

Sustainable Partnerships for City Development

Prepared by Jesse M. Robredo, City Mayor, City Government of Naga, for the Cities Alliance Public Policy Forum on December 10, 2001 at Kolkata, India.

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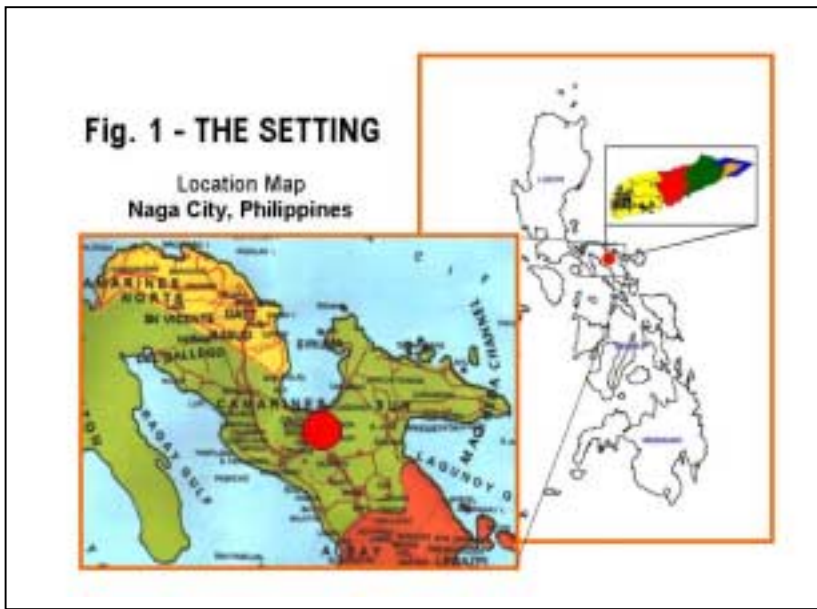
The Philippines is widely recognized to be in the forefront of “localization.” This is pursuant to the mandate of the 1987 Philippine Constitution which has embraced local autonomy and decentralization as a development strategy.

Interestingly, the World Bank agrees with this direction. In its recent World Development Report, the bank said “localization” and the new global economy could either revolutionize prospects for economic and human development or lead to increased political chaos, strife and suffering.”

Over the last 12 years, Naga City is proud to have made significant strides in urban governance in the context of local autonomy and decentralization.

Significantly, some of them were achieved even before Congress enacted the Local Government Code of 1991 (LGC), the enabling law for the “localization” policy.

My presentation will focus on our urban governance model anchored on partnerships and participation.



THE SETTING

A riverine city in southern Luzon, Naga is located in the province of Camarines Sur, between 13 to 14° North Latitude and 123 to 124° East Longitude. It is about

450 kms south of Manila and about 100 kms north of Legazpi City. (See Fig. 1.)

As a city, Naga is one of the country’s oldest. Originally called Ciudad de Nueva Caceres, it was one of the five cities created by royal Spanish decree in the late 16th century.

The “Heart of Bicol,” Naga has established itself as the religious, educational and business center of Bicol, one of the country’s 15 administrative regions. Since the Spanish era, the city has served as seat of the Archdiocese of Nueva Caceres which oversees the Roman Catholic hierarchy of the whole region.

It is home to two of the country’s oldest colleges—the Holy Rosary Minor Seminary founded in 1793 and Colegio de Sta. Isabel (now Universidad de Sta. Isabel), the first normal school for women in the Orient, founded in 1868.

Naga in a nutshell

Population (2000)	140,325
Number of households	25,986
Per capita gross city product (1998)	US\$1,953
Average annual family income	US\$4,620
Poverty incidence	29%

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WHAT IT IS NOT

Naga is medium-sized, not big. Of the over 100 Philippine cities today, Naga is the 44th biggest in terms of land area and 38th in terms of population. Its 77.5-sq. kms territory pales in comparison with Davao and Puerto Princesa, the Philippines' two biggest whose land area both exceeds 2,000 sq. kms. Its 140,000 population is not even 10% of the 1.8-million population of Manila and Quezon City in the national capital region.

Naga is landlocked, not a port city. Hence, it does not have a shipping industry to speak of. All it has is the Naga River, which can only accommodate small motorized boats. Situated at the heart of Bicol's agricultural peninsula, its landlocked location places Naga at an obvious disadvantage vis-à-vis the country's port cities such as Manila, Cebu, Davao, Puerto Princesa, Olongapo and General Santos.

Naga is peripheral, not central. The city is around 450 kms away from Manila, the national capital. Likewise, it is equally that far from Metro Cebu, our second largest urban center. Hence, its location and distance from these urban centers is another disadvantage, particularly in a highly capital-focused government system. It is, therefore, the typical rural Philippine city—one of the faceless, ordinary urban centers dotting the countryside.

WHAT IT IS

These limitations notwithstanding, Naga has made a name for itself in the area of local governance.

It is a recognized center of local innovations. Over the years, Naga has built a reputation for being a model local government unit, and a center for innovations in local governance.

This is borne out by more than 50 national and international recognition accorded to Naga by various award-giving bodies. The most prestigious came in 1998, when the city was chosen to receive the 1998 Dubai International Award for having one of the Top 10 Best Practices worldwide.

In November 1999, it was cited by *Asiaweek* as one of four most improved cities in Asia in recognition of its participative processes, strong democratic traditions and commitment to excellence.

It is a livable city. Naga, likewise, is considered one of the Philippines' most livable cities, says *Interface*, the newsmagazine of the League of Cities of the Philippines.

It has a strong non-government sector. Another outstanding feature of Naga is the presence of a strong non-government sector, in the form of civic, business and people's organizations.

It took advantage of local autonomy. Finally, the state policy to promote local autonomy and decentralization has helped Naga mainly because it has helped itself, crafting a number of innovations that even antedated the 1991 Local Government Code.

THE NAGA GOVERNANCE MODEL

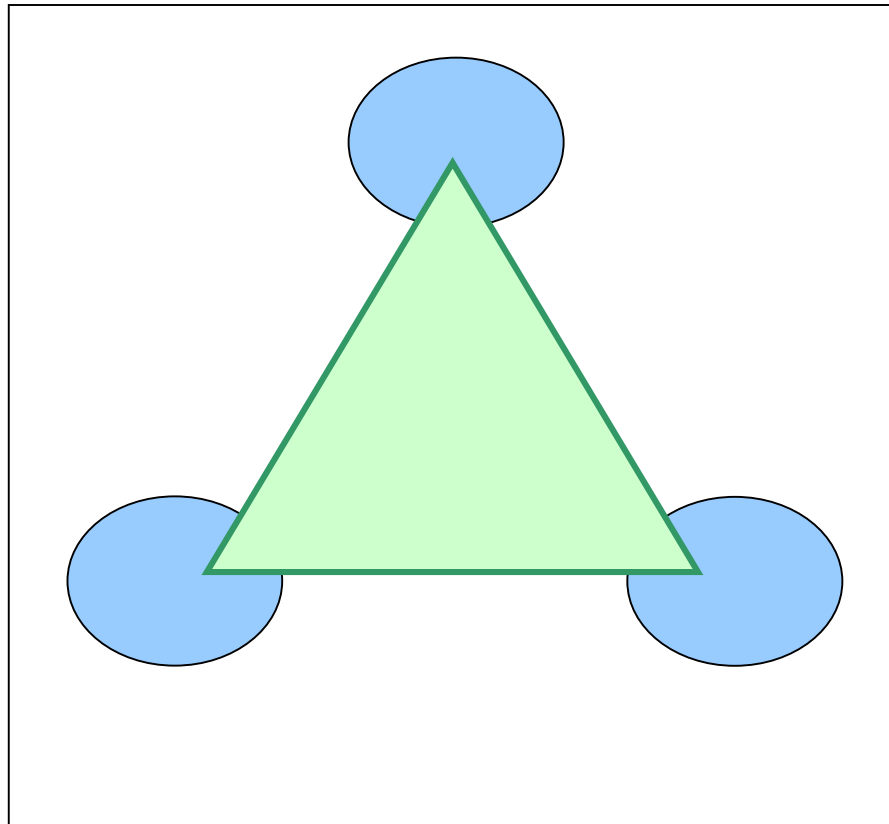
To provide a conceptual framework to my presentation, Figure 2 presents the model of governance we have developed, based on our collective experience over the last decade.

At its simplest, sustainability is a quality that can be associated with good urban governance. This type of governance therefore can be represented by a triangle, which is the most stable of all geometric shapes.

Three elements form the foundation of good urban governance:

- **Progressive development perspective.** In the model, it lies at the apex of the triangle because it is a function of leadership which the local administration must provide.

Among others, a progressive perspective seeks to build prosperity for the community at large. But the goal of prosperity-building is tempered by an enlightened perception of the poor, whose upliftment is an end to governance.



- **Functional partnerships.** These are vehicles that enable the city to tap community resources for priority undertakings, in the process multiplying its capacity and enabling it to overcome resource constraints that usually hamper government.
- **Participation.** These are mechanisms ensure long-term sustainability by generating broad-based stakeholdership and community ownership over local undertakings.

Partnerships and participation lie at the base of the triangle because they are the elements that provide it sustainability.

FUNCTIONAL PARTNERSHIPS: ADDITIONAL NOTES AND EXAMPLES

What is the rationale behind our policy for continuing engagement in partnerships?

Based from experience, partnership systems and mechanisms enable local initiatives to access community resources (particularly the private sector), thereby augmenting the city's resources.

The beauty of partnerships is that it allows involved parties to attain mutually beneficial objectives even with minimum individual resources. Thus, partnerships multiply the local government's internal capability, opening doors to opportunities that are otherwise beyond our own resources to pursue and implement. In short, they enable a local authority to do more with less.

Operating principles. In trying to forge functional partnerships, we have identified three operating principles, which I want to share with you:

1. *Role definition.* By properly defining and delineating roles of each partner within the partnership, responsibilities and accountabilities are clarified and clear, unambiguous rules of engagement can be set. This prevents potential conflicts and other operational problems.

2. *Resource complementation.* A partnership is a venue for resource pooling, and more. It should attain synergy—ensuring that the total is greater than the sum of its parts. A good partner, therefore, must bring resources that others do not have into the partnership.
3. *Specialization.* This is predicated on marked inefficiencies that arise from the “do-it-all” approach that spawned big governments and unwieldy bureaucracies. In such situation, the strategic response is to take the opposite direction and move towards one’s core competencies. Or specialize, to put it simply.

Illustrative examples. Having described our brand of governance from a higher plane, let me discuss some illustrative programs that exemplify these partnerships and participation mechanisms.

- To promote equitable development and tilt the balance in favor of the poor, the city implemented a unique tripartism-driven program called Kaantabay sa Kauswagan that facilitated homelot acquisition for urban poor beneficiaries. In 1996, it was named one of the Top 40 Best Practices by UNCHS in during the Habitat II conference in Istanbul, Turkey.

As of October 31, 2001, a total of 41 on-site and off-site development projects under the program has covered a total of 6,940 urban poor households, which represents 27 percent of the entire population of the city. The figure is roughly 500 families shy of the 7,400 low-income Naga households who, according to Asian Development Bank (ADB) estimates, live below poverty line

In terms of direct benefit, 67 percent of the 6,940 households city are on their way to getting their property titles, having benefited from 27 completed projects under the program. Negotiations are ongoing for 14 more projects that will cover the remaining 33 percent, thereby ensuring total direct benefit—something that eluded them in all of Naga’s 50 years as a city.

In implementing the project, the NGO sector has played a critical role in social preparation and community organizing. Admittedly, these areas lie outside the city government’s core competence. The partnership between City Hall and its NGO partners like the Community Organizers of the Philippines Enterprise (COPE) Foundation therefore made sense in that specific instance.

- To provide quality health services, Naga built its own city hospital which continues to provide accessible and affordable health services to residents. It also serves as headquarters of Emergency Rescue Naga, an award-winning emergency response service inspired by Rescue 911.

But while ERN is famed for its 24-hour quality quick-response service in times of emergencies, its strength really lies in its successful community resource mobilization effort, pooling together the people, equipment, facilities and other resources of local schools, the police and fire departments, amateur radio groups and the national and local health agencies in the city.

- To improve the quality of education, the city began investing on the future through the establishment and institutionalization of a Montessori-based daycare system in all of Naga’s 27 barangays. By targeting preschoolers, the program called Naga Early Education and Development ensures that local youngsters are better prepared before entering grade school.

Just like ERN, NEED is also built on vital inputs from the UP College of Medicine, the local division of city schools, the DSWD, a private NGO specializing in educating the differently-abled kids of the city, the association of barangay councils, and the parents-teachers associations in each of the 27 barangays of Naga.

- The city government's other mandates and priorities prevent it from putting money on the establishment and operation of satellite markets all on its own. By allowing private entities to do what it cannot under the circumstances, the city attains its objective of creating additional livelihood opportunities for Nagueños. At the same time, the private investors are given the opportunity to realize their profit-motive.

In all of these, we see that partnerships can occur between and among the various levels of government (national, regional, local); between government and the NGO-PO community; and between government and private individuals or entities.

PEOPLE PARTICIPATION

A limiting factor to partnerships arises from its nature. At the operational and practical level, partnerships have to occur between institutions and organized groups, resulting often to the exclusion of the community at large, reducing them to a spectator's role in governance processes. Marginalized sectors—especially the urban poor and other unorganized basic sectors—are usually the ones left along the wayside.

For the long-term, this is not sustainable. Partnerships therefore must be complemented by mechanisms that mainstream the marginalized, and actively engaged them in governance.

By tradition, Naga is most ideal to the development of these mechanisms.

In his introduction to the book *The Theory and Practice of People's Councils: Focus on the Naga City Model*, Soliman M. Santos, Jr., executive director of the Institute of Politics and Governance, tried to answer the question—What is it about Naga, including its political, social and cultural context, which has given rise to its successful innovations?

Santos identified the following (and allow me to quote liberally):

Naga has a characteristic of expressing in various ways its sentiment of the moment in a continuing quest for meaningful politics and governance...In its history of active citizens participation, the Naga citizens answers back to the politico. And there are many venues for such expression, including institutions like the "Jardin" in Rizal Park (Naga's version of Hyde Park or Plaza Miranda) and the "freest press in the Philippines."

Naga has a tradition and fondness for political debates and discourse. This leads to openness to new ideas. Naga is pluralist, not purist. Naga is free spirit, as in butterflies are free to let a hundred flowers bloom. Debates are occasions for people to come together. Along the way, some of the ideas become experiments like the peace zone and the people's council.

Because of such tradition, Naga has seen generations of politicized elders who have left a legacy of meaningful politics and governance which is a challenge for each new political generation to improve on....

On the other side of this, of course, is the presence of an active and vibrant NGO-PO community in Naga which is characteristically pluralist (like its roots in the cause-oriented sector of the 80's). It was the Naga City NGO-PO Council of the early 90's which held quiet discussions (with city government officials) to conceptualize the "Empowerment Ordinance" creating the NCPC to maximize the historical moment and LGC-inspired momentum of people's participation in local governance....

The preponderance of NGOs and POs is, in fact, one of the reasons behind Naga's success. Unlike other local governments who seem to have an institutional aversion to NGOs and POs, we tried hard to breathe life to the provision of the 1991 Local Government promoting partnerships with community-based organizations.

After the Code was passed, Naga was among the first to implement the provision mandating NGO accreditation. During its first run in 1993, close to 80 applied with the city council and were duly accredited.

Four years later, we took the concept a step further. Through a landmark legislation, we initiated the establishment of a system of partnership wherein the city encouraged the federation of these NGOs and POs into the Naga City People's Council (NCPC). This institutionalized a system of self-regulation among the rank and file of NGOs and POs in the city.

Among others, the Naga City People's Council was empowered to

- appoint NGO representatives to local special bodies of the city government
- observe, vote and participate in the deliberation, conceptualization, implementation and evaluation of projects, activities and programs of the city government,
- propose legislations, participate and vote at the committee level of the Sangguniang Panlungsod, and
- act as the people's representatives in the exercise of their constitutional rights to information on matters of public concern and access to official records and documents.

This novel partnership became the main engine of the Naga City Participatory Planning and Development Initiatives. In 1998, this program was adjudged one of the 10 best practices worldwide by UNCHS and awarded the Dubai International Award.

CONCLUSION

From our experience as a developing city, it is evident that sustainable partnerships are critical to livable cities in the 21st century.

But they must be complemented by a progressive perspective among local leaderships, particularly one that is shaped by an enlightened perception of the poor.

Mechanisms for greater participation in governance process is also critical, to address the exclusionary nature of partnerships at the operational and practical level. In this context, the Naga City People's Council is a good mechanism that we can look at and learn from.

As pointed out above, a strong commitment to functional partnerships has keyed almost all of Naga's innovations, grounded on the key concepts of role definition, resource complementation and specialization.

The challenge before us is to transform the concept of partnerships into our second nature. It should become as ordinary or ubiquitous as the air we breathe—it is so very much around we often take it for granted but it sustains life.

When partnerships become the norm and not the exception between neighbors, between and among families, and between individuals and their communities, then we can proudly say that we have overcome an important roadblock to our maturing as a livable city.