

## **Securing the future of “Maogmang Lugar”**

Building strong local local institutions, sustaining a culture of innovations

BY Mayor Jesse M. Robredo

A YEAR ago at Plaza Quezon, we celebrated Naga City's rise from the devastation of Super typhoon 'Reming', our noteworthy Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) scorecard and the continuing affirmation about our chosen development path.

In between, a tumultuous electoral campaign took place, yielding yet another firm mandate for the current administration-paving the way for a midterm address that unveiled our Executive-Legislative Agenda for 207-10 which outlined our directions for the next three years.

Allow me now, as we convene the first meeting of the full City Development Council, to report to you our progress for calendar year 2007. Six months into our new term, where does our city stand, vis-à-vis the 12 milestone we have anchored our “Maogmang Lugar” vision on?

### **More affirmations**

We have at least four more reasons to celebrate.

During the year, the city government maintained its record of receiving accolades from both local, national and international entities. These include the **Housing Rights Protector Award** from the Geneva, Switzerland-based Center on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) for Kaantabay sa Kauswagan, the city's flagship program for the urban poor sector.

Naga's City Youth official (CYO) program was awarded the **Gawad Galing Pook** as one of the country's 10 Most Outstanding Local Programs awarded by the Galing Pook Foundation, the only awardee coming from the Bicol region.

Dating back to March 1998, making it in fact the most underrated yet longest running initiatives of this administration, the CYO has become a unique annual government internship program that enabled close to 700 youth leaders in the city to secure a first-hand experience in public service. So far, it has produced four of City Hall's sitting department heads and a city councilor, former urban poor affairs office head Nathan Sergio.

During the year, Naga's website-*www.naga.gov.ph*-which is being maintained by its Electronic Data Processing Unit, made it to the **eLGU Hall of Frame** of the National Computer Center after winning as the most outstanding City government website for the last three years. Content for the full-featured, information rich portal is being generated and updated by key city government departments.

But equally meaningful, perhaps even more so because it recognized the local bureaucracy in its entirety, is the **Community Development Award** extended by the

University of Nueva Caceres to the Naga City Government on the occasion of its recent Diamond Jubilee. The award noted that “over the last two decades, the unsung men and women of the city government, guided by a competent leadership, have joined hands in delivering effective and efficient public service to the people of Naga.” This, I believe, is a refreshing testimony that all is not lost in Philippine public service, in the face of the darkness that seems to have descended on the governance of the nation.

### **The 12 Milestones of “Maogmang Lugar”**

Let me recapitulate what we said comprises our vision for Naga in updating you of our progress in each area:

1. *Cleaner Naga.* We should do a lot more to improve air and water quality, and manage our solid waste, whose volume is growing by the day, more effectively. We need to dramatically increase our waste recycling capacity or get a new sanitary landfill soon.

- Over the last six months, the City ENRO, with the help of the planning department, EDP and the DENR regional office, has evaluated four alternative sites for the sanitary landfill
- Side by side, technical assistance from the Czech Republic has enabled us to prepare a closure plan for the existing Balatas controlled dumpsite.
- This process has narrowed down our best choice to a 21-hectare property between Naga and Magarao. The Magarao municipal government is supportive of this initiative-making it an inter-LGU partnership with potential Metro Naga Wide impact.
- We will jointly develop this facility, together with the MNWD which is also eyeing its own septage facility within the property.
- A technical staff from JICA has also expressed interest in helping bring this project forward.

2. *Good Schools.* Our best public schools are as good as best private schools lead the region, from the elementary up to the tertiary level. But

- The city maintained its leadership in the Regional Unified Achievement test, topping the RUAT for the second consecutive

the bigger challenge lies in the middle and bottom half which need to do better. And we also need to address the continuing inability of our school system to ensure that no child is left behind.

3. *A decent house to live in.* Through our Kaantabay sa Kauswagan program, we have done a massive job of ensuring security of tenure in a scale unmatched by any other Philippine locality. The next step is to look at the bigger picture and build self-contained, vibrant and clean communities that we will be proud to live in.

year. But results in the Division and National achievement test barely moved during the last two years.

- This is a serious concern that the Naga City School Board took note of in a series of meetings with parents, teachers and school heads in the process of crafting its 2008 Budget. We have secured the commitment of the division of City Schools to improve its performance in the recently concluded test this month. We are hopeful that the city public school system will rise up to this challenge.
- We have also completed the first year of implementing the QUEEN programs, including vital organizing and capacity building activities. In the process, we have made public education more accessible by covering most school fees for 2 of every 3 enrolled students.
- We will look forward to the June enrolment figures and see whether these initial investments have paid off in improving survival and completion rates.
- As an additional footnote to the COHRE citation, Naga essentially redeemed the Philippine's poor performance the previous year when the same agency rated the country as one of worst violator of housing rights, together with Nigeria and Greece.
- In partnership with PHILSSA and COPE Foundation, Habitat for Humanity and Gawad Kalinga, we have built up the city's second Gawad Kalinga project in Balatas-the GK-Habitat
- Maogma village. In the process, it gives us another working model of

multistakeholder community development

- In partnership with local property developers, particularly the Enjoy Realty group, we have also operationalized the Socialized housing Counterparting (SHC) scheme that has initially yielded almost P5 million in additional resources for area upgrading
- Finally, we are the only remaining pilot area (out of the original four or five) for the Localized Community Mortgage Program (LCMP) of the national government's housing agencies.

4. *A city of trees.* We have maintained our preeminent status as the regional center of trade and services, anchored on a support infrastructure that meets if not exceeds Bicol and Philippine standards. Now, imagine if this urban vitality is enhanced by a verdant city teeming with green trees and landscaped spaces. It is time to beautify Naga!

- We have planted a total 10,145 seedlings during the year, 80% of which took place within the Mt. Isarog National Park in partnership with the Metro Naga Water District.
- The remaining 20% consisted of fruit and shade trees in 18 public schools in the city. These schools, in partnership with the Ladies in Green Foundation and the Rotary Club of Naga, are serving as our pilot areas for greening efforts.

5. *Three meals a day.* The nutritional status of our preschool children is unparalleled in Bicol, but we begin to have a problem once they enter the public school system. We need to sustain current efforts to address in-school malnutrition all the way – and ensure there is sufficient food on the table for every Nagueño household. A clear food security policy is therefore in order.

- Through the effort of the City Nutrition Office and Vice Mayor Bordado, the city government piloted the implementation of Nutri-Dunong in five big public schools with the highest incidence of malnutrition. OPT exit results showed a 65% improvement among school children covered.
- Thus, under its 2008 Budget, the Naga City School Board prioritized the full implementation of the Nutri-Dunong initiative in all of Naga's 29 public elementary schools, tripling its funding support for the program. Its

6. *Gainful jobs.* Our investment figures have been consistently increasing over the years, indicating solid confidence by the private sector on our strengths and comparative advantages. We started with our “one family, one gainful economic activity” program during our previous term. But side by side, we continue to lose a sizable number of our graduates to Metro Manila.

impact will be felt once the new school year starts in June.

- As expected, the city’s investment numbers suffered during the year as first semester efforts focused on recovery rehabilitation in Reming’s aftermath. The electoral process that took up much of the first half of 2007 also contributed to the slowdown.
- As a result, investment in terms of volume and value fell by an average of 33% and 45%, respectively, taking place during the latter part of the year
- But we remain bullish because during the period, five new hotels have also opened up shop, led by the FLC Group’s high-end Avenue square Hotel that has catalyzed the dramatic growth of the so-called “Magsaysay Strip,” adding more than 200 new rooms to Naga’s existing capacity currently placed at 590 rooms.
- These gains are in line with a rapidly growing tourism sector that has seen the Naga-Camarines sur combine registering hefty triple-digit annual growth rates for the last two years, buoyed by a strong influx in domestic visitors, dislodging perennial leader Legazpi-Albay in the process.
- There’s also the decision of the SM Group to upgrade its planned mall in Naga from a smaller hypermart to a full-blown two-storey mall-officially christened as SM Naga City Mall- at the CBD 2 area. In all, is expected to infuse around P1 billion into the economy (P250 million more than the total for 2007) and create 3,500 new jobs during constructions phase alone

7. *Well-paved roads, working drainage and orderly streets.* We have the highest road ratios in Bicol, and we need to maintain and improve them. We also have one of the largest drainage network in the region but we have to maintain them at their highest level of efficiency to mitigate flooding. And we need to put better order in the distribution lines of our utilities and eliminate the unseemly sight of dangling wires.

8. *Available health service everytime it is needed.* Our health indicators are the best in Bicol. But the MDG reports aired some concerns, especially in regard to immunization coverage. Then there is also the need to ensure optimized coverage, particularly for the poorer segments of our population.

10. *Vibrant city of history, music, culture and arts.* Urban livability requires taking good care of our economic vitality, our social fabric as well as our soul, and the latter is expressed in our history, music, culture and arts.

- Thanks to the SHC scheme and the WB-funded UPSURGE project, the city government laid down the groundwork's for completing the Balatas-Gimenez Subdivision roadlink within 2008
- At the same time, we have reached agreement with the group of Atty. William Enrile over the acquisition of the required road right-of-way (RROW) that will finally connect the city's inner Circumferential Road. This practically opens up the Abella-Queborac area to new development possibilities.
- We have started to recover some lost ground, particularly in the field of immunization. Last year, I raised concern over the alarming decrease of fully immunized children from 95% in 2005 to 81%.
- This year, we raised it up 85% notwithstanding the very strict supervision and policy guidance issued by the Department of Health insofar as coverage of the immunization campaign are concerned.
- For this reason, the city Health Office was among those recognized by the DOH Regional Office due to its accomplishments.
- The planning department made use of Naga's participative governance strategies in building up an urban renewal program for the City's Central Business District, attracting the active participation of various sectors concerned with CBG I's continuing vitality.
- With procurement of materials

underway, the administration's initial investments in sprucing up the old centro, in the form of improved streetlights and sidewalks, will be implemented by midyear.

- Some legislative measures in support of this thrust are also pending in the Sangguniang Panlungsod, including that declaring Plaza Quince Martirez as the city's official landmark.
- Led by the HRMO, the city government has updated its Performance Pledges and come up with individualized commitments to the city's Vision and Mission statement under its "Connecting the Dots" initiative.
- This puts in a place a four-level scorecard for our public Governance System, down to the individual employees.
- To sum up, this remains our dream that drives, guides and binds all effort of the city government
- At the institutional level Naga has demonstrated that it can hold its own and be among the best. Our continuing challenge is to do the same for every citizen.

*11. Clean and honest government.*

Modesty aside, we already have the best governed city in the entire country. But we should not rest on our laurels because there is always a better way and, in partnership with civil society, we will continue to find them.

*12. A place where one can realize his full potentials.* The bottomline of all the above is building a city that will allow its citizens to develop their full potentials in the full range of human pursuits.

### **Complementary Institutional Gains**

During the year, we also witnessed key developments that yielded stronger local institutions that would strengthen our system of governance- incidentally the primary reason why nine international and 15 domestic study groups visited Naga last year alone.

- **Local sectoral representation**

In passing the Local Sectoral Representation ordinance last year, the city is poised to become the first locality to elect sectoral representatives to a sitting sanggunian in the entire country. Election for LSRs in the city is expected to be held by midyear after complying with certain procedural requirements.

This ordinance effectively makes up what Congress has failed to do for Philippine Local autonomy and decentralization over the last 17 years-enact an enabling law for the codal provision of local sectoral representation in local legislatures.

- **Stronger NCPC, women, children, youth and senior citizen programs and institutions**

During the year, we have seen more vibrant representation among our partner institutions.

The NCPC has elected a new set of officers and effected a successful transition to its new leadership.

So did the SK, who is now represented by their new leader in the Sangguniang Panlungsod. Side by side, we have the nationally recognized City Youth Officials program that is set to celebrate its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year.

We now have more vibrant women, children, youth and senior citizen sectors headed by their respective councils. Ordinarily, these are the vulnerable sectors of society; but as you can see, they are organized and strong in our city.

- **The Queen program**

Finally, we have also institutionalized the QUEEN initiatives by virtue of a Sanggunian ordinance. Among others, it calls and has effected the organization of parents who will play a key role in ensuring that every Nagueño child will be given all opportunities to complete basic education.

- ***A professional local bureaucracy***

Finally, we have at City Hall a better, more professional corps of civil servants who definitely played a key role in making all of the above possible. That the city government became what it is today is largely because of their collective work.

For two decades, they have proven their worth and capabilities, especially in terms of ensuring that public interest is always served. Clearly, they are the pride and joy of the Philippine civil service.

### **Gaps We Must Address**

Nonetheless, much more remains to be done, if we go by the ELA I have presented last July. Let me cite a few:

- ***Policy gap.*** While I applaud the Sangguniang Panlungsod, headed by Vice Mayor Gabby Bordado, for passing the aforementioned landmark ordinances, they represent only a quarter of the 12 priorities I identified.

Still pending are the Greenbelts, Three-Strike Rule, Junkshop and cellphone, HRD, Accountability and Bikol language institute ordinances. Clearly, we need to do more, by streamlining our policymaking processes and putting more focus on the legislative agenda.

- **Resource gap.** Initial estimates from the planning department put the price tag of our three-year plan between P700 million-P1billion pesos. The LDIP will in fact be presented as another item in our agenda this afternoon.

While on the one hand we need to further prioritize what we have short listed at the executive side, we also need to come together and face certain hard decisions. Early this morning, the first public hearing on the proposed revision of Schedule of Market Values was conducted. Whatever the final configuration will be, it will help us implement our plans better.

Then there is also seriously exploring borrowings as away to finance key big ticket items. In fact, later today, we will present full completion of the Naga Coliseum for your consideration.

- **Institutional gap.** Then there's also some lingering weakness in our bureaucracy. Specifically, we have yet to see clear programs for the agricultural sector on the table-notwithstanding the presence of passionate advocates in and out of the Sanggunian, and the region's prime agricultural academic institution right at our doorstep.

Consequently, there has been no movement whatsoever in regard to defining what our food security policy should be-which should take greater urgency in the light of recent expert pronouncement that the area of cheap food worldwide are effectively over.

## **Conclusion**

On the balance, the city government remains confident that Naga City has what it takes to make one of the country's best governed urban community better.

Our local institutions are becoming stronger. And our culture and tradition for innovations remain vibrant. These are two essential requirements for maintaining competitiveness in the glocal-that is, the globalized world of vibrant local communities-21<sup>st</sup> century.

Over the last six months, we have clearly accomplished a substantial amount of work. In another place and time, they would have sufficed. But because we are not in the "business-as-usual" mode, it is equally clear that much, much more needs to be done.