

11th International Conference, Dhaka, Bangladesh December 5-7, 2014

IMPORTANCE OF INVESTING IN PEOPLE TO IMPROVE LIVES AND PROTECT RESOURCES: MAKING *NEGROS FIRST* A REALITY

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ABSTRACT

The four centuries of colonial influence in the Philippines by the Spaniards and Americans made the people in the course of time to be unaware of the need for social change. It was from the concept of *encomenderos* (people cared and supervised by the wards of the Spanish king and later by the American power headed by the *illustrados*) to what now is development is freedom as we define i. e. mainstreaming the rights-based approach to development and governance.

This paper will illustrate an example of what public participation in democratic governance is in the province of **Negros Occidental** i.e. the sugar capital of the Philippines. With the earlier background and situation, political dynasties even after the Philippine Independence in 1946 to the latter part of 20th century still triumphed. It was headed by the public managers (both elected and appointed) most especially in the sugar industry, the major source of income of the people. The result was having a system of inequality of the marginalized people bringing about greater poverty and underdevelopment caused by unjust, non-accountable and non-transparent managers and leaders.

With the guidance, management and commitment of the newly elected governor in 2010, its local leaders directed its policies, plans and programs where the population has been made conscious to address the global challenges of sustainable and equitable development.

The province is categorized as first class with six (6) urbanized districts where its leaders and people are becoming enablers of the development process. There is the awareness and realization of the importance of citizen's voice in crafting the development agenda i.e. for a better and responsive government to meet the needs of the populace.

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11th International Conference, Dhaka, Bangladesh December 5-7, 2014

The direction of its development plan is towards transparency and accountability to render an efficient, effective and equitable delivery of basic services. They are on health, education, food, income generation among others as it is the basic rights of the people and entitlements in a democratic society as articulated in the covenants on state obligations.

Introduction

The Philippine socio-administrative system during colonial period and still up to the present time is characterized by the landlord-tenant relations in managing the resources especially in the government setting. This system brings about lack of accountability causing the marginalization of the people to remain in poverty and without voice to articulate their needs and aspirations due to lack of measurement of efficiency and effectiveness.

With experiences in development over time, the concept of governance using the rights-based perspective is continuously being integrated in a democratic socio-administrative system in the Philippines. This attempt has been the result of having full awareness for an increased freedom of the people in the 1990s. This vision could fully be realized only with full consciousness as to what freedom is if only the public officials become leaders of institutional change-having a participatory, accountable and transparent management of scarce resources for greater benefit of the population.

This vision is clearly embedded in the strategy crafted in the latter part of 2000 i.e. **NEGROS FIRST**. It was developed because of the increase in family poverty incidence by 4.9 in 1997-2000 and 10.3 in 2003. In addition, surveys conducted in the succeeding years conducted by the National Statistics Office showed that there was an increasing trend in the annual poverty threshold because the purchasing power was weakening. The unequal distribution of economic benefits was brought about by the management of political dynasties in the immediate past.

NEGROS FIRST strategy is participatory development and governance management where the representatives of constituencies are involved in the development process yearly (assessment of policies, plan and programs) to experience an integrated and concerted efforts to transform them into an executive-legislative agenda.

11th International Conference, Dhaka, Bangladesh December 5-7, 2014

This direction follows the neoliberal principles and dimensions of development. As articulated by the people, “ the present governor, Alfredo Maranon, is a humble man with sincerity, conviction, hard work, dedication and wisdom he gained through 40 years in public service to make now NEGROS FIRST a reality.”

This vision is exemplified in Negros Occidental as a political battle cry of the governor and according to the local government officials, the crafting of such strategy was mostly based on the development problems and issues identified by the different sectors and departments at all levels of government.

Negros Occidental as case in point in this paper is located in the northwestern part of Negros island in one of the sixteen (16) regions of the country. Western Visayas region is situated in the central part of the Philippine Archipelago which is rich in volcanic soil, ideal for agriculture. The capital city, Bacolod, has a total land area of almost 8,000 sq. kms. The province is approximately 37 kms. long from north to south with thirteen (13) cities and nineteen (19) municipalities.

This paper is aimed at exemplifying NEGROS FIRST as development and governance strategy to other provinces to improve development situation.

Methodology and Theoretical Foundation on Mainstreaming Development and Governance

The paper which discusses the importance of “Investing in People to Improve Lives and Protect Resources: Making NEGROS FIRST a Reality” as premised on the strict adherence of sustainability and good governance principles. To establish the evidenced-based discussions on the subject matter, the following methodologies were adopted: document analysis, focused group discussion, key informant interview and policy Delphi. In most cases, the questions were directed on the implementation of policies, plans and programs for the development of human capital as well as on conservation, rehabilitation and protection of environment. Likewise, a number of discussions were focused on linkages established with different public and private entities regarding execution of programs and projects as well as advocacy activities.

11th International Conference, Dhaka, Bangladesh December 5-7, 2014

Regarding the theoretical foundation of this paper, it is established and an acceptable reality that in the Philippines as a developing country, it has not surmounted significantly in resolving problems in economic, social, administrative and political dimensions of development. Primarily, it is due to the persistence of poverty especially in infest pocket areas where a number of communities have no or little access to basic needs (health, education and livelihood opportunities) which are caused by failure of the people to receive adequate public goods and services and the problem of peace and order.

Although there are indicators of growth in its economic activities, the country continues to suffer from huge debts both local and foreign as an offshoot of weak tax collection system and corrupt practices i.e. lack of transparency, accountability, voice or citizen participation, efficient and effective government performance.

Though there are continuing efforts to institute relevant and responsive laws and reforms in the different dimensions of development, enforcement and administration of laws, rules and regulations remain a constraint to successful implementation. Most often it is caused by poor leadership and lack of political will as evidenced in lack of decisiveness in resolving issues, among others, in having unclear goals, targets not focused in setting priorities as well as poor streamlining of procedures.

It is within this line of thought that a compelling good governance advocacy i.e. NEGROS FIRST message was executed in Negros Occidental to resolve primary problems caused by lack of information awareness and educational opportunities in the past. Thus greater attempt is focused on dissemination strategies or mechanism of which one of them is the human rights-based approach to development. This attempt has been adopted to ensure a more realistic and reliable transparent data for accountability and in measuring impact and effects of results and lastly, the presence of government bench marks for program timeliness, acceptability, alignment, harmonization, ownership and sustainability.

To conclude the theoretical foundation of this paper, the following perspectives are important for the development of well-being and progress:

- Good governance is important in development and preservation of resources of the government;

11th International Conference, Dhaka, Bangladesh December 5-7, 2014

- Governance is not only for the government but it also involves various development actors at all levels (village to international) and sectors (civil society, non-government organizations, community organizations, academe, private, church and international partners) who manage resources and affairs i.e. quality and attributes of leadership, the governed, structure and processes; and,
- Building capacities guided by moral, integrity and ethical principles.

We have to take note that governance improvement would result to sustainability of processes and commitments to attain better and quality human development outcomes as it is the core component of empowerment towards reduction of poverty and inequality.

Likewise, it would bring forth greater trust and confidence in the government structure to have an effective and efficient delivery of services. As an outcome, it would result to better standards in regulation, monitoring of performance to prevent corruption and establish greater credibility of the political and administrative leaders in a democratic society in the Philippines. As articulated by Noor (2007), poor governance definitely would threaten democratic stability and impede economic growth,

These conclusions will be testified in the NEGROS FIRST to improve the welfare of its people and the mechanics to conserve, rehabilitate and preserve the resources of the government.

Literature Review

In general, Twaddle (1996) discussed reforms internationally that he gave more importance on efficiency rather than effectiveness or equity. The author claimed that there was lack of coherent theoretical framework to understand the reforms although there were attempts to explain some theoretical ideas on timing, speed and direction of reform efforts throughout the world. There was the debate that the most important criteria was effectiveness i.e. measuring the degree to which the reforms worked to resolve the problem in its domain and the people it would serve.

11th International Conference, Dhaka, Bangladesh December 5-7, 2014

With regard to equity concerns, it was more on seeing that those in need had access to effective services than using the measurement of success.

On the other hand, Wong, et al (1998) gave emphasis on decentralized planning and financing functions in promoting diversification of services as long as there is balanced of responsibility to

address needs of people in the community and at the same time responding to equity issues and problems.

In short, in formulating reforms it is critical to look into the political history and economic dimensions and the managers' perspectives in introducing reforms and new processes especially on why and how reforms are to be adopted and implemented.

Introduction of NEGROS FIRST

With the situation of increasing trend in the poverty threshold in the 1080s, the government has intervened to help the poor by (1) encouraging and strengthening entrepreneurial ventures to increase the earning capacity of the people; and, (2) providing livelihood opportunities e.g. swine dispersal for backyard raisers and support to small, medium and micro enterprises through providing credit facility, product design, skills training, technology transfer and marketing assistance.

Following the above-mentioned development agenda, it is envisioned to bring about income and employment opportunities to the low growth rate of the population of the province. This construct is based on the local leadership level of awareness that follows the Malthusian model where it asserts that an increase in population beyond the agricultural and natural resources production will bring about poor quality of life to its people because of the degradation of the environment. Likewise, negligence in developing human capital will bring about poor quality of life, thus, there is underdevelopment.

All of the programs and projects of the present administration in Negros Occidental are in line with the NEGROS FIRST development agenda. The programs and projects were considered priority for the LGU because it is the

11th International Conference, Dhaka, Bangladesh December 5-7, 2014

“political battlecry of the provincial governor “and according to the LGU officials, these are mostly based on problems and issues identified by the different sectors and departments of the provincial government.

These programs are funded by the General Fund, IRA share of the province, economic enterprise fund, loans from banks, PDAF and financial assistance from foreign sources. The provincial government will expand its programs and projects in the next three years and the focus of these efforts are mostly financial strategies on ICT and economic enterprise.

The three-year development agenda 2010-2012 as discussed earlier defines the response to the prevailing human rights conditions in Negros Occidental. It provides a framework for the key local government officials to adequately perform its obligations to provide development initiatives and measures to its constituencies (claimholders). The framework is for the populations to enjoy the right to life, health, food, water, education, among others for development is freedom.

The agenda addresses in a holistic perspective its policies, plans and programs that are seen as an indivisible body that includes civil, political, social, economic, cultural and collective rights. The normative content of the agenda encourages continuous struggle to realized that land utilization and population management are essential to be sustained so as the next generation would benefit from the right to development.

Specifically, the local officials are aware of their obligations to respect, protect and fulfill the rights of the population such as follows:

- Afford full protection of labor i.e. full employment and equality of employment opportunities as well as guarantee the rights of all workers to security of tenure, human condition of work and appropriate living wages. The workers are encouraged to participate in policy-making and decision-making processes that would protect their rights according to rule of law;

11th International Conference, Dhaka, Bangladesh December 5-7, 2014

- Establish policies at all levels on adequate social security and services particularly related to full employment, rising standard of living and improved quality of life; and,
- Protect the rights of the family. Women and children to have decent living and health including balanced and healthful ecology as provided in the policies on natural resources management, agricultural and economic development and education.

In short, the leaders and managers of the province of Negros Occidental clearly state their development agenda in accordance to the principle that human rights is for everyone and everywhere. Their vision for “NEGROS FIRST” is irrespective of age culture, faith, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and disability. That is towards well-being and progress of human capital.

Mid-Term Development Agenda of Negros Occidental 2010- 2013

Population and Health Care and Educational Opportunities

In 2010, the population of the province was almost 3M with a growth rate of only 1.15 in 2007. There was a increase to 1.44 as of 2013 due to the migration from different provinces searching for greener pasture, Regarding the health situation of the population, there has been a generally decline trend from 2008 to 2012 except a slight increase in the under five mortality ratio, infant mortality ratio and maternal mortality ratio in some years.

Other than those discussed later in the development thrusts and challenges, the following are directed towards the development of human capital and protection of rights to health and food:

- Optimum Health Care- As said that the nation’s development lies on the health of its population to be productive and bring economic wealth to the country. This goal could be materialized by the province through:

11th International Conference, Dhaka, Bangladesh December 5-7, 2014

- Establishment of health insurance program for the indigents where the local government will allocate a four percent of its internal revenue allotment for this purpose;
- Sustained upgrading of government hospitals facilities and services to decongest the regional hospital in Bacolod City and provincial hospital in Silay City;
- Boost public health preventive disease programs more than the curative aspect health delivery as well as bring health services to the underserved rural areas through medical-surgical missions.
- Social Services- the concentration given to these services to empower the population for social development, the programs are as follows:
 - Programs for pre-school children and senior citizen;
 - Reinforce youth development through responsible adolescence program;
 - Promote responsible parenting and natural family planning program;
 - Promote disaster risk programs for public safety; and
 - Support national and local program efforts for peace and security because development is impossible if there is no peace everyday.
- Strong Support for Education- It is a belief that education plays an important role in the economy development of a country. Thus, the local officials put impetus to the quality of education of her human capital through various investment programs in upgrading the capabilities of teachers and students through provision of scholarships and incentive packages both to the high school and college levels.

Education will liberate the population from poverty and lessen the gap between the rich and the poor. Like the government

11th International Conference, Dhaka, Bangladesh December 5-7, 2014

promotes to tech-voc and entrepreneurial education to improve the quality of education of the provincial population.

Development Policies, Plans and Programming

With NEGROS FIRST as flagship principle, strategy and value, its political and social development are based on the mandate of the government to follow the principles of good governance i.e. (1) increase level of participation of the people in the affairs of the government; and (2) transparent and accountable transactions through efficient and effective service delivery and responsive to needs of the people following the strict adherence to the rule of law.

To exemplify these principles, the province spelled out its plans and programs in line with the following directional thrusts and prospects that respond to the needs of the population given adequate resources like trained manpower and availability of land:

- Strengthen Inter-Local Alliances as mandated in the Local Government Code of 1991;
- Promote transparency and accountability in all the affairs of the government from barangay (village), municipal, district to provincial level;
- Strengthen personnel and fiscal rules and regulations;
- Rationalize policies, systems and procedures on reform management for countryside development;
- Provide wider avenue for people's participation (local communities i.e. people's organization, non-government agencies, civil society and private partners) in mainstreaming policy development planning and programming as well as advocacy activities; and,
- Increase mobilization and networking activities with national and international agencies to secure funding for rural development projects.

Development Thrusts and Challenges: Programs and Projects

11th International Conference, Dhaka, Bangladesh December 5-7, 2014

All programs and projects of Negros Occidental are based on the Preamble of the Declaration on the Right to Development which states that the concern of the province is the constant improvement of the well-being of the populace and the individual stakeholders.

The provincial development agenda from 2010-2013 was directed mainly on the following dimensions focusing on the enhancement of human capital and natural resource conservation. They were as follows:

- With regard to natural resources conservation, the government encourages strict adherence to ecologically sustainable and good governance principles through implementation of plans and programs that follow guidelines to boost economic development:
 - Sustain programs that conserve, rehabilitate and protect the environment i.e. increase forest cover from 4.7 to 9%, shift from reforestation to livelihood swamp projects and 44 has mangrove, and plant 1M trees both in upland and coastal areas and confiscate illegally sourced lumber and sacks of charcoal;
 - Strengthen linkage with different public and private entities for the protection of coasts, rivers to support coastal management that to enhance production of marine resources;
 - Promote judicious use of abundant water resources for irrigation and power sources through advocating protection of Visayan Sea as epicenter of the marine biodiversity;
 - Strengthen advocacies on climate change response and solid waste management; and,
 - Strict adherence to zoning laws specifically to enforce forest laws in 11 LGUs and establish Alliance Board-Coastal Law enforcement and develop mechanisms to generate P40M in taxes/regulatory fees/fines/penalties and to strengthen strategies in solid waste management plan and implementation
- Food Security- When rice sufficiency is attained for the population in 2013, the focus after is food security at the household level. This is to be through

11th International Conference, Dhaka, Bangladesh December 5-7, 2014

encouragement of backyard vegetable, poultry, livestock and dairy production not only for food consumption but also for income generation. In addition, the concentration of development are also on the following:

- Improve pre and post harvest facilities in the production of high value crops like corn, mango, banana, pineapple, coffee, soybean, pili, rubber, coconut and abaca. Vegetable crops are to be produced such as carrots, cabbage, celery, lettuce, squash, sweet pepper, *ampalaya*, *mongo*, radish, *pechay* among others;
 - Implement more communal irrigation system tapping the source of the six river system and strengthen aquaculture fish production in aquamarine sources;
 - Enhance capabilities of farmers and fisher folks by pursuing pursue thrusts towards organic farming.
- There are different income generation and employment opportunities schemes promoted as follows:
 - Registration of economic enterprise units to garner cash and non-cash revenues coming from tourism projects as well as from the micro, small and medium enterprises at the countryside;
 -
 - Livestock project (sheep and cattle) as second major industry next to sugar is encouraged as supplemental livelihood to reduce incidence of poverty;
 - Establishment of 10 organic villages to provide organic and backyard vegetable garden products including distribution of quality seeds to market i.e. making Negros Occidental as the country's leader in organic agriculture;
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 - Conversion of portion of the a sports complex into a commercial center that would boost the economy through the following: (1) Negros First Cyber center that would provide more or less 5,000

11th International Conference, Dhaka, Bangladesh December 5-7, 2014

BPO jobs and the complex to generate at least P50M annual rent income sufficient to pay its loan for its construction and development, and (2) cheap rent dormitory for out-of-town students; and

- The government is continuously improving and regulating its tourist facilities with the private sector for tourism sustainability and to boost investments;

ICT Utilization- To improve the provincial website, the use of ICT was maximized for interactive or electronic governance with the aim of making it as a vehicle for people's access to provincial government information of its plans and activities to the local level.

Many government agencies and local government units have developed their websites to offer specific services to the public online. In addition the government procurement system encourages feedback mechanism to promote good governance principles of participation, accountability and transparency.

In addition, the ICT utilization increases the people's readiness to avail of opportunities in the ICT industry e.g. trainings to enhance their capacity conducted in the Negros Occidental Language and Information Technology Center (NOLITC).

Factors that Contributed to Development and Governance

A. Leadership, Management and Commitment

The government at local level management based their development agenda and actions on the leadership style of the local chief executives and other local government officials from the provincial to the *barangay* levels. They determine priorities and strategies for development through annual planning workshops

11th International Conference, Dhaka, Bangladesh December 5-7, 2014

where they are active in crafting laws and policies as an output of the executive legislative agenda.

They manage the government affairs in accordance with the provisions of the Citizen Charter to for collaborative partnership following the principles of transparency and accountability. They exemplify good governance by having the attitude and practice of collaborative partnership among the component local government units, non-government organizations and peoples' organization in implementing priority development projects.

District legislators in the six districts are visible as claimed by their constituents whenever there is no session in Congress. Likewise, a number of times they concentrate on constituent service and district projects. Some of them are active in policy making as they are advocates of local interests.

The local officials are clear in their mission and values that human rights protection are not only for the people who are active subjects and that rights are not privileges bestowed at the pleasure of the government. To them accountability and transparency are principles that allow everyone to see and know the affairs of the government especially in decision making processes, formulating policies and defining goals and objectives.

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Fiscal Autonomy

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Good afternoon!!! I will email to you this portion later. I will go home now. I will for the meantime fix my things to bring to Bangladesh

The LGUs need finances to fulfil the development agenda the leaders and managers have set as they are the duty bearers to respect, protect and fulfil its obligations to its claimholders. The finances may come in varied sources from the national government and from the LGUs raised income based on laws on local revenues and generations.

One of the sources is the IRA which is being used to fund the different development programs and projects over the years. In most cases, it is 50-90% of the total budget.

In the case of Negros Occidental, good governance principles is being followed in the fund utilization so as the programs and projects would be sustainable i.e. to realize the provincial vision and missions. Its mandate is for the improvement of its land and quality of population it has for the future generation.

Lastly, the local government ensures that its development thrusts and challenges would have positive effects and impact not only to its population but also for the country's general welfare and progress. This attempt is being done through formulation of sound laws and policies on planning and programming.

Conclusion on Development and Governance in Negros Occidental

As such, the paper concludes the dream of the country having democratic stability as exemplified in what NEGROS FIRST has been achieving for Negros Occidental. It is expressed in the writing of Dr. Jose Abueva on "*Building "The Good Society" We, Filipinos, May Want*" that spelled out the social transformation that we must bring about to fulfill our vision of development and governance in a democratic society, i.e.

11th International Conference, Dhaka, Bangladesh December 5-7, 2014

United under God, we shall develop citizens and leaders who love our country, and trust and challenge one another to do our best to solve our problems. In our quest for “The Good Life” we shall focus on the poor, the powerless and oppressed.

Upholding honesty and rewarding excellence, we shall work together for the common good of all Filipinos at home and around the world. For we are a Global Filipino Nation committed to the security, advancement, and well-being of all our people—and humankind.

We shall build responsive, effective and accountable institutions — our own families and all other institutions through which we seek to satisfy our needs and fulfill our lives.

With creativity, innovation and dedication, we shall build “The Good Society” we want through good citizenship and governance in dynamic and inclusive democracies --under “the rule of law.”

A Filipino society united in its diversity, free, peaceful, egalitarian, and prosperous, progressive, nationalistic, and global too. It is a just, humane, and civil community in agreeable to attain sustainable environment. in a nation that would contribute its share as well in building a peaceful, just, humane and caring world.

In sum, a Filipino nation-and-global- communities that is God-centered— infused with His Love— whose people love and care for one another near and far.

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11th International Conference, Dhaka, Bangladesh December 5-7, 2014

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