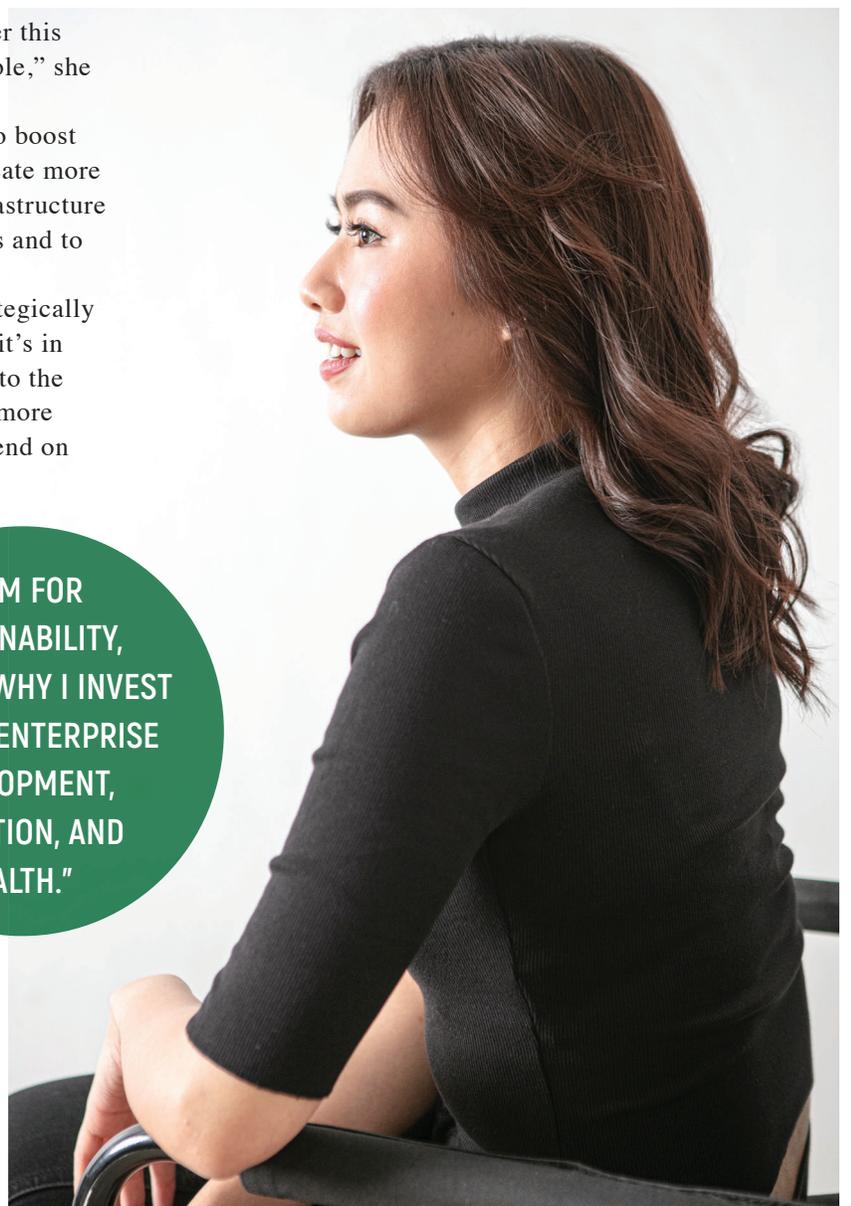
The mayor points out that their town being strategically located is a big plus. "If you look at it on the map it's in the middle of Central Luzon. It's the real gateway to the north. I promote it so much to investors, to create more opportunities for our locals so they won't just depend on farming, or working in cities or in Metro Manila. I dream that the time would come that my constituents won't have to leave because all the opportunities to live a good quality life are already in San Manuel."

#### STRIVING FOR CHANGE

The young leader has made a conscious effort to affect changes and improve systems to uphold an honest and more efficient public service.

"In our social programs, we've slowly eliminated the

"I AIM FOR SUSTAINABILITY, WHICH IS WHY I INVEST IN MICROENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT, EDUCATION, AND HEALTH."





to government workers in the barangay level such as the barangay police force and health workers. They have also allotted budget for indigent non-pension senior citizens.

Education has been a key priority, and prior to the pandemic, Tesoro has been addressing literacy issues by conducting reading classes for both the daycare and secondary students.

To cater to the growing number of students, they are in the process of fully establishing their national high school building, completing senior high school facilities, and rehabilitating daycare centers

*palakasan* system—meaning, everyone gets equal and fair chance in availing government support,” she mentions.

She hired people who are competent and qualified, and made sure to eliminate nepotism. “This has increased the competitiveness level of the LGU,” Tesoro points out.

For efficient governance, their projects and programs are based on consultations to match the needs of the community for efficient governance.

Her other programs are geared towards creating more jobs and decreasing poverty rate. For instance, her office has constantly supported micro, small and medium enterprises by way of microfinancing, provision of *negosyo* starter packages, trainings, and exhibits.

They are providing compensation



and existing primary schools. “This is also my father’s legacy. He established this during his term, now we’re already building it,” she says.

To ensure the health of their people, they have increased the budget for health to provide quality health services and facilities. They have established a Community Health Center, and purchased additional patient transport and rescue

vehicles.

To maintain peace and order, they have invested in capability development activities for all law enforcement agencies and the installation of CCTVs. “We are a drug-free municipality thanks to the collective effort of the barangays and the Philippine National Police,” she says with pride.

Her biggest dream for San Manuel is cityhood. “*Sana, bago*



*mawala ang family namin sa politika* (I'm hoping it happens before our family's term in politics is over)," she quips.

### **CALL FOR AGILE LEADERSHIP**

In recent months, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the good mayor has been on her toes personally attending to the needs of her constituents.

"Even before COVID-19, most of my time has been dedicated to providing the needs of my constituents. But it's even busier now because more people need help, not just the ones living below the poverty line," she admits. "And we're talking about their basic needs to survive because many had lost their jobs. And it is my duty to answer to their every need."

She's in the frontlines, giving away food packs and health kits, constantly informing the people about new ordinances and regulations, making sure that the health care workers are prepared to handle COVID-19 cases.

Tesoro made sure to prioritize the health of the frontliners (health workers and government workers) by providing them with personal protective equipment, food, and vitamins while they're on duty. "I was able to compensate all of our frontliners for their hard work," she says.

Through the creation of the COVID-19 Taskforce, they were able to efficiently coordinate with all essential agencies and offices to implement their COVID-19 measures.

"We were able to control movement and maintain our COVID-free status by strictly implementing one entry/exit roads, checkpoints at all borders, close monitoring of all PUMs and PUIs, and separating them all in different facilities. I was able to build two isolation facilities in a span of three

**SHE'S IN THE FRONTLINES, GIVING AWAY FOOD PACKS AND HEALTH KITS, CONSTANTLY INFORMING THE PEOPLE ABOUT NEW ORDINANCES AND REGULATIONS, MAKING SURE THAT THE HEALTH CARE WORKERS ARE PREPARED TO HANDLE COVID-19 CASES.**



months ever since the quarantine started," she informs LEAGUE.

In partnership with the Department of Agriculture, they were able to help the farmers by distributing seedlings for backyard gardening, fingerlings, palay seedlings and fertilizers to support their livelihood and to make up for their losses during the pandemic. She says they have a long list of recovery programs for their agriculture sector, which comprises 90 percent of the population in San Manuel.

They likewise provided emergency employment to those who had lost jobs, assisted locally stranded individuals going home, and provided their constituents' basic necessities such as food, vitamins, milk for the kids and the elderly, baby needs, and disinfectants etc.

Aside from the social amelioration and social pension from the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), they also released funds for

the allowances of their senior citizens.

To make sure the youth can cope with new education strategies, she made sure that there's free WiFi in all the barangays and there's a Tech4Ed Center, a research center with computers and WiFi connection for public use. She also granted scholarships to college students.

Boosting their municipality's tech capacity, the local government of San Manuel has also partnered with Smart to utilize the Smart Infocast platform. This enables them to send out SMS broadcasts to disseminate information to their constituents.

### MODERN GOVERNANCE

Being her father's protégé, some people think she lives in his shadow. But Tesoro insists that

this is not the case. "Now, he's really hands-off. *Halos wala na syang guidance sa mga ginagawa ko.* (He almost has no guidance in the conduct of my duties.)

It's because when he was mayor, I was already doing things for the municipality, so *hindi na rin ako masyadong nahirapan sa transition* (so I didn't have much difficulty with the transition)."

She's also thankful that the people of San Manuel—her constituents in the 15 barangays—have given her their full trust. "*Kasi dito na ako lumaki, tumanda.* (It's because I've grown here.) They had seen how professional I was at work and how effective I was; my productivity level is unquestionable," she quips.

Tesoro thinks there is a great advantage in being a millennial leader. "One of the advantages

is that I'm still young and I still have so many years ahead of me to learn and innovate," she says. "Having experienced working in both legislative and executive positions makes work smoother and more efficient because I already know the job like the back of my hand."

She also has a deeper understanding of modern governance. "Modern governance to me is the active participation of all key players in running the government. The relationship of the LGUs with head agencies and the private sector enables them to deliver bigger results to the people," she explains.

"Modern governance also makes use of the technological advancements for faster delivery of services, because every second matters. Technology is harnessed through the use of social media platforms to spread information, communicate with the people, and to show transparency," she adds.

Public service is not an easy job and it's not for everyone, she points out. "It takes a lot of sacrifice, courage and strength to deliver our promises to the people. I always tell my fellow government workers that we live for other people now, their concern is now our concern, and that our priority is to make their lives better."

She admits feeling pressured and challenged, holding a key government position at a young age. "But as somebody with this much energy, I shall use this opportunity to do more and prove that millennial mayors are very much capable, too," she declares.

Being a young leader, she wants to encourage the youth to have strong ideals and to have a strong conviction for change. "As long as there are youth who are hungry for change, we can keep the government clean and [the community] well-governed," she assures. |■

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# PRIMUS INTER PARES

*House Deputy Secretary General Brian Raymund Yamsuan talks about his journey to one of the most important posts in the House of Representatives.*

**BY GODFREY T. DANCEL  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY IVAN LLANETA**

*P*rimus inter pares, which means “first among equals,” is one of the many concepts House Deputy Secretary General (SecGen) Brian Raymund Yamsuan studied as a political science student at the Far Eastern University (FEU). Today, he is *primus inter pares* among the House of Representatives’ deputy secretaries general.

As Deputy SecGen under the Office of the Speaker, Yamsuan is an important cog in the day-to-day operations of Congress.

## **POSITION OF TRUST**

Not so many people are familiar with the role played by the Deputy SecGen under the Office of the Speaker. Simply put, the position is the House’s counterpart to the executive secretary in the executive department.

“The role of the Deputy SecGen is basically to take care of all the affairs of the Speaker. You see, there are different

deputy secretaries-general appointed in the House. There's one for legislation, financial administration, engineering.... They have specific roles," Yamsuan explains.

Yamsuan performs political, administrative, (eg. signing appointment papers and vouchers for the daily use of the office), as well as oversight functions. He also takes care of the Speaker's personal needs in the office, and even his relations with congressmen.

Yamsuan's position is, in a nutshell, a position of trust. It is also one that requires a high level of competence.

"It a very humbling position but at the same time it requires a lot of trust coming from the Speaker," Yamsuan stresses. "And it requires a lot of competence for you to be effective. *Kailangang may institutional knowledge ka rin ng lahat kasi mahirap magdesisyon for anything kung hindi mo rin naman alam.* For example, *itong problema ng [ABS-CBN] franchise and everything else. Kung hindi maayos 'yong communication ninyo, mag-bog down.* (You need to have institutional knowledge in order to come up with the right decisions. For example, this problem with the ABS-CBN franchise and everything else. Without proper communication, things will bog down.)"

### JOURNEY TO THE CORRIDORS OF POWER

Yamsuan has had a journey many could only dream of. It started in 1995 when he was still a student leader at the Far Eastern University. He received an invitation for a courtesy call with then Senate President Edgardo Angara. The Senate leader was really impressed after their exchange of ideas that he made an offer the young Yamsuan

could not refuse "*Hijo, interesado kang magtrabaho sa `kin?*" (Son, would you like to work with me?)"

"*So sabi ko nag-aaral pa ho ako e. Sabi niya, 'Di bale na, you can start.' So sabi ko, 'tapusin ko lang `tong sem ko then I'll start working with you.'* Mga few months before I graduated, *kinuha na niya ako.* September 1995 *noon, nag-start ako sa kanya. Tapos nag-graduate ako noong* October 1996 ("I told him I was still studying, but he said 'I could start.' I said 'I will just finish the sem and then I'll work with him.' He took me in September 1995. I graduated October 1996)," Yamsuan relates.

Angara's failed bid for the vice presidency in 1998 did not stop concerned Malacañang officials from noticing the best members of his group. One of them was Yamsuan.

Yamsuan became part of the Office of the Press Secretary (OPS), eventually becoming director for media affairs at Malacañang. He was 25.

"It was overwhelming for a young man like me," Yamsuan recalls. "Of course, you do not expect to be in the

halls of power just as early as that."

All of a sudden, Yamsuan's dream of playing an important role in politics had become real. "*Ang bilis e* (It happened so fast)," he enthuses.

Contrary to what the self-effacing leader claims, however, his mercurial rise was not at all unexpected. It was merit that brought him to where he was at a young age. His work ethic, competence, and ability to adapt to different situations made top government officials notice him. He also identifies people skills as a major strength. "I'm good at dealing with people. I'm good at dealing with the boss, also," he says. "*Kasi lahat naman ng utos nila and everything, nasusunod ko. So, maayos ang usapan namin.* (I am able to accomplish all tasks given to me, so everything turns out fine.)"

Yamsuan's success at the OPS led to other opportunities. He became chief of staff of Senator Tessie Aquino-Oreta at age 28, and Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) assistant



“ IF YOU ARE GOING TO ENGAGE IN POLITICS, DON'T DO IT HALF-HEARTEDLY. POLITICS IS REALLY VICIOUS. IT WILL NOT TREAT YOU WELL IF YOU'RE NOT READY FOR IT.”

secretary at the age of 31. After a brief hiatus, he returned to Malacañang under the Office of the Executive Secretary. He eventually found himself back in the legislative branch, this time at the Lower House.

### HOUSE LEADER AND PARTY LEADER

Along the way, Yamsuan has also become a major leader of a fast-rising national political party. He is—quite coincidentally—presently deputy secretary-general of the National Unity Party (NUP). The party has been around for a decade, but has only recently made it to the consciousness of many Filipinos.



48 LEAGUE

Since its inception in 2011, the NUP has steadily grown in number. From a lean 20 congressmen at the start of the 16th Congress, membership grew to about 35 in the 17th Congress. Earlier this year, membership in the House reached 61. Among its newest members are two deputy speakers and the chairperson of a major committee. The party also counts among its members a number of governors and vice governors, as well as dozens of city and municipal mayors.

As the NUP's membership in the House grew, so did its influence. “*Noong itinayo namin itong NUP, insip namin is to be part of the majority lang ng House, basically. Basta magkaroon lang ng parang prominent part sa Congress para at least magkaroon kami ng magandang bargaining power as part of the majority kasi syempre ang partido namin marami ring gustong i-push na legislation* (When we organized NUP, we basically just wanted to be part of the House majority. We wanted to have a good bargaining power because the party wants to push certain legislation),” Yamsuan reveals.

Yamsuan points to NUP members' closeness with Speaker Alan Peter Cayetano—an adopted member—and their recent adoption of Cong. Paolo “Pulong” Duterte as major reasons why NUP is now a formidable force in the House. “*Isa ring magandang aspect doon sa aming partido, first time kasi na 'yung Deputy SecGen, part din ng political party* (One good thing about our party is that this is the first time that the Deputy SecGen is also a member of a political party),” he points out.

Indeed, Yamsuan has been a stabilizing force in both the NUP and the House. His competence and quiet readiness to render service has served both organizations well.

### THE POLITICAL PERSON AS PERSONAL FRIEND

Yamsuan's experience as NUP deputy secgen, coupled with his personal closeness with the Speaker and congressmen has made it easier for him to perform his present role in Congress.

“*Magkakasama na kami through the years. I mean, 'yong iba may mga personal friendships pa ako. Kapag may mga issues kasi, as much as possible I try to be available to all of them. Especially those who need my help. Lalo sa mga ganitong access and everything. Syempre si Speaker hindi naman palaging available. Mahirap dahil*

*marami rin naman siyang inaasikaso. May district din siyang iniintindi. Saka hindi lang naman 'yong Congress, 'di ba? Marami rin naman siyang ibang engagement outside. (We've been together through the years, and I've developed personal friendships with some. When there are issues, as much as possible I try to be available to all of them, especially those who need my help. More so when it involves access to the Speaker. You see, the Speaker isn't always available. He gets really busy attending to his district, and he also has lots of other engagements outside Congress),” he shares.*

There are times, however, when he could not lend a hand due to certain constraints. This is when mutual respect based on years of personal relationships come in handy.

“I try to be real with them. [*Ginagamit*] ko 'yong people skills ko. *Kasi nga nakikita ko na kailangang sabihin ko sa kanila 'yong katotohanan.* And I also recommend to them *ano 'yong mga solusyon doon sa mga inilalapit nila.* ([I use] my people skills. I tell them the truth as I see it. I also recommend solutions to their concerns.) Most of them, I have previous relationships with, having been DILG Asec, having worked in Malacañang.”

Conversely, Yamsuan doesn't let his professional life come in the way of his personal relationships. “*Sa mga friends ko, 'yon 'yong lagi kong nire-remind.* I'm always available to them. *Hindi ako nagbabago kahit nasa posisyon ako. Tumawag sila, sasagutin ko sila. Humingi ng tulong, hangga't sa makakaya ko, tutulungan ko sila. Kaya siguro 'yong ganong attitude ko, ang nakatulong din sa `kin kaya wala akong masyadong problema ngayon. Hindi ako involved emotionally. Basta ako, trabaho lang, kumbaga.* (I remind my friends that I am always available to help them. Being in a position of power hasn't changed me. I will still take their calls, I will still help them the best I can. This attitude, being emotionally detached from my work, has served me well.)”

Yamsuan knows all too well that whatever power comes with his position is but fleeting. “I try to detach myself from the position every time I'm reminded by everybody how powerful I am, how powerful the office is,” Yamsuan states. “I always remind myself, this is but temporary. I'll make the most out of whatever time I have.”

## **REVOLUTIONIZING THE HOUSE**

Indeed, Yamsuan is making the most of his time at the House. Quietly but efficiently, he has helped the Speaker bring about changes in the House. Among these, Yamsuan stresses the Speaker's efforts to restore the dignity of Congress, and to ensure good relations with both the Senate

and the Cabinet. “The Lower House's relationship with the Cabinet and the Senate have become stronger, as the Speaker is a former Cabinet member and former senator,” he points out.

The affable House leader has also made it a point to uphold the Speaker's directive of making the Office of the Speaker accessible. “*Hindi na sarado 'yong office ng Speaker. Dati, ang hirap pumasok dyan e. Kung sino lang 'yong gustong ipatawag, 'yon lang ang nakakapunta. Kumbaga, pila ka. Hindi na ngayon.* (The office of the Speaker is no longer off-limits. Time was when only a select few had access to it. You had to fall in line. Not anymore.)”

Yamsuan also highlights their efforts to use modern technology to propagate awareness of what the House is doing. “The Speaker wants to bring Congress closer to the people via Facebook Live. Every speech, every event as much as possible, is broadcasted through Facebook Live. There are other changes we will implement once we have the budget. We want Congress wired so people could follow us electronically, just like what the US Congress has done through C-SPAN,” he reveals.

“At the same time, we want to go paperless [where possible],” Yamsuan adds. “We're in the process of formulating a proposal that would turn this into reality.” Instead of printing bills on piles of paper and dumping these on lawmakers' desks on the plenary hall, he would rather have electronic files sent to their tablets.

INDEED, YAMSUAN HAS BEEN A STABILIZING FORCE IN BOTH THE NUP AND THE HOUSE. HIS COMPETENCE AND QUIET READINESS TO RENDER SERVICE HAS SERVED BOTH ORGANIZATIONS WELL.

## A DREAM REALIZED, ADVICE TO DREAMERS

Asked about what he loves most about his job, Yamsuan has a straightforward answer. “*Ito ‘yong pangarap ko, eh, politika* (This is my dream, to engage in politics). I studied political science not just to graduate. I studied political science because I wanted to engage in politics and I’m lucky enough to have the opportunity to have this career where I am well-entrenched in the workings of the different branches of government. I have had the experience of working in the executive and legislative branches. *‘Di lang basta trabaho e.* I’ve been given ‘yong position of privilege *na makapagsilbi at makagawa ng*

*difference sa lahat ng pinupuntahan ko.* (It’s not just ordinary work. I’ve been given positions of privilege which I could use to serve and make a difference.)”

Just as his dream was realized, so does Yamsuan wish that those of others will also become real. As for students of politics who are considering entering politics. “*Kung papasok ng politika, hindi pwedeng half-hearted. Ang politika kasi napaka-vicious nito.* (If you are going to engage in politics, don’t do it half-heartedly. Politics is really vicious.) It will not treat you well if you’re not ready for it. There will be some bumps along the way. But at the end of the day, if it makes you happy, if you have the passion for it, and

you really love it, I think you should pursue it. But do it wholeheartedly and don’t be frustrated over things that will come along the way. Take these as lessons that will make you better in the future.”

## CHARTING THE FUTURE

As a young House official with loads of experience, Yamsuan has at many times been egged on to seek an elective post. Asked if he is now ready to serve Congress, this time as a lawmaker, Yamsuan references his favorite childhood superhero. “*Kita mo si Batman... Nasa Batcave lang siya. Lumalabas lang siya kapag kailangan. So ang sa `kin, ganun din ‘yong role ko dito sa Congress e.* Behind the scenes *lang ako pero kapag kailangan, lumalabas din ako.* So silent worker *ako, hindi ako ‘yong nakikita mong nasa labas, nakikita ng tao. Ako ‘yong nasa shadows lang. Si Batman laging nasa shadows e.* (Let’s look at Batman, who leaves the Batcave only when needed. I’m like that here in Congress. I work behind the scenes and come out only when needed. I’m a silent worker, always in the shadows just like Batman.)”

Still, he is not closing his doors on the possibility of running. “Politics is so unpredictable, so we’ll see,” he declares.

Teaching and writing a book or two are also among his options. “I’ve been witness to so many events in our country’s political history; things I could relay and elaborate on among those who’d like to listen. So I think teaching and writing are options,” he says.

Whatever path Yamsuan chooses to take, his achievements will speak for themselves, and he will again distinguish himself as *primus inter pares*. | ■



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# A WOMAN OF ACTION

BY CHIN ANN OBIEDO

PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
ROMEO PERALTA, JR.

*After making that big leap from serving as vice mayor to congresswoman, Shirlyn Bañas-Nogralles reflects on her own definition of leadership, the long and winding road that ultimately led her to her current position, and her big hopes for the First District of South Cotabato.*



When you're dubbed "*Libun Flehew Banwe*," which literally means a "woman that brings joy in the community," you must be quite the character. It may seem like a bold title to give, especially in today's political climate, but looking at First District of South Cotabato Congresswoman Shirlyn Legario-Bañas' impressive list of achievements, she has arguably more than earned the epithet.

Late in the afternoon, the congresswoman arrives on set, and immediately greets people, checking if they're well and comfortable. She apologizes for running a bit late and proceeds to thank everyone for patiently waiting for her. It's hard to take it against her as her presence is demanded by many, and sometimes meetings simply do overlap.

When asked to describe her daily routine to an outsider, she runs the incredibly long list of meetings, enumerating almost as if by habit. But when asked what she does in a day before all the chaos of the office, she gives a shy smile. "Well, I begin the day with a prayer. I take my breakfast, spend some time with my daughter, and then I will start with public functions.

"*Ang daming* functions, usually on all seven days of the week. Actually, when I wake up, *marami nang tao niyan sa bahay, marami nang nag-aantay*, so I have to talk to them." She sees to it that she's able to meet with each and every one of them. "*Ayaw kong umuwi sila na hindi ako nakakausap*. So *ganun* every day." In the evenings, she attends functions. "Then before I sleep, I study and study, and do some research."

“ SHIRLYN LETS HER WORK AS A PUBLIC SERVANT SPEAK FOR HER. WITH 12 YEARS AS A LEGISLATOR—THREE YEARS AS COUNCILOR AND NINE YEARS AS VICE MAYOR—AUTHORING A TOTAL OF 373 RESOLUTIONS AND 35 ORDINANCES UNDER HER BELT, IT'S EVIDENT THAT SHE LOVES HER WORK AND THE PEOPLE SUPPORT HER LEADERSHIP.

While most politicians are concerned with turning themselves into a household name and broadcasting their every move, Shirlyn lets her work as a public servant speak for her. With 12 years as a legislator—three years as councilor and nine years as vice mayor—authoring a total of 373 resolutions and 35 ordinances under her belt, it's evident that she loves her work and the people support her leadership. They trust her so much that she garnered 105,137 votes in 2013 when she ran for office, the highest number of votes garnered by a candidate in the history of the city.

### A FAMILY AFFAIR

It may be hard to imagine Shirlyn doing anything else other than being at a seat of service, but she actually took up BS Biology in University of the Philippines Mindanao.

Unlike most public servants who knew as soon as they could speak that they're born for this line of career, Shirlyn was reluctant to choose the path of politics early—even if it should have been second nature to her. She admits, "I really didn't have any plans of entering public service. I grew up in a political family: my uncle used to be an assemblyman and my father was a councilor, and we all lived in one compound.

"I had always known the cutthroat, competitive nature of politics and I didn't want that kind of environment, *kaya umiwas ako*." Her dad was insistent that she run for councilor after graduation, after his first term, "but I was very hesitant."

But eventually, she did answer the call to service and duty to country, and at 28 years old, was duly elected. "*Siguro doon din nagsimula ako na mag-isip na baka pwede ako dito*, because I enjoy serving the people. I love to be with people, especially the marginalized sectors." And now more than a decade after, she continues to be known for her compassionate projects and for nurturing the kind of work environment she wants to work in.

Among her many roles and responsibilities, Shirlyn is focused on promoting self-sustaining livelihood for residents in poor communities. She's created women's organizations and trainings on craftsmanship, pushed for education for the youth by developing the General Santos City Public Library, and is improving citizen participation in local legislation by upgrading the facilities of the Sanggunian by using tools like social media to reach the masses. She has also supported the efforts of the city government on environmental preservation, trade and tourism, and social welfare.

## A NEW ROLE

On November 4, 2019, Shirlyn took office as Congresswoman of the First District of South Cotabato. Although she admits it was an easy transition from being the city's vice mayor, the journey of getting elected was a big challenge. She recalls, "Tumultuous was really the word. I went through a lot during the election, but with God's grace and the support of my family and of the people, *talagang nalagpasan lahat*. And I'm really thankful."

During the campaign period, a bill seeking to make General Santos a separate congressional district was under consideration by Congress. "We were waiting for the law to be passed prior to the filing of certificate of candidacy, because if the law would be passed, then I would focus on General Santos." She filed her certificate of candidacy for the whole district, and started



campaigning. "Everything was really doing well, we had good ratings in the surveys even if it was my first time to run there." Unfortunately, in the midst of the campaign period, the law creating the lone district of General Santos was passed. The law made campaigning quite problematic in the sense that the title speaks of a lone district, but in the body, it's considered the third district of General Santos. "The city says that we are no longer part of the province of South Cotabato; we are an independent city, that's why we don't get to vote for governor, vice-governor, and board members. But under the new law, *ginawa 'yung General Santos na* third district of the province of South Cotabato, that's the problem."

But in the end it, all worked out, and she ultimately got the people's support even under the extraordinary circumstance. "There was a time when everything seemed so hopeless. But if there's something you really believe in, you fight for it."

Now in the position to do more for her countrymen, Shirlyn has not wasted any time. She immediately continued all the projects she started as vice mayor. She says, "In my nine years as vice mayor here in General Santos, we have already identified the problems that need legislation. For one, the problems in public schools, then the different policies with the different agencies, especially with the public lands. *Magkakaroon ng mga* land conflict and it becomes a hindrance to our development so that needs legislation. So *isa 'yun sa mga inaayos natin* and that is quite the challenge."

## MAKING TIES

With all that she has done for the community, one that is most notable perhaps is her work with indigenous people. "I was in high school and I was involved in many outreach programs and community service. I was doing it on my own and I really enjoyed doing it. I was 'adopted' by a certain IP community. *Dumadalaw ako*

“SHIRLYN IS FOCUSED ON PROMOTING SELF-SUSTAINING LIVELIHOOD FOR RESIDENTS IN POOR COMMUNITIES, PUSHING FOR EDUCATION FOR THE YOUTH BY DEVELOPING THE GENERAL SANTOS CITY PUBLIC LIBRARY, AND IS IMPROVING CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL LEGISLATION.

from time to time. We had outreach programs which I attended until I graduated and even in college, *binabalik-balikan ko pa rin sila*. Then, eventually, when I ran for councilor, *talagang lumago na 'yung community 'dun*. *'Dun ko unang nakita na, pwede pala, may pwede pala tayong magawa 'pag talagang natututukan natin.'*

Her experiences with and exposure to the common people stayed with her, and when the time came that she could do more good for them, she made it a point to create meaningful programs for them like educational assistance. "I introduced special scholarships *kasi nahihirapan silang mapasa 'yung mga exams nila*. Usually *kasi ang lalayo ng bahay nila sa school*. They have to walk far, so *alas tres pa lang ng umaga, lalakad na sila so pagdating doon, pagod na ang bata.*"

Shirlyn opened up more opportunities for them. "We also passed the ordinance for the mandatory representation of the IP in the council. They requested it for the chieftains. This really settled the disputes and concerns, *lalo na ang mga land problems*." She also wanted to preserve their rich traditions and heritage like traditional weaving. "We want to develop a system where we can assist them and create more livelihood programs for them. We really wanted to develop co-IP communities as early as now," she shares.

### CATCHING UP WITH THE TIMES

Even if Shirlyn is all about preserving and respecting traditions, she's not averse to improving and evolving her leadership style to suit the changing times. She makes it a point to listen to what her people have to say and take action based on that information. Even if that means using a contemporary approach to reach out to her constituents.

"The General Santos group in the social media platforms *ay napaka active*, so *nakikita ko sila; andiyan sila* for check and balance. *Kasi kami* as public officials, we see to it that we're on the right track. I value the opinion of the public. I see to it na *mayroong* platform where they can express their opinions and thoughts, so I'm happy *na involved din ang mga constituents dito sa social media*. In fact, there were ordinances that have been passed *na na 'yung proposal ay nanggaling sa mga submissions sa website and through Facebook*. So *pinag-aaralan talaga namin 'yung mga sina-submit doon.'*

In addition to using social platforms to connect with her people, she has also used the digital space to disseminate important information, which has proven critical in addressing the pandemic. She initiated the codification of laws and ordinances, so that they can be easily accessed by everyone. "One project that I am really pushing for *sa local government is 'yung codification ng kanilang law and ordinances, kasi napakaraming policies. Halos every week 'yung mga councilors (gumagawa) ng batas, nagpa-pile up na. Hindi na alam kung anong implementable or redundant kaya nahihirapan pagdating sa implementation*. My staff are ready to assist. Of course, I would be happy to assist also *'yung ating mga LGUs, particularly the local sanggunian.'*"

### LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE

For now the city is able to manage the cases of COVID-19, but if we're to overcome this crisis as a nation, we must all work together, she says. Shirlyn has many big plans for the city and the whole district. She believes in its potential and even though there are hurdles she has to cross, she and her team are working

"WE CANNOT CHANGE THE WORLD IMMEDIATELY, BUT MAYBE WE CAN START WITHIN OURSELVES AND THEN USE OUR INFLUENCE TO BETTER THE WORLD."

very hard to work around such to achieve their goals. "Aside from addressing the urgent needs of the pandemic, there are other projects that I want to introduce. We have a lot of developmental projects for this city and even in the other municipalities, and fortunately, *kahit papano, nahahanapan din ng paraan*. General Santos has a very strategic location. In fact, it's a gateway to the region. And we want to maximize the opportunities for Gen San, to see a more progressive community."

"*Isa sa mga main advocacies natin, lalo na 'yung developmental projects, it's really more focused on the environment.*"

It hasn't all been smooth sailing, but, as she perfectly puts it, small steps in the right direction are still steps forward. "'*Yun 'yung challenge as a public official. Minsan nakikita naman natin na people get frustrated with the government pero ang sa 'kin naman, wala naman akong nakikitang impossible*. We have different persuasions, different political affiliations, but, at the end of the day, *isa lang naman ang goal natin: to do what's best for the people*. So *'yun 'yung uniting factor*. It's what we do every day as an individual that will eventually affect the entire community. We cannot change the world immediately *kasi masyadong malaki*, but maybe we can start within ourselves and then use our influence to better the world." | 📌

# RISING ABOVE THE STORM

BY HELEN HERNANE

PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
ROMEO PERALTA JR.

*Clear foresight, realistic strategies,  
and constant consultation with  
various sectors allow Sablayan,  
Occidental Mindoro to overcome  
crises and challenges*

Home to the country's largest coral reef system and stunning beaches, Sablayan, Occidental Mindoro is an underwater haven. For a country with numerous globally-acclaimed islands and beaches, this little-known town is undoubtedly breathtaking.

It is, however, no stranger to predicament. Because the municipality faces the West Philippine Sea, it is often visited by typhoons. And Mayor Andres Dangelos, having been born and raised in Sablayan, is well aware of this fact.



Once a typhoon enters the Philippine area of responsibility and is expected to hit the town, a team is right away sent to the barangays on the seaside to evacuate the residents. Through their quick response, Sablayan is proud to report zero casualties in most cases of natural calamities.

With the yearly typhoons, the town provides financial aid and other forms of assistance to affected residents. DSWD Region IV's staff personally validate the houses that were destroyed by the typhoon and provide P30,000 worth of construction materials and additional funding for labor costs.

Dangeros points out though that this is just a short-term solution. The local government is currently in talks with coastal residents, especially those who live near the seaside, to relocate, in order to ensure their safety.

Safety of tourists is also a primary concern, especially since their top tourist location is the Apo Reef. The tourism office keeps a close eye on the town's waters, and so far, no tourism-related accidents have been reported.

Sablayan was scheduled to host the MIMAROPA Regional Athletic Association (MRAA) Meet 2020. But because of Typhoons Ursula and Tisoy, the Department of Education (DepEd) decided to move the event to a later date. It was good foresight as the typhoon later damaged the registration building, convention center, astrodome, wet market, and grand terminal. The Meet, including the Palarong Pambansa, which was also supposed to be in Occidental Mindoro, have since been cancelled indefinitely due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **FAITH AND RESILIENCE**

As of this writing, the number of COVID-19 cases and deaths in the Philippines continues to rise daily. It's been months since the start of the pandemic and Dangeros admits the situation has challenged his leadership.

"The long wait for government subsidies due to different constraints and the people's plea for urgency have greatly tested my patience as a leader. It has also taught me to be more resourceful and decisive. Most of all, the



situation increased my faith in the Almighty," he says.

The pandemic, however, seems far from over, so the local government continues to intensify its efforts to curb the spread of the virus. Dangeros shares that the planning sessions, emergency meeting and consultations with stakeholders have "made all the difference."

Different national agencies came together to set precautionary measures and protocols to manage the pandemic. These included the Department of Social Welfare and Development, National Food Authority, Philippine National Police, Bureau of Fire Protection, Philippine Coast Guard, and other branches of the military. The local agencies, on the other hand, included the Municipal Social Welfare and Development, Sangguniang Bayan, Municipal



Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office, and Municipal Health Office.

“The key to Sablayan’s successful fight against the pandemic is constant consultation with stakeholders,” Dangeros says, stressing the essential roles of social media and radio programs in spreading vital information.

The method may be effective, but there is still room for improvement. Dangeros believes the system can be improved by coming up with more realistic approaches. “Lockdowns are never effective if there are problems on food scarcity, congestion, and misinformation. Services can be improved if there are more issue-oriented frontliners and implementers,” he points out.

Should there be subsequent surges of infection, the local government is ready to implement new strategies. While mask-wearing, regular disinfection of common public spaces, and social distancing still remain, the LGU is also offering testing (both rapid and swab) and free shuttle services.

Helping the displaced, the LGU has also given subsidies to tricycle drivers while others were hired for *Oplan Sundo*. Senior citizens were also given SAP and farmers were given cash and seeds. Relief packs were distributed to PWDs and locally stranded individuals (LSIs).

Dangeros, however, suggests that there should be more concrete national plans, including more systematic information dissemination and consistent guidelines implementation. He adds that the government’s pandemic response will also improve if everyone will adhere to universally-implemented protocols.

“Violators should be penalized, regardless of rank and position in the community. There should not be any practice of selective justice. We heal as one and we obey as one,” stresses Dangeros.

But the mayor is grateful for the resilience of his local government and the people of Sablayan in the face of adversity. “It is indeed true that ‘when the going gets tough, the tough get going,’” he affirms.

### 118 YEARS AND MORE

Earlier this year, the Municipality of Sablayan celebrated their 118th founding anniversary. Thousands filled the astrodome and the plaza. Dangeros proudly shares that the multi-day celebration ended without trouble and he is hopeful that five years from now, Sablayan will vastly improve.

Multiple projects (infrastructure and such) are in the works that aim to improve the town and address major concerns. As an example, the mayor cited their flooding

problems, which were fixed by constructing large drainage canals, apart from regular de-clogging.

Another major problem is the flooding along Sabang River. The local government is coordinating with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) about the mangroves in the river. Dangeros also thanked Congresswoman Josephine Sato for the P38 million designated for flood protection.

While there are not many problems in their tourism sector, illegal fishing is a major issue in Apo Reef which is why a task force was put together to protect the waters.

Dangeros also shares that the local government provides seeds to farmers and Indigenous Peoples (IP). Sablayan has also maintained the peace and order in their town, having cleared barangays for drugs. This earned them a MADAC (Municipal Anti-Drug Abuse Council) Award.

Dangeros credits the cooperation between their local police and military, plus the efficient work of barangay

officials in implementing programs. Apprehended addicts or pushers are taken to the *Balai Silangan* where they undergo rehabilitation and trainings, and attend seminars.

Soon, four government agencies will establish a local branch in Sablayan: the National Bureau of Investigation (NBI), Philippine Regulatory Commission (PRC), Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), and Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA).

Every program Dangeros implement follows a simple acronym: MANDATO.

M – Manpower development, accountability, and people’s participation in governance

A – Advancement of rights, access to quality education, and well-preserved culture

N – Nutrition and wellness in all aspects and sectors of society

D – Development that is sustainable, disaster-resilient, and climate change-adaptive

A – Access to modern agriculture, opportunities enhancement for all

T – Tourism in well-managed ecosystems

O – Orderly, peaceful community and public safety 24/7

“ THERE SHOULD NOT BE ANY PRACTICE OF SELECTIVE JUSTICE. WE HEAL AS ONE AND WE OBEY AS ONE.”





### FROM THE GRASSROOTS

As someone who grew up as a farmer in the *barrio*, the mayor admits his life today as a politician is very different from what he was used to.

“I didn’t plan to be a public servant but maybe it is my mission to serve and help the people,” Dangeros says. “Actually, *wala nga akong hilig mamulitika kasi tulad ng sinabi ko, anak lang ako ng mahirap na ang kinabubuhay ay pagsasaka. Pero nung time na dumating ‘yung last day ng filing, maraming taong lumapit sakin at nag-offer sila na kumandidato ako* (Actually, I’m not interested in politics because like I’ve said before, I belong to a poor family that farms for a living. But the last day of filing came and plenty of people approached me and encouraged me to run [for politics]).”

Prior to becoming Vice Mayor, Dangeros worked in the Office of the Municipal Treasurer as a tax collector. He was working there for 10 years when the people approached



him to run for Vice Mayor. “I ran as an independent candidate and luckily, *nanalo po ako* with the help of farmers and *mga mangingisda* (I won with the help of farmers and fishermen),” he recalls.

Despite his initial reluctance, Dangeros has been pulled towards his destiny of leading the people of Sablayan. He began as Municipal Vice Mayor in 1988. After his term, he ran for Mayor but failed in his bid, and returned in the next elections as Vice Mayor.

He became Municipal Mayor from 1998 to 2001. Then from 2010 until 2019, he served as Vice Mayor before being elected as Mayor once again in 2019.

But it seems Dangeros has a deeper connection with the town’s politics. In 1913, Santiago Dangeros became one of the first Municipal presidents (as they were called before the title changed to “mayor”) of Sablayan. Despite their roots in politics, it took 70 years before another Dangeros led the town. When asked about the gap, Andres Dangeros simply

chalks it up to the family’s general lack of interest in politics.

Eventually the day came that he was urged by the people to run with the promise of their support and Dangeros ran with one simple motivation in mind. “*Syempre ang inisip ko ‘yung kapakanan ng mga tao* (Of course, then, I thought about the welfare of the people),” Dangeros divulges. “Although *mahirap lumaban at walang pera, eh awa ng Diyos naman,*

*naging successful naman tayo sa laban* (Although it was a difficult fight and we had no money, through God’s grace, we were successful).”

Despite the hurdles they are facing, things are looking bright for Sablayan. Following the mandate of Mayor Dangeros, the idyllic town will hopefully rise above this pandemic and preserve its reputation as Occidental Mindoro’s hidden paradise. |



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# LEADING AT THE RIGHT TIME

*The key to successful leadership: be the right person, in the right place, at the right time. It is a lesson that Barangay Captain Victor Emmanuel “Don-Don” S. Francisco Jr. of Barangay Namayan, Mandaluyong has taken to heart.*

**BY KRISTEL DACUMOS-LAGORZA  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY RENJIE TOLENTINO**

Now more than ever, as chairman elect, Francisco is confident to lead, embracing the opportunity he has so long waited for to finally serve his constituents and help them achieve a life that he envisions for himself and every Filipino. “I think what we all want is very simple—a good life, a secure home, and a positive future,” he shares in the vernacular.

The first-time barangay captain had first run for the position in 2002. “I was excited and ready to serve. But ultimately, it wasn’t time for me and I lost.” Disheartened but not defeated, Francisco didn’t let this setback dampen his spirit.

### TIME AS A TEACHER

Recalling the heartbreak of his first loss, he shares, “*Talo ako kasi masyado akong mapusok, bata pa ako. Yung kasabihan nga, malapot pa dugo ko. Pero natuto ako doon, so hinintay ko na lang talaga yung magandang timing. Hindi ako nagmadali.* (I lost because I was impatient, I was young. But I learned to trust the timing.)”

This was the same advice given to him by his mentor, Mayor Benhur Abalos Jr., the former chief of Mandaluyong and the son of former COMELEC chairman Benjamin Abalos. “*Sinabi sa akin ni Mayor, lahat ng bagay dito sa mundo nasa timing, so I just trusted him.*” Uplifted by his boss’ words, Francisco took cue to use this time to further develop his skills and learn from the seasoned public servant. (Francisco waited 16 years, and ran in 2018.)

“ONE OF MY GOALS FOR THE BARANGAY IS TO MAKE IT MORE SECURE, AND HELP IT THRIVE BY MAKING US MORE SELF-RELIANT. IT ENTAILS PRIORITIZING THE BUSINESSES AND LIVELIHOODS OF THE PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY FIRST.”



Francisco had worked with the mayor for over a decade, and holds him in high regard. “Even before Mayor Abalos entered into politics, when he was just a lawyer, I was already part of his team,” says Francisco. He had joined Abalos when the latter ran—and won—as Mandaluyong Councilor District 1 in 1995. (Mayor Abalos later served as congressman and mayor thereafter for another term.)

Under his mentor’s wing, Francisco gleaned great wisdom and patterned his own leadership style after Mayor Abalos’. “What I admire about him is that he’s *puro gawa, hindi salita. Saka matalino, so mahahasa ka talaga.* (He walks the talk. He’s smart and you’ll really be trained.)” Aside from being the mayor’s executive assistant, Francisco also headed the Anti Smoke Belching Unit (ASBU) of Mandaluyong City.

His patience, hard work, and determination paid off as Francisco finally won as punong barangay in 2018.

### A PLACE TO CALL HOME

A “true child of Namayan,” Francisco has simple but meaningful plans for his barangay, which has served as the



home of his family (mother’s side) for many generations.

Francisco shares that his family’s roots are deeply intertwined with the political history of the metro. His paternal grandfather, Augusto Francisco, served as congressman of the Fourth District of Manila in the late ‘50s and early ‘60s, while his other grandfather served as punong barangay in the ‘80s. Francisco followed in their footsteps, and became SK Chairman in Namayan from 1992 to 1996, which began his foray into local politics.

Having assumed office in 2018, Francisco is using his term to quickly make up for lost time. There are over 7,100 households in Barangay Namayan and over 5,000 registered voters, who inhabit the estimated 30 hectares of prime property in Mandaluyong.

### SUPPORT AND SUCCESS

Francisco is proud to share that most of the basic services and amenities for the barangay have already been established, and so his greater goal is to further improve services and help his citizens achieve a better quality of life. “As part of the LGU, it’s our responsibility to ensure that they have all the support and the access to services to achieve all these,” he quips.



In his time in office, Francisco is proud to have secured their own ambulance for the barangay, making them first in Mandaluyong to have acquired one using their own taxes. In addition, Barangay Namayan has installed 35 new CCTV cameras (bringing their total to 60) throughout the community. This technology, enabled with facial recognition, allows the LGU to keep a closer eye on the community and increase security. For the convenience of its residents, the barangay also launched the BRIC (Barangay Residents Identification Card) program, which (aside from serving as a valid resident’s ID) offers numerous perks and incentives from partner merchants.

But one of Francisco’s most proud initiatives is the barangay playground. It’s a simple, yet beautiful playground with brightly colored play sets and modest grounds for running. This holds a particular place in his heart, because he has an affinity with kids. “I remember my own childhood, and I want those happy memories for them, too,” says the father. “*Gusto ko nandito sila lagi*. Actually, *walang ibang mayroong katulad ng park ko* out of the 27 barangays in Mandaluyong. *Kami lang ang meron.*”

Another one of his unique barangay initiatives is the anti-cellphone ordinance for kids. Social media, he asserts, takes a toll on young minds, and so like most





parents, he urges kids to lessen their time on their phones. They've actually recently just held another hearing to further discuss the use of this ordinance. "But essentially, kids 12 years and below are not allowed to use the cellphone outside of their homes. This barangay ordinance, he shares, may be the first and only implemented in the metro, or even the whole country.

**"AKO, AS A LEADER, I DO NOT LOVE MY POSITION. I CAN CLEARLY STATE THAT I DON'T LOVE THE POSITION. HOWEVER, WHAT I LOVE AND HAVE PASSION FOR IS PUBLIC SERVICE. SERVICE BEYOND EXPECTATION—THAT IS MY BATTLECRY."**

### NAMAYAN FIRST

"One of my other goals for the barangay is to make it more secure, and help it thrive by making it more self-reliant." What does this mean? he says. "It entails prioritizing the businesses and livelihoods of the people in the community first. I believe that the funds of Namayan should be spent on the people, and not be given to outside contractors." For example, if the barangay needs uniforms made, instead of looking to hire outside, they always check if there are those in the barangay who can provide and fulfill their requirements. "We believe in taking care of own people first," he says.

And this he has taken further to heart as the barangay adjusts to the new threats brought about COVID-19. As the country braces for more cases, Francisco and his barangay are getting ready.

He's proud to share that they were one of the first barangays to mobilize quickly, preparing face

masks and alcohol as early as January to ensure the safety of their community. But he does recognize that this is not enough, even with the strict implementation of social distancing and local lockdowns.

As part of the barangay's strategy moving forward into life in the "new normal," Francisco underlines the need to build trust through transparency. "I've told my people to be transparent *sa mga tao rito* about everything that is being done by the government. It is important that we lead by example and show discipline, to abide by the law and the ordinances. *Hindi pwedeng hindi ka sumusunod.*"

If there is a silver lining to this crisis, Francisco says that it has brought the community closer together, working together as one. "In addition, as I have said a lot of times, this pandemic will test your strength of character as a leader.

"This will make or break you whether you're the president or a humble SK chairman. People seek



your help, leadership, and service, and so you cannot be passive," he says.

And for Francisco, he is rising to the challenge, giving his all in safeguarding the health and well-being of his barangay.

"What this pandemic has taught me is that you must love what you do. *Ako*, as a leader, I do not love my position. I can clearly state that I don't love the position. However, what I love and have passion for is public service. Service beyond expectation— that is my battlecry." |

GROOMING BY TOTANES ONING



Photo by: Herbert Hernanez



# EDUCATION UNDER THE 'NEW NORMAL'

*Despite the hurdles and challenges brought about by the pandemic, the Department of Education (DepEd) is trying its best to ensure that no student will be left behind*

BY LAKAMBINI BAUTISTA

**H**ow students can continue their education amid the pandemic is one of the most perplexing problems that the various agencies of our government, especially the Department of Education (DepEd), need to address this year.

With the economic slump and thousands of Filipinos who had lost their jobs, can parents still afford to send their children to school? It is deemed too risky to have the students engage in face-to-face learning. And are students and teachers ready for alternative education modalities? Do we have enough resources to carry out the alternative solutions?

## THE PANDEMIC'S IMPACT ON THE ECONOMY

At the online press conference of *Oplan Balik Eskwela*, held last July 8, Education Secretary Leonor Magtolis Briones admitted that the economic downturn has significantly impacted the education sector. She noted that the hardest hit are the private schools.

*"Nasa 75,000 ang Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) nating magsisiuwian, halos lahat sa kanila pag-uwi walang trabaho, at marami sa mga anak nila ay nag-aaral sa private schools,"* she pointed out. *"May mga professionals din na nawalan ng trabaho o lumiit ang kita na nagpapaaral ng anak nila sa private schools."*

In an interview with PTV News, DepEd Undersecretary Jesus L. R. Mateo said that there are 305,000 students from private schools who have transferred to public schools. *"Dati nag-warn ako na ang mga private school teachers, nagma-migrate na sa public schools—that was four years ago. Ngayon, the learners are also migrating to the public schools,"* said Sec. Briones.

Nevertheless, the DepEd chief is optimistic that if the economy is opened, if jobs are restored, and people start working again, parents will have the confidence to enroll their children again in private schools.

## WORKING HAND-IN-HAND

There is no problem too big if everyone will do their share in providing solutions. Through the valiant efforts of DepEd, under the tutelage of Secretary Briones, and the

support and cooperation of various government and non-government agencies, classes can finally begin on October 5.

The July 22 data shared by the DepEd shows that the total number of enrollees in public and private schools for school year 2020 to 2021 has reached 21,844,452. Ninety-one percent of the public school students from the last school year have enrolled for the incoming school year, while 20,583,109 learners have enrolled in public schools and 1,231,273 learners have enrolled in private schools.

“Are we ready? *Palagi na lang tinatanong yan.* Right now, *naghahanda pa kami,*” shared Sec. Briones at the online press conference.

“More than 20 partners *ang nag-offer ng kanilang mga tulong.* It’s so heartwarming and so touching to hear so many institutions, in addition to individuals, who are helping us out. In fact, *sobra-sobra ang offers especially pagdating sa Blended Education,*” she said.

She recognizes that it won’t reach a point where DepEd will be totally ready because once they have responded to a particular need, she knows for sure that there will be other needs that need to be addressed.

“MORE THAN 20 PARTNERS  
ANG NAG-OFFER NG  
KANILANG MGA TULONG. IT’S  
SO HEARTWARMING AND SO TOUCHING  
TO HEAR SO MANY INSTITUTIONS, IN  
ADDITION TO INDIVIDUALS, WHO ARE  
HELPING US OUT.”



### STRENGTHENING SYNERGY

According to Undersecretary for Legislative Affairs, External Partnerships and Project Management Service Tonisito M.C. Umali, DepEd has reconfigured its Brigada Eskwela to focus on partnership activities to support the implementation of the basic education learning continuity plan (BE-LCP).

At the National Brigada kickoff last June 1, they presented the new face of Brigada Eskwela, followed



by regional kickoff activities and webinars participated in by partner organizations, parents and volunteers, teachers and learners.

World Vision is helping through its “Abutin Na10” campaign, which aims to raise funds to support DepEd in the implementation of Learning Continuity Plan (LCP), particularly in the printing of self-learning materials and the procurement of gadgets to support LCP’s distance learning and home schooling modalities.

PLDT and Smart Communications are fully supporting DepEd’s Blended Learning strategy to allow students to learn via online, on-air broadcast, and offline settings. Working with them in this undertaking are ePLDT, Gabay Guro, PLDT Smart Foundation, Cignal TV, and TV5.

“We will provide not only connectivity but also digital technology, learning strategies, and quality locally-developed educational content,” said Mon Isberto, public affairs head of PLDT and its subsidiary, Smart.

Smartphone users can have free access to the DepEd Commons, an online educational resource for both learners and teachers.

The telecommunications companies are also helping to provide the Dynamic Learning Program (DLP) training to

teachers. Devised by two Filipino physicists, DLP enables students to study effectively using learning activity sheets. Under this, classes or learning sessions can be done online, through broadcast (radio and TV), and using printed materials distributed to students. “It is low budget and requires minimal parental supervision,” noted Isberto.

In lieu of face-to-face learning, they have provided portable digital classrooms called “Smart School in a Bag” for the use of both teachers and students. “The tablets are pre-loaded with learning content. This is designed for schools in remote locations such as upland communities and schools in remote islands,” he said.

In cooperation with local content partners, Smart has also developed the #LearnSmart Literacy App to help young children develop literacy (learn how to read and write) and numeracy (how to count) in engaging and interactive ways. These can be downloaded for free on Google apps.

Similarly, Globe Telecom is also zero-rating the access to DepEd Commons for Globe and TM subscribers.

They are also providing learners with hundreds of free e-books and e-learning videos for students and teachers to enjoy through the Globe eLibrary, a web and mobile app platform. To promote safety and security, etiquette and responsibility, online critical thinking, digital empowerment, Globe is also providing training on responsible online behavior. Alongside this is the e-skwela, a free webinar on learning technologies integration in schools during the COVID-19 crisis.

“**THROUGH THE GOVERNMENT RADIO AND TV CHANNELS, DEPED TARGETS TO REACH 18 MILLION PUBLIC SCHOOL LEARNERS OF K-12,” –PCOO UNDERSECRETARY GEORGE APACIBLE**

## HELP FROM GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

The Presidential Communications Operations Office (PCOO) will be utilizing its attached agencies— Intercontinental Broadcasting Corporation (IBC) and Philippine Broadcasting Service (PBS)— to broadcast the education curriculum across the country.

Through the government radio and TV channels, DepEd targets to reach 18 million public school learners of K-12, said PCOO Undersecretary George Apacible.

The Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) is also fully supporting DepEd's Oplan Balik Eskwela as per DILG memorandum circular 2020-096.

According to DILG Undersecretary Jonathan Malaya, the local chief executives are enjoined to provide assistance in the enrollment activities such as the provision of kiosks or centers in their barangays for the distribution and collection of enrollment forms of learners in public schools in their respective areas.

The LGUs are directed to provide/donate laptops, desktops, tablet PCs, tablets, smartphones, internet services and other learning resources to public schools, teachers, and/or students. They are also requested to assist the schools under their jurisdiction in the delivery and collection of printed modules to the homes of the students upon request of school authorities.

The Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH), for their part, is assisting in the disinfection of schools and its surroundings and repair of wash areas, painting of pedestrian lanes near/ fronting the schools, de-clogging of drainage, cleaning of manholes, repairing of entrance gate, dilapidated chairs and classroom ceilings, trimming of trees, and fixing of electrical facilities.

## PREPARING FOR THE 'NEW NORMAL'

DepEd has extended its Oplan Balik Eskwela (OBE) to address the problems, queries, and other concerns that are commonly encountered by the public at the



Photos by: Romeo Medina



start of the school year. This is also to ensure that students are properly enrolled and are able to attend school by the first day of classes.

For the duration of the OBE initiative, Public Assistance Command Centers (PACC) will be set up at the central, regional, and schools division offices nationwide.

In partnership with BE, the OBE, headed by Usec. Mateo, will focus on an information campaign on the implementation of the LCP of the Department in light of the COVID-19 situation in the country.

OBE will ensure that every question from parents and learners in relation to new and adjusted DepEd policies, rules, and regulations on enrolment and class opening due to the COVID-19 situation will be addressed. |

*For queries and clarifications regarding the enrolment and other initiatives of the Department for the upcoming school year, you may visit [www.deped.gov.ph/obe-be](http://www.deped.gov.ph/obe-be) for frequently asked questions about SY 2020-2021.*

# THE ANTI-TERROR LAW

## A Question of Trust and Confidence

BY HERMAN JOSEPH S. KRAFT

*If the Anti-Terror Law (ATL) is the government's preferred instrument for fighting terrorism, then it better start working on securing the public's trust and confidence to get the people to support it.*

**O**n July 3, 2020, President Rodrigo Duterte signed the Anti-Terror Bill into Law. It was intended to amend and repeal Republic Act No. 9372, or the Human Security Act of 2007, and to respond to what had been pointed out was an injunction by the United Nations to strengthen laws against terrorism.

As Sen. Panfilo Lacson, one of its authors, had pointed out, Republic Act 11479 (The Anti-Terror Act) gave the Filipino people the assurance “of a law that allows the Philippines to mount the needed strong response against the threat of terrorism.”

To be sure, the country does require a law that addresses the question of government action to counter terrorism. The Human Security Act of 2007 is supposed to be the legal instrument that empowers government agents in securing the country and its people against terrorist acts and terrorists. It has hardly been used, however, primarily because of the stringent provisions that punish wrongful arrests.

Law enforcers instead charge suspected terrorists of crimes under the criminal code, which parallel the crimes in the Human Security Act (HSA) but have lesser penalties. In that way they are not subject to the possible heavy punitive measures that are present in the HSA in the event that their investigation and the evidence they have are found insufficient to make the charges stick. For this reason, the HSA has been largely inutile.

The new Anti-Terror Law (ATL) does not have these same measures against wrongful arrests. In signing the Bill into a Law, President Duterte

**HOW CAN FILIPINOS BEING CALLED UPON TO PROVIDE A CHECK AGAINST ABUSES DO SO WITHOUT FEAR OF THE CHARGES BEING TURNED ON THEM INSTEAD? CAN THE FILIPINO PUBLIC FEEL CONFIDENT THAT THEIR PERFORMING WHAT IS SUPPOSED TO BE THEIR CIVIC DUTY WILL NOT LEAD TO THEIR BEING CHARGED WITH TERRORISM BY PUBLIC AUTHORITIES?**

ended the speculation that had people abuzz regarding what would happen with the proposed law.

Different statements have been published against the Bill, urging the President not to proceed with its signing. These statements came from different sectors. For the most part, the issues revolved around how much the Bill could be subject to violations of the Constitution, and abuse in interpretation that would lead to violations of human rights.

### ARGUMENTS AGAINST ATC

There are a number of points of contention. One that has attracted particular attention is the issue of arrest and detention under Section 29 of the Law. The Law gives the responsibility for overseeing its operation to an Anti-Terror Council (ATC).

Section 29 specifically gives the ATC the power to order the detention of anybody *suspected* of committing any of the acts defined in previous sections of constituting terrorism. The period of detention could be from anywhere between 14 to 24 days. Critics including former Associate Justice of the Supreme

Court Antonio Carpio and members of different legal organizations have decried it as being unconstitutional. The Constitution stipulates that only the judiciary can issue warrants of arrest.

A more fundamental concern that has been expressed in general is how State agents could play fast and loose with interpretations of the provisions of the ATL in their zeal to fight terrorism in the country.

The HSA safeguarded against such abuses by imposing penalties against wrongful arrests made under its aegis. The ATL does not have these same “safeguards” and, at the same time, seems to loosen the scope for its application. These include very fundamental questions about what constitutes a terror act, what is a terrorist organization, and who is a terrorist.

Sen. Lacson had responded to these criticisms by claiming that these were the outcome of a lack of careful reading of the Law. He insisted that the ATL already has the safeguards necessary to protect the human rights of suspected terrorists. Even beyond these safeguards, Sen. Lacson himself promised to personally see to it that there will not be abuses in the implementation of the Law.

Nonetheless, Sen. Lacson has also held that the responsibility for ensuring that the Law is implemented properly lie with the people themselves—that their vigilance should make sure that this is ultimately about going after terrorists, *and not anybody else*. It is his contention, however, that this responsibility should be exercised using the proper channels

in accordance with officially prescribed guidelines and rules.

This is precisely the problem. That ensuring the proper operation of the law requires the active involvement of the people is a fair point. That this active involvement, however, has to operate within parameters defined by those in power creates the scope within which the government could interpret the provisions of the Law in ways that could be detrimental to the public.

In fact, Sen. Lacson himself may have unintentionally exposed the danger of being critical of the government. He posted a response to the criticisms made by Associate Justice Carpio that seemed to point out that those speaking out against the ATL could be involved in disinformation campaigns to discredit the Law in the eyes of the public. How can Filipinos being called upon to provide a check

against abuses do so without fear of the charges being turned on them instead? In other words, can the Filipino public feel confident that their performing what is supposed to be their civic duty will not lead to their being charged with terrorism by public authorities?

### TRUST ISSUES

No less ironic is the fact that the same factor that made law enforcers hesitate (and in fact largely disregard) charging anyone using the HSA is the same factor that people are critical of the ATL—a lack of confidence and trust in the system.

No matter how many safeguards are in place, this does not ensure public confidence. This is not about doing the right thing in the right way, and knowing that one did not do anything wrong. Rather this is just about how much confidence Filipinos have in their political institutions.



ILLUSTRATION BY LUCIANO RAMIREZ

Philippine politics is so personalized that public perception and appreciation of institutions depends on who it is that people associate with that institution. In the case of the ATL, for all that Sen. Lacson has been at the forefront of responding to criticisms, it is the President who is largely responsible for how the public looks at the Law.

In this context, the questions about the ATL arise from how President Duterte has asserted and imposed his persona on how the ATL is projected upon the public. The ATL is about protecting the public from terror acts and terrorists.

**NO MATTER HOW MANY SAFEGUARDS ARE IN PLACE, THIS DOES NOT ENSURE PUBLIC CONFIDENCE. THIS IS NOT ABOUT DOING THE RIGHT THING IN THE RIGHT WAY, AND KNOWING THAT ONE DID NOT DO ANYTHING WRONG. RATHER THIS IS JUST ABOUT HOW MUCH CONFIDENCE FILIPINOS HAVE IN THEIR POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS.**

The President, however, has bandied it about like a club to bludgeon the public with threats against going up against the government. Instead of presenting it as an instrument with which to reassure the people against threats, the President has in his inimitable way chooses to speak threateningly against the “enemies” of the state, whether these be drug lords or Left-wing organizations.

One of the underlying sub-texts of Sen. Lacson’s defense of the ATL is for the Filipino public to trust those institutions that will be responsible for its enforcement. Yet, the Duterte Administration has behaved in ways where the trust

levels of political institutions have been further compromised by the President’s tendency to cherry pick how laws are to be observed (not to speak of which ones are to be observed).

His propensity to absorb blame for the actions of government agents effectively absolves them of any wrongdoing. This is particularly true of the Philippine National Police (PNP). The case of Police Major General Debold Sinas and the tradition of the *mañanita* illustrate this Presidential favoritism.

His statement of the “law is the law” is balanced against his personal need for the services of the man, and so “*Akin na yon.*” Taking responsibility for the actions of his subordinates with no corrective measures undertaken does nothing to strengthen public confidence in how laws are going to be implemented. In the case of the ATL, a significant part of the public’s uncertainty stems from distrust of the state agents responsible for its enforcement.

**READING BETWEEN THE LINES**

Public perception is not helped by the fact of instances where public statements made by officials have seemed to indicate a case of policy overreach.

The newly installed Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Lieutenant General Gilbert Gapay suggested that social media be regulated under the ATL. The ATL itself does not have any provisions that specifically address this issue, but General Gapay intimated that this could be included in the Implementing Rules and Regulation being drafted for the Law.

The statement was quickly assailed by different voices. Even Sen. Lacson had to pull back the

statement claiming that it was “ill-advised.” These kinds of statements and declarations only build up the impression that agencies that may be tasked with implementing the ATL seem to be quick on the trigger. Yet, the President himself contributes to this impression.

In the days following his signing of the ATL, President Duterte declared that the Communist Party of the Philippines and its armed wing, the New People’s Army, were terrorist organizations.

Again, Sen. Lacson had to reel the statement in. The President is not authorized to designate anyone as a terrorist organization under the new Anti-Terror Law. Under the Law this power is given to the Court of Appeals or the ATC.

Even Sen. Ronald “Bato” Dela Rosa had to clarify that declaration made by the President is a personal opinion and not an official one. The ATC, however, is made up of members of the President’s Cabinet as ex officio members and others designated by the President. These kinds of declarations by the President could just as easily be construed as orders especially in an Administration where a significant number of officials are former military officials.

The ATL could very well be a law needed to secure the country against terrorism. Whether the public is willing to accept this remains on the balance. The issue for the Duterte Administration is to start looking at the public as a partner in counter-terrorism and not as the object of threats. If the ATL is its preferred instrument for fighting terrorism, then it had better start working on securing the public’s trust and confidence in order to get them to support it. | ■

*Herman Joseph S. Kraft is a Professor of Political Science and currently the Chair of the Department of Political Science at the University of the Philippines in Diliman.*

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PHOTO BY BASILIO SEPE

## THE ANTI-TERRORISM ACT OF 2020

"Looks good on the surface. My only concern is, yes, [the implementers] keep the peace and bad guys in check. But who's doing the checks and balances? Recent events and certain people are enough to realize that justice is usually selective in a country such as ours. There's not really much stopping them from branding the opposition as 'dissidents' if they wanted to."

- Eldridge Jon Famorcan

**"A much-needed law for the security and safety of law-abiding citizens against the unscrupulous ones."**

- Don Christian Galias

**"Security of the people must not be sacrificed in the name of democratic freedom. I support [the] Anti-Terror Law."** - Angelo

"This law is needed here in our country, regardless [of] this pandemic. To secure the lives and safety of every Filipino. Those people who are against this law must be guilty enough and they're close-minded to know what is the real purpose of this Anti-Terrorism Act."

- Kolin Chaira Ampong

**"Don't be afraid if you're not a terrorist. That's what anti-terrorism means!"**

- Emmie D. Fulay

**"Para ma-identiyang laban sa government."** - Romeo Gonzales Mojica

**"Maganda yan para sa mga asungot na wala ng naitutulong sa bayan. Puro na lang angal at batikos. Gumagawa pa ng kaguluhan at nagmi-mislead sa taong bayan para sa sariling agenda nila."** - Tony Tandingan

"VAGUE DEFINITION OF TERRORISM STATED BY THE LAW. THE LARGER SCOPE MEANS PINAPALAWAK YUNG PANGIL LABAN SA TERRORISTS THAT CAN AFFECT OUR INNOCENT CITIZENS. THE LAW NEEDS REVISION AND NEEDS TO BE BETTER." - Robert

**"Lawbreakers oppose the Anti-Terrorism Act. Paranoids fear it."** - Daniel Antiojo

*"Bakit ka matatakot kung wala ka namang ginagawang masama, di ba? Look at the brighter side, ang bill na yan [ay] para sa mga gustong magbalak nang masama sa bansa. Sa mga abusado, sa mga feeling self-entitled, sa mga feeling nila na sila lang ang apektado, sa mga NPA, sa mga recruiter ng NPA."* - Gibo Piao

**"Definition of terrorism is too vague. They need to revise or dispose that law. And according to ATL, you can arrest a person thru mere suspicion. They need to be proven first before they can conduct an arrest. Warrantless arrests [can only be used] when you get caught in the act of committing a crime."** - Derek Gomez

*"Maraming Pilipino ang may gusto sa batas [na] Anti-Terrorism Bill. Ako, gusto ko ang batas na ito. Isa lang akong tahimik na mamamayan na gustong makatulong sa kapwa ko. Walang pumilit o nagbayad sa akin para mag-rally. Salamat, Pangulong Duterte sa pag-apruba sa batas na ito."* - Benjamin Bracamante

**"You can't just run around and justify all your bills in the name of peace and order. We're not a communist state. We should put democratic bases [such as] due process on top of our hierarchy of values and principles. Warrantless arrest and unconsented surveillance based on vague, overly-broad criteria are not democratic principles and certainly not a good precedent and standard in making future laws."** - Charles King

**"Activism is not terrorism."** - Arn Andraneda

**"IT CAN BE USED BY BAD PEOPLE AGAINST GOOD PEOPLE IF BAD PEOPLE ARE RULING."** - David McClellan

*"It's terrifying since anyone can be falsely accused as a suspect without due process and be put behind bars for a long period. It has no provision for compensation either if wrongfully accused."* - Vic Cortes

*"[Isa itong] batas na ipinasa o pinilit ipasa at niratipikahan nang may mga probisyong kalihis sa Revised Penal Code at mismong konstitusyon. Dapat ibasura."* - Ronel Dimaya Cana

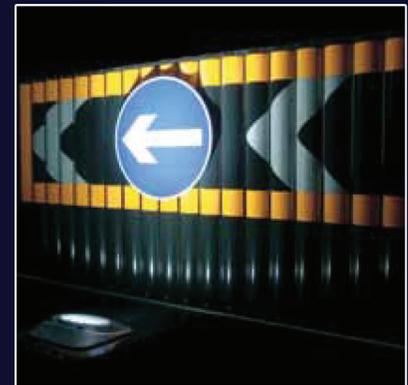
**"If you say it is a law that is very prone to abuse, then my argument is 'give me a law that isn't abused yet?' If so, all laws are very prone to abuse. It's time to put an end to private armed groups, rebels, or any kind of group that carries weapons, threatens, or incites violence against people in the country. We are the only country that legalizes armed groups, rebels, or terrorists. [Anti-Terrorism Law] could give our government power to crack down on these terrorist networks."** - Helmut Tito Cadorna

**"The Anti-Terrorism Act should have been implemented when this pandemic is over and everyone is back to their normal lives. It should've also made it clear from the start that the people who exercise their right to voice out in a public place are safe. It should've also indicated that there shall be no arrests made until enough evidence is gathered. This act will endanger lives rather than protect them."** - Jerome Lester Vegafria

**"JAIL THEM ALL IF THEY BREAK THE LAW, ASAP, AND NOW."** - Romel Santos

*"A good law, but could be better. May mga section kasi na hindi pabor sa biktima ng wrongful arrest. Gaya ng walang babayaran ang gobyerno sa ilalim ng batas na ito bilang danyos sa napagbintangan lamang. Masyadong malawak ang kahulugan ng salitang terorista na halos lahat pwede na sabihing terorista."* - Billy Bellon

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