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## A CASE STUDY ON THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF INTERNAL MIGRATION AND ITS EFFECT ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT: NAGA CITY

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**M**ayor Jesse Robredo of Naga City was smiling as he stepped out of the conference room where the monthly Metro Naga Development Council (MNDC) meeting was just held. He got the Council's thumbs up to push his initiative which he called "Maogmang Lugar" – building strong local institutions and sustaining a culture of innovations" for Naga City that will address internal migration issues with the view to improving the overall welfare of his constituency. With the MNDC's support, engaging the various stakeholders in Naga City's new policy initiative and pushing forward the accompanying change process will no longer be a problem.

On his way back to his office from the Provincial Capitol where the conference was held, Mayor Robredo was already plotting his next moves in his mind. He knew he had to act quick ...."Strike while the iron is still hot"... that was the adage that kept him going while all these issues affecting population and development in Naga City were impeding the accomplishment of the city's programs and projects. His management team was already waiting for him for a focus group discussion on the necessary interventions in order to implement the desired reforms including additional programs, projects and services to realize the city's development goals.

### ***Almost Ten Years Ago...***

The local executives of the city government, in the late 1990s, already recognized the fact that political intervention was an essential piece in the overall management of population and development. What was happening in the national scale was evidently true in Naga City. Thousands move to the urban centers and cities attracted by more opportunities and a better life. The increase in population placed an added strain on the city's resources including the provision of public service.

### ***The City by the River***

Naga City, which is 377 kilometers southeast of Manila, is located in Bicol, a region on the southeastern tip of the island of Luzon. Naga is ranked 44th in terms of land area and 38th in terms of population among the 83 Philippine cities. The city's 77.5-sq. kms land area makes it small compared to other cities in Bicol. The small territory combined with a population of around 149,573 in 2005 (at a growth rate of

1.94%), makes it the most densely populated city in the region. Naga is the only chartered city and the commercial, educational, financial, religious, and cultural center of the Bicol region.

One of the main attractions of Naga City is the presence of several institutions of higher learning, including three universities. The most prominent is the Jesuit-run Ateneo de Naga University. The second is the non-sectarian University of Nueva Caceres which is considered the biggest university in Bicol in terms of enrollment. The third is the Universidad de Santa Isabel which is run by the religious order of the Daughters of Charity sisters. Another college in the city is the Naga College Foundation which is considered one of the region's leading schools in Criminology. The Philippine Women's University also has its Career Development and Continuing Education Center in the city, while the University of the Philippines Open University in Naga caters to distance education students.

As of 2005, the total population of Naga City stood at 149,573, the largest in terms of size, accounting for about 8.9 percent of the total population of the province. This was followed by Iriga City (5.73 percent), the municipalities of Libmanan (5.70 percent), and Nabua (4.57 percent). The least populous was the municipality of Gainza (0.54 percent).<sup>1</sup>

### ***Internal Migration***

The city government of Naga understood that migration was an important livelihood strategy. People living in the outskirts of Naga actually took to the city to seek more opportunities there. Indeed in 2000, it was estimated that 37 percent of the more than 137,000 population in Naga City at that time were not natives. More than one fifth of the migrant population moved into the city during the last five years prior to 2000, which meant a net migration rate of 1.7 percent. This further indicated that migration has become the main driver of the city's population growth, accounting for about 80 percent of the annual increment. Six of every ten migrants came from other towns within the province of Camarines Sur, while the rest came from other Philippine provinces.<sup>2</sup>

However, the influx of people has its accompanying negative ramifications. Even prior to his meeting with the MNDC, Mayor Robredo and his management team already discussed the lingering effects of in-migration, which is unmanaged rural-to-urban migration that has resulted in a mismatch between population and urban physical infrastructure and basic services. Slum and squatter settlements, sanitation problems, water and air pollution, and traffic congestion are urban-specific issues which were also felt in Naga City. Just like in other cities in the Philippines, the rate of population growth in Naga far exceeds job creation, leading to more unemployment and worsening poverty.

Mayor Robredo also realized that as more people moved to and stayed in the city, the greater would be the strain on its resources. Those who flocked to the city included the workforce as well as students from neighboring localities and even adjoining provinces, education being one of the significant driving forces of in-migration to Naga City. Thus, the influx of workers and students into the city exerted pressure on the resources of the local government. Most of the poor migrants became squatters which added to the already worsening problem of urban poor housing. The strain brought by the in-migration was not limited to the entry of poor migrants. Even migrants who were more financially capable also availed of the basic services that the city provided, including subsidies in education. Since public education is subsidized, more students meant more subsidies. Other consequences of the increase in population included the strain on garbage collection, traffic management and other public services.

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<sup>1</sup> Census of Population and Housing, National Statistics Office < <http://www.census.gov.ph> >

<sup>2</sup> Wilfredo B. Prilles Jr., Urban Indicators for Managing Cities. Asian Development Bank

Majority of the permanent and temporary in-migrants in Naga were students. Mayor Robredo stated that there could be more students than workers in their city during a specific time and day. In fact, he observed that the population of the city swells during school days. Parents sent their children to the city with the purpose of giving them the best education. There were instances where an entire family has moved into the city or families who have the capacity even bought second houses because one of the children was studying in one of the schools in the city. Because of this situation, Mayor Robredo opined that the government should exert more effort to restore balance. Putting up tertiary education facilities on the city's periphery could be a way to decongest the urban center.

### **The Initiative**

As he was presiding the meeting of his management team, Mayor Robredo recounted those days when MNDC was still a blueprint. During that period, with the long term threat to Naga's resources because of a population growth rate greater than the pace of development, the city government, together with other local executives, had to come up with ways to address the issue of internal migration. With its limited resources amidst increasing responsibilities, the city government had to look for innovative and creative solutions. The foremost public policy response that has greatly impacted the issue of internal migration was the creation of the Metro Naga Development Council (MNDC). The MNDC was established in 1992 to primarily address the widening gap in the level of development between Naga City and its neighboring municipalities. The MNDC pooled the efforts and resources of these local government units, the private sector and national government agencies in Camarines Sur and focused them on projects and activities that address the needs of the Metro Naga constituency.<sup>3</sup>

The MNDC was given increased autonomy in line with the decentralization strategy for national development of the Local Government Code. The council structure was primarily set up to facilitate economic cooperation. MNDC established a plan to formulate programs through the coordination of mayors and governors. It consists of 15 mayors and representatives of the provincial government, and representatives of National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA), the private sector, and NGOs. The key components of the council are:

- **Metro-wide planning and role definitions.**

Metro Naga's Development Program served as a framework for defining the roles of LGUs. An agreement empowers each LGU to implement a complementary development program within its area. Naga is the trade, financial, education, and services center. One town is the industrial center. The other towns are key sites for manufacturing, food processing, and other industries.

- **Organizational machinery.**

The city government created a separate office that initiates and manages MNDC activities. Led by an Executive Director who supervises the project formulation, implementation, and support-service units, this office is considered crucial in sustaining LGU interests in the economic and service-delivery partnership.

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<sup>3</sup> Jesse M. Robredo, City Strategy and Governance: The Naga City Experience, Presented during the East Asia Urban and City Management Course on May 3, 2000 in Singapore

- **Pooling of resources and services for Metro-wide service delivery.**

LGUs contribute 2% of their economic development fund to a common fund. Other initiatives included the setting up of a Metro Naga equipment pool and emergency rescue network, construction of 50 km of farm-to-market roads, and a 500 water system and extension of livelihood assistance to Metro Naga constituents.

- **Pooling investment potentials and comparative advantages.**

Metro Naga capitalized on its competitive advantages. These included the city's image as one of the fastest-growing local economies in the country, the presence of four special economic zones, two of the country's richest fishing grounds, and a market of over half a million people. Investment- promotion activities were guided by the objectives of economic diversification, employment generation, and poverty reduction.

### **The Challenges: Political Constraints**

MNDC's creation was initially met with skepticism. Experts were critical that it could never work since one could never get chief executives of various political leanings to work together. Unlike the Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA) which was created by law and therefore has the authority, Metro Naga cannot impose its will and can only enjoin its member local governments to support any metro-wide program. The Metro Naga concept encountered many challenges which they had to confront and hurdle. It included operational difficulties to implement the change process.

There was a need to balance short and long-term projects. Support for the MNDC from local officials was dependent on whether or not the programs can be implemented within their short term of three years (such as livelihood). Mandated with a short three-year term, immediate and visible results are necessary to gain the confidence of the electorate again. The management team of Mayor Robredo had to face the political reality that short-term interests take precedence over long-term goals. This is especially true when the short term goals conflict with the long term goals. Ironically, programs and projects with far-reaching benefits have long gestation periods. Elected officials would be more interested in outcomes than processes because of their short term of office.

The city local executives had to contend with their increasing responsibilities to the constituents while looking at the welfare of the neighboring towns. The local government needed to look beyond the city boundaries because cities and their rural neighbors are always dynamically interlinked and that ills of urbanization are largely due to urban-rural disparities. Even without a metropolitan institution, the city had to take into account the impact of policies and programs on rural communities.

However, there was a continuing need for a carrier LGU. The local executives were aware that partnerships often bog down because there is no one willing to bear much of its initial burdens. Due to their varying status, members of a metro institution were expected to assume equal responsibilities for the partnership. A lead LGU that is willing to provide more financial and technical resources to the institution had to accept the responsibility. As in the case of Metro Naga, this responsibility fell on the shoulders of Naga City based on the premise that it has better capabilities and has more at stake in the growth of other local governments. Then there was the need to set aside partisan politics. The initiators of the MNDC knew that the issue of political differences was a hindrance to cooperative efforts among local governments.

## **Selling the Idea**

Exerting political will and influence was a major ingredient in realizing the MNDC. In initiating the establishment of the metropolitan arrangement, Mayor Robredo knew that the development strategy of the city was rooted on long-term city development and local inter-dependency. This was the reason why the development goals have been far-sighted and considered a planning perspective beyond political boundaries. As stressed by Mayor Robredo, the development challenges of the city were not something just confined to the city itself. Problems of shortage of space, water, migration, squatting, employment could not be resolved solely by the city itself but by integrating the development impact of the surrounding areas.

The team of Mayor Robredo saw the need to have good relations with neighboring LGUs and integrating each other's concerns in order to sustain the development efforts. Naga City took its role as the “Big Brother” in the area and initiated programs or activities that assisted other LGUs in the delivery of basic services to their constituents. Naga City's long-term view of city development together with its resolve to help its neighbors and the political leadership to initiate cooperation were significant hallmarks of MNDC's establishment.

Naga City initiated the creation of the MNDC as an exercise in partnership with a fresh view that Mayors are not just political figures but investors in the development business. The solid partnership among the LGUs in the MNDC and their accomplishments were manifestations of a cooperative undertaking that ignored partisan considerations in favor of achieving development benefits. Municipal mayors acknowledged that they benefited from the arrangement. Most claiming to have received more than what they give to the partnership. This was one prime mover for the sustained interest among the members on the activities of the Council.

A major feature of the MNDC is the application of maximizing utility of assets and resources. In addition, the pooled resources, either financial or non-financial assets, widened the coverage of its use rather than confined to only one or few local areas. The combination of resources by the member-LGUs increased their capacity to deliver services especially for LGUs which only have meager resources to assume big responsibilities mandated to them by the new local government code (LGC).

A serious exercise of coming up with major development roles for each of the member-LGUs was an important step towards the development of a more workable and sound integrated development for the area. LGUs found basis upon which their local socioeconomic and physical development plans were formulated or revised. The roles that they have agreed upon under the MNDC served as the guiding framework for the detailed master plan that was developed for Metro Naga.

## **Effectiveness**

The opening up of expansion areas for housing in Metro Naga has created opportunities in member municipalities while, at the same time, stemming the inflow of new migrants into Naga. The towns of Canaman and Camaligan, specifically, have absorbed the spill-over effects of Naga development. Residential subdivision development in these areas has mushroomed— leading to more resources from real property taxes and increased business potential brought about by a larger market. With a growth rate of 4.05% for the period 1995 to 2000, Canaman is the fastest-growing municipality in Metro Naga in terms of population. On the other hand, Naga's growth rate of approximately 1.94% is 0.33% lower than that for the period 1990 to 1995— a complete reversal of the situation that has prevailed since the 1960s.

The creation of the MNDC also lessened the economic disparity between Naga and the surrounding rural areas. This was seen from employment figures in the years after the initiative was operationalized.

Employment data showed that for the period 1990 to 1995 jobs were created in the area. While urban areas accounted for a higher increase in labor force population (22.72% vis-à-vis 13.61%), the 5-year change in the employed population in the rural areas was greater by 30.53%. There were pronounced results. One of the turnarounds was seen in Gainza. It is a town which was considered as one of the smallest and the poorest towns in Camarines Sur until the creation of the MNDC. Gainza registered the highest percentage increase in terms of the population that became employed.

### **Complementary Measures**

Parallel to the MNDC was the aggressive program on managing population. The population and development program of the city made significant inroads. The city's annual population growth rate over the last five years (2000 - 2005) has been maintained at 1.65%. The contraceptive prevalence rate increased from 48% in 1990, 57.75% in 2004 to 58.27% in 2005. The thrust was not to increase prevalence rate but to lay down the available options to married couples. The city made headway with the Go Natural Program in promoting natural family planning for responsible parenthood.

One thing that went Naga City's way was that there was no disagreement in the population program among the different sectors including that of the conservative Catholic Church. The main stance of the city is that government will only provide options and the technology and the people will decide eventually. The government view to avoid confrontations was to talk and agree among parties before implementing. The methods available should be equally presented with no given incentive. If an incentive is given for one method then all incentives should be given for all methods. There should be no government bias with artificial because when that happens then there is already bias against religion (specifically the Catholic Church).

Mayor Robredo realized that other than the programs that were already in place, it was also important that the people should have a high level of understanding. The level of development should be more than the average. The mayor stressed that population growth should be proportional to development.

Another key to the success of their programs according to the mayor was good implementation. The city's population officer has really been good long before he assumed the city's top post. The critical part was the fact that the program had a clear outcome. In the case of population management, what the mayor wanted to see at the end of the day was the tempering of the growth rate. The mayor is concerned more on the outcome. The focus was on results and good programs.

The in-migration in Naga City was balanced by their population growth rate. This meant that even if there was an increase in in-migration, population growth rate due to live births did not increase. Managing internal migration was meant to be in consonance with the national policy of promoting responsible population and family planning programs. The city aggressively pursued its information dissemination campaigns from the barangay to the household levels.

One of the distinguishing features of the city's population and development program is the institutionalization of the Barangay Service Point Officers (BSPOs) who until now are very much active. The BSPOs are the link of the city hall to the grassroots level. They are the ones who regularly visit households in the barangays where they are assigned. Their duties include gathering of data and educating the Married Women of Reproductive Age (MWRAs).

The city also organized the Naga City Natural Family Planning Council with members from the cross-section of the community, including representatives from the religious sector and the academe. Its unifying campaign is to "Go Natural" which the council accordingly adopted as its theme. It aims to

address issues on the growing problem on population and women's reproductive health with natural family planning method as the safest and best method in family planning.

### **Sustainability and Replicability**

Maintaining and improving on the gains achieved will be largely dictated by the kind of leadership that succeeding administrations could provide. Initial efforts only served as strong foundation for sustaining gains.

Participation by national government agencies (NGAs) and non-government organizations (NGOs) was also a critical factor. While Metro Naga started as an initiative of local government units, the involvement of NGAs and NGOs in decision-making was very important. The NGOs and NGAs sit as members of the Council. Their role is to temper the bias of elected officials for short-term projects that may sidetrack long-term development goals. They provide continuity to the partnership as local executives come and go after elections.

Local executives' subscription to the idea that they as Metro Naga's Executive Council members should go beyond the party lines was another important part of the success of MNDC. The executives were able to embrace a paradigm shift where the Council members forget partisan considerations and focus on common development concerns. The executives agreed that political affiliation should never a basis for membership or decision-making. They were aware of the fact that politics can split the partnership into ineffectual factions.

A very crucial factor in the formation of the Council was the realization and recognition that cooperating with other LGUs in solving their problems was beneficial to all of them. Equally important in the success of the possible replication of the MNDC is the presence of legislations/national government policies that support such alliances.

As the meeting was drawing to a close, Mayor Robredo thought of the new accolades (in addition to the earlier 40 awards) Naga City has received from local, national and international entities. In 2007, the city was awarded the Housing Rights Protector Award by 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. CYO dates back to March 1998, making it the longest running initiative of Mayor Robredo and 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, to include four city department heads and a city councilor, former urban poor affairs office head Nathan Sergio. Furthermore, the city was the recipient of the Community Development Award given by the University of Nueva Caceres to commemorate the city's Diamond Jubilee.

In 2006, Naga passed the Local Sectoral Representation ordinance, making it the first locality to elect sectoral representatives to a sitting Sanggunian in the entire country. Mayor Robredo was happy to note that the city ordinance effectively accomplished what Congress has failed to do for local autonomy and decentralization over the last 17 years. In addition, Naga saw the active participation of various sectors and institutions in running the city's affairs. Councils working for the rights of women, children, youth and senior citizens have been organized. Likewise, the city institutionalized the so-called QUEEN initiatives through another Sanggunian ordinance, which organized parents who will play a key role in ensuring that every Nagueño child will be given all opportunities to complete basic education.

**Finally, a new blueprint for development....**

After a day-long closed door session with members of his management team, Mayor Robredo held his notes comprising the revisions to the draft of Naga City's Three-Year Development Plan which already incorporated a revived list of projects to address the gnawing population and other development concerns of the city. He was pleased with his discussion with the team, knowing that the final draft document to be presented to the Executive Committee of MNDC later that week constituted Naga's new blueprint for growth.

**GUIDE QUESTIONS:**

1. *The MNDC model is highly recommended for emulation in every province. Why is the model not replicated in other provinces in Region 5?*
2. *What best practice lessons of the MNDC may be replicated in other parts of the country?*
3. *Would you say that the success of the MNDC is tied up with the leadership style of the local executive? Explain your answer.*
4. *The problem of most provinces is funding, what would you recommend to local executives of other provinces to support their population programs?*
5. *What internal migration factors are evident from the Naga experience?*
6. *Based on the MNDC experiences, how would you reconcile the influx of migrants to an urban area with a population program?*