

## LOCAL GOOD GOVERNANCE PRACTICES: THE CASE OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNIT OF NAGA CITY, PHILIPPINES

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### ABSTRACT

“Good Governance” has been one of the more prominent concepts among governments and international aid agencies in the past decades, with various sectors and organizations setting standards and identifying indicators to assess and measure good governance (*Brillantes, Alex and Fernandez, Maricel, “Is there a Philippine Public Administration?”*)

*Governance* is the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country’s affairs at all levels” (*UNDP, 1997 as cited by Brillantes 2010*). It is the process through which those institutions, businesses and citizens’ groups articulate their interest, exercise their rights and obligations and mediate their differences. (*Louise, 2000 as cited by Brillantes 2010*)

The practice of governance is inherent for both national and local government to deliver its function. For them to be effective there should be a well-managed and administered government, characterized by the following basic elements of good governance: accountability, participatory, predictability and transparency.

The case of the *Local Government Unit (LGU) of Naga City*, Philippines is widely recognized for its model for good governance. Naga City has been recognized by various award-giving bodies relative to its remarkable practices relative to effective public administration and governance. It has been cited by various institutions and has garnered over 140 awards over the years. Naga City is located in the Bicol Region, a peninsula on the southeastern most tip of the island of Luzon. It is the most densely-populated city in the region, and is locally known as the “Heart of Bicol”. It is the commercial, financial, educational, religious and cultural center of the region.

**Keywords:** Good Governance, Accountability, Participatory, Predictability, Transparency and Local Government Unit of Naga City

### I. Introduction and Background of the Study

“Good Governance” has been one of the more prominent concepts among governments and international aid agencies in the past decades, with various sectors and organizations setting standards and identifying indicators to assess and measure good governance (*Brillantes, Alex and Fernandez, Maricel, “Is there a Philippine Public Administration?”*)

Governance is commonly defined as the *exercise of power or authority by political leaders for the well-being of their country’s citizens or subjects*. It is the complex process whereby some sectors of the society wield power, and enact and promulgate public policies which directly affect human and institutional interactions, and economic and social development. The power

exercised by the participating sectors of the society is always for the common good, as it is essential for demanding respect and cooperation from the citizens and the state. As such, a great deal about governance is the proper and effective utilization of resources. (<https://tamayaosbc.wordpress.com/2014/08/21/what-is-governance/>)

It is also a system of values, policies and institutions by which a society manages its economic, political and social affairs through interactions within and among the state, civil society and private sector. It is the way a society organizes itself to make and implement decisions – achieving mutual understanding agreement and action. It comprises the mechanisms and processes for citizens and groups to articulate their interests, mediate their differences and exercise their legal rights and obligations. It is the rules, institutions and practices that set limits and provide incentives for individuals, organizations and firms. Governance, including its social, political and economic dimensions, operates at every level of human enterprise be it at the household, village, municipality, nation or globe. (*UNDP Strategy Note on Governance for Human Development, 2000*).

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These are indicators or characteristics of good governance: (1) Transparency (2) Participation (3) Accountability (4) Leadership (5) Rule of Law (6) Continuity, Predictability and Sustainability of Program (7) Preference for the Poor; (8) Effective, responsive, Provision of Basic Services, and (9) Human Right Based Approach to Governance. These are inextricably related to each other.

## **II. Methodology**

In the conduct of this study, an Interview Guide reflecting the governance indicators with indicative checklist was used. The instrument was employed to the Local Government Unit of Naga

The data generated from the said Local Government Unit (LGU) was validated through a Focus Group Discussion which was participated by representatives from the different sectors in the community: business, military, church, academe, youth, media and NGO.

## **III. The Setting – Naga City**

Naga City is located in the Province of Camarines Sur. It is about 450 kilometers away from the south of Manila and about 100 kilometers away from the north of Legazpi City. It is one of the smallest among cities in the country, with a total land area of 8,448 hectares. It has a population of 160,000 residents.

It is one of the five cities created by royal Spanish decree in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, thus one of the country's oldest and is originally called as Ciudad de Nueva Caceres. And since the Spanish era, it has served as seat of the Archdiocese of Nueva Caceres that oversees the Roman Catholic hierarchy of the whole region. Aside from its religious dimension, the city has also been established in the fields of education and business, thus has been described as the "Heart of Bicol".

#### **IV. Local Governance Practices**

The Local Government Unit (LGU) of Naga City was assessed along the different governance indicators:

##### Transparency

*Transparency*, as used and practiced in public organizations imply openness, communication and accountability. It calls for an operation that allows others to see what actions are performed.

The LGU- Naga City demonstrated implementation of the Anti-Red Tape Act (ARTA) RA 9485 – *"An Act to Improve Efficiency in the Delivery of Government Service to the Public by Reducing Bureaucratic Red Tape, preventing Graft and Corruption and Providing Penalties Therefore"*. Specifically, as stated in Sec 2:

"SEC2. *Declaration of Policy.* – It is hereby declared the policy of the State to promote integrity, accountability, proper management of public affairs and public property as well as to establish effective practices aimed at the prevention of graft and corruption in government.

Towards this end, the State shall maintain honesty and responsibility among its public officials and employees, and shall take appropriate measures to promote transparency in each agency with regard to the manner of transacting with the public, which shall encompass

a program for the adoption of simplified procedures that will reduce red tape and expedite transactions in government."

As shown, the LGU-Naga City has set-up their own service standards known as Citizen's Charter. There is the presence of information billboards, specifically, performance pledges reflecting the procedure to obtain a particular service; person/s responsible for each step; maximum time to conclude the process; the documents to be presented by the customer, if necessary and the procedure for filing complaints. These are posted at the main entrance of the offices. Also, in the case of the City, a written and published Citizen's Charter is available (*please refer to the attached Documentation*).

Further, the frontline services can also be accessed in the LGU. There is the presence of the Public Assistance/Complaints Desk.

As to the use of the Report Card Survey to obtain feedback on how provisions in the Citizen's Charter are being followed and how the LGU is performing, LGU-Naga City expressed that the process is being practiced and handled by their Personnel Officer.

There is also the presence of Management Information System (MIS) that is anchored on E-Governance (*please refer to these site - <http://naga.gov.ph/>*). Further, a City Events Protocol Public Information Office is created to continuously provide public information. Aside from the website, a social media account, specifically, Facebook –Page is also available (*please refer to this site <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Naga-Smiles-to-the-World/122597411124352>*).

As to the implementation of Full Disclosure Policy of local government finances and transactions, the LGU-Naga City practiced the display of financial transactions on bulletin, referred to as Transparency Board or Full Disclosure Board (*please refer to the attached Photo documentations*). The public can view the financial documents from the website and the constituents can understand how their local governments budget and spend for public services. (*Please refer to the websites*).

The presence of a communication plan was only evident to the City, considering the creation of the City Events Protocol Public Information Office, the presence of the website and the social media (Facebook) account and the availability of the publications – SMILES magazine and the Gazette. All salient information about the City including its programs, projects and activities are reflected in the information materials and facilities. The rest of the LGUs expressed that they still have to work on preparation of such communication plan. All LGUs are also into practice of having regular State of the Municipal/City Address and the conduct of the regular citizen assemblies at the barangay level.

In line with the implementation of the Procurement Law – Republic Act 9184 – “Government Procurement Act - *“An Act Providing For the Modernization, Standardization and Regulation of the Procurement Activities of the Government and For Other Purposes”*” which states that:

GPRA was enacted primarily to eliminate all forms of corrupt practices in the government procurement system and likewise seek efficient utilization of the government’s resources. The GPRA is governed by five (5) core principles, To promote: (1) **transparency** in the procurement process; (2) **competitiveness by extending equal opportunities** thereby allowing eligible private contracting parties to participate in public bidding; (3) **streamlined procurement process** that will uniformly apply to all government procurements; (4) **system of accountability; and, (5) public monitoring** of the procurement processes and implementation.

As claimed by the LGU-Naga City, these 5 core principles are translated concretely through the posting of materials/supplies for bidding and the posting of bidders. Thus, the LGU follow strictly the said law.

#### Participation:

*Participation* as defined by Robredo (2006) is a mechanism that ensures long-term sustainability by generating broad-based stakeholdership and community ownership over local undertakings.

In the case of Naga City, this indicator of good governance is very evident. There are mechanisms that enhance constituency participation that is treated as both partner and beneficiary. All sectors of the community – including the marginalized – have a voice in the government.

The participatory mechanisms involve organizations and aggrupations in government-initiated bodies.

- The “Naga City People’s Council” (NCPC) which is composed of all accredited business, non-government and people’s organizations within the City was established as supported by the legislation known as the “Empowerment Ordinance of the City of Naga”. The Council appoints representatives to local special bodies; observes, votes, and participates in the deliberation, conceptualization, implementation and evaluation of programs, projects and activities of the City government; proposes legislation, participates and votes at the Committee level of the Sangguniang Panlungsod; and acts as the people’s representative in the exercise of their constitutional rights to information on matters of public concern and of access to official records and documents.
- The various groups and organizations are involved in the City policy-making bodies.
- The i-Governance is another mechanism that enhances citizen involvement in governance. Through such mechanism the City improves its transparency through the information openness. It has two components – the city’s website and the Citizen’s Charter.

Accountability:

Accountability as defined refers to the obligation of an individual or organization to account for its activities, accept responsibility for them and to disclose the results in a transparent manner (<http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/accountability.html>.)

As claimed by LGU-Naga City, the RA 6713 – “ *An Act Establishing A Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees, to Uphold the Time-Honored Principle of Public Office Being a Public Trust, Granting Incentives and Rewards for Exemplary Service, Enumerating Prohibited Acts and Transactions and Providing Penalties for Violations Thereof, and for Other Purposes*” is being complied with by the LGU officials and employees. Specifically, as declared in Sec 2 of the Code:

*Sec. 2. Declaration of Policies.* - It is the policy of the State to promote a high standard of ethics in public service. Public officials and employees shall at all times be accountable to the people and shall discharge their duties with utmost responsibility, integrity, competence, and loyalty, act with patriotism and justice, lead modest lives, and uphold public interest over personal interest.

However, as expressed by the stakeholders, the government officials and employees are still to imbibe the expected norms of conduct of Public Officials and Employees, especially along commitment to public interest, professionalism and responsiveness to the public.

As shared, most of them are not that conscious of the procedural requirements and time needed to complete a transaction despite the availability of the performance pledges. Further,

mostly are still to be trained to be give utmost importance on customer service and to be more customer-friendly.

The conduct performance measurement and appraisal system including the performance audit is being practiced and is being handled by the Human Resource Management Office.

### *Leadership*

*Leadership* as defined refers to the activity of leading a group of people or an organization or the ability to do this which involves establishing a clear vision, sharing that vision with others so that they follow willingly, providing the information, knowledge and methods to realize that vision, and coordinating and balancing the conflicting interests of all members and stakeholders. (<http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/leadership.html>)

As to the leadership capabilities of the Local Chief Executive of LGU-Naga City, it is claimed that these are manifested. A clear and consistent vision statement is present for the Local Government Unit.

The Local Chief Executive of the City is the one that showed capacity relative to its ability to network with NGAs, LGUs and donor institutions as shown in the delivery of the basic services and the various projects of the City including the recognitions received based on its performance on good governance.

### *Rule of Law:*

*Rule of the Law* as defined refers to the absolute predominance of the law of the land overall citizens, no matter how powerful. It is based on three principles that (1) legal duties, and liability to punishment, of all citizens, is determined by the ordinary (regular) law and not by any arbitrary official fiat, government decree, or wide discretionary-powers; (2) disputes between citizens and government officials are to be determined by the ordinary courts applying ordinary law, and the (3) fundamental rights of the citizens (freedom of the person , freedom of association, freedom of speech) are rooted in the natural law, and are not dependent on any abstract constitutional concept, declaration or guaranty. (<http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/rule-of-law.html>)

As shown, the LGU is practicing this effectively. The Local Government ensures strict implementation of the national laws including local ones, specifically the ordinances. Though as expressed by some stakeholders, one constraint that somehow causes concern relative to this is the fact that the Philippine National Police (PNP), agency that is mandated to aid in the enforcement of the laws is undermanned. Apart from this, is the issue on ‘politics’ that is still prevailing for the LGUs.

### *Continuity, Predictability and Sustainability of Programs*

The LGU ensures that the programs, projects and activities as reflected in their City and Municipal Development Plans are translated concretely into actions. With the practice of the ‘bottom-up’ and participatory approaches in the preparation of their Plans, the Local Government Unit warrants a “demand-driven” programs for their constituents.

The City has shown strong evidence relative to its continuing efforts to augment resources through grants.

*Preference for the Poor*

The City has shown strong evidence on this concern. Considering its “Kaantabay sa Kauswagan” Program being handled by its Urban Poors Affairs Office (UPAO), an agency dedicated to squarely address the needs of its growing urban poor population. In the long run, the program aims to empower the urban poor sector of the City by providing home lots, basic infrastructures and services, as well as livelihood opportunities to all in need; to strengthen the urban poor sector and heighten their participation in local governance, and to integrate the urban poor in the mainstream of development and make them more productive members of the society.

*Effective, responsive, Provision of Basic Services*

The LGU-Naga City as shown in their approved budget claimed to have equitable and rational distribution of basic services among beneficiaries. There is appropriate allotment on the following Sectoral Services: (1) Economic; (2) Social, covering Education, Health and Nutrition, Labor and Employment, Housing and Community Development; and (3) General.

*Human Rights-Based Approach to Governance*

The presence of effective mechanisms allowing equal access to social services, justice, etc. and equal access to opportunities for human development are seen in the City, specifically in its equity-building programs covering health, nutrition and education.

## **V. Best Practices**

The Local Government Unit of Naga City is a (1) recognized Center of Local Innovations. It has garnered more than 40 national and international recognition – including the 1998 Dubai International award for having one of the Top ten (10) Best Practices worldwide; (2) a Livable City, as recognized by the League of Cities; (3) has strong non-government sector which can in the form of civic, business and people’s organizations. There are one hundred (100) organizations which are accredited with the City; and (4) has took advantage of local autonomy. The state policy to promote local autonomy has helped Naga mainly because it has helped itself, crafting innovations that even antedate the Local Government Code.

For the City to have this in place, a Governance Model has been adopted:

- *Progressive development perspective* - based on “growth with equity” as a core philosophy

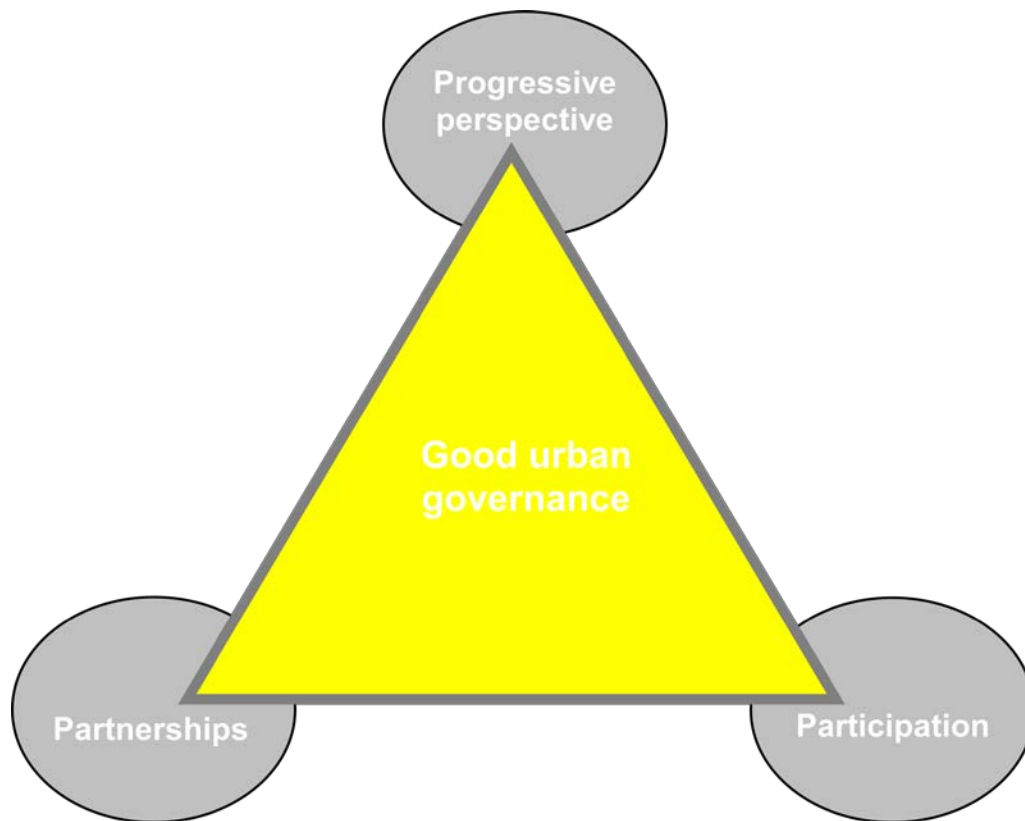
It is a function of the local leadership. In the case of Naga, considering its previous situation had to involve: confidence-building measures; sharing with the community a vision for the city and leadership by example.

- *Functional partnerships* - vehicles that enable the city to tap community resources for priority undertakings.

It multiplies the local government's capacity and enables it to overcome resource constraints for growth or equity-building strategies, with community groups or individuals, and government-initiated or private-led.

- *Participation* - mechanisms that generate stakeholder-ship and ownership over local undertakings.

It is borne out of the belief that the extent of the city government's success is contingent on how people respond to its initiatives. It serves as the mechanisms to ensure the inclusion of individuals and the community in decision-making. It also mainstreams and engages people in governance, promotes long-term sustainability by generating broad-based ownership of initiatives and promotes the partner-beneficiary concept.



(<http://naga.gov.ph/experience-naga/innovations/best-practices/>)



The following are illustrative examples:

1.) Partnerships in Growth Programs

- The preparation of the Urban Transport & Traffic Management Plan

It is a growth strategy for expanding the Central Business District (CBD) only through the relocation of transport terminals outside the CBD.

- Satellite/District Markets

It is the development dispersed to areas outside the CBD by encouraging the development of privately- owned district markets.

- Naga Southwest Development

It is a multi-billion property development covering approximately 90 hectares. It is another private-led partnership involving one of the country's leading property development conglomerates and will be the area for first-class commercial and residential development.

2.) Partnerships in Equity-Building Programs

- Urban Poor Program (*Kaantabay sa Kauswagan*) –

It is a program with urban poor organizations, landowners and private developers and covers 6,940 households.

- Livelihood

It provides livelihood assistance to the urban poor and other micro entrepreneurs.

- Health, Nutrition and Emergency Assistance

It brought down the number of malnourished children to 5.3% of the pre-school population. Further it institutionalized *Emergency Rescue Naga* with various community groups.

- Education

The presence of schools for early education and development and specialized high schools.

## VI. Conclusion

The City's good governance practices are anchored on its governance model, highlighting partnerships and participation. These are key components of the City's governance model.

Partnerships work best among organized groups and institutions, specifically on operational and practical level. This can be complemented by mechanisms that promote stronger participation at the level of individual.

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