

RENEWED VIGOR, FRESH HOPES
The City Mayor's Report
HON. MAYOR DALE B. CORVERA
Third Charter Day, July 28, 2010, Cabadbaran City

Maayong hapon sa tanan.

IT IS WITH RENEWED VIGOR brought about by the fresh mandate that you have given me in the last elections that I once again stand before you to report on what my administration has accomplished last year for you, the *Cabadbaranons*. I have been doing this each year because like our new president, His Excellency Benigno Simeon Aquino III, I look upon you as my boss *busa matag karon ug unya motaho ako aron inyong mahukman kung takus ba ako sa inyong pagsalig.*

THE PAST YEAR, if I may go straight into what must be in your mind right now and be blunt about it, was a difficult year for our city.

It was, as I said in my report last year, because of the obstruction thrown our way by the group of old cities that doesn't want us to make our way to progress that easy.

We all know that the Supreme Court reversed its decision of November 18, 2008 and instead ruled on December 21, 2009 that our cityhood law was indeed constitutional. But the case is not over yet. The league of cities has filed a motion for reconsideration, and while it is still pending in the court our administrative status remains unclear. In fact, our Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) is still on a Municipal status since May 21, 2009 until today and until the case will be finally resolved hopefully in our favor.

What I have been most worried about is the adverse impact of this crisis on the delivery of basic services in our city. We have to limit our services only to those that address the most basic of needs such as those for medicine support and discontinue some programs, projects and activities during the year simply because we no longer have funds for them.

To further cut on costs, we have set stringent austerity measures such as limiting the maintenance and other operating expenses, again, only to those involving the most basic of the city's services such as for the unhampered operation of garbage collection.

Our resolve to momentarily do away with capital outlays has also reduced our cash outflows.

I am confident however, that if we will continue to seriously implement the cost-cutting measures that are now in-placed on top of the encouraging result of our collection efforts from the mining sector and the opening of new businesses as a result of the transfer of the market operation to the market site in Mabini, our financial picture is not completely dim after all.

We may note that we have been denied of over to Php200 million of the year's allocation because of the pending question on our cityhood and you can just imagine how crippling that amount could be to so many programs and projects for our people. The inadequacy of the budget was also pronounced by the fact that we started the year with allocations of a regular city during the period.

We projected that an increased inflow from local sources could somehow keep the most basic of our services afloat but while local tax payments have been much better compared to the previous years, these were not enough to fund the programs and projects that were lined-up for the year.

You may recall that in my report last year I outlined the position that we cannot be paralyzed by the uncertainty of the outcome of our cityhood case. Our resolve then was that we, the city officials, have to perform no matter what status shall Cabadbaran be classified into – a city or a municipality – as its result because we are duty bound to satisfy the needs of our people. That position remains. But we can only live up to that position if number 1 our local taxpayers help us out not necessarily by doing something big but by simply paying the taxes due to our city on time and number 2 if our economic enterprise ventures which I call our profit centers like the market, terminal and slaughterhouse, will yield the desired revenues.

MY FELLOW CABADBARANONS, if I rattled off the preceding sad notes on the state of our city early on in this report it is not because I want to justify and be pardoned for possible shortchanges in the services that my administration would have delivered. No, my administration has been delivering the services that are due to our people so I don't have to resort to it. It is simply a disclosure on the conditions wherein our city has to operate, an expression of trust that you can make sound judgement from out of it and an intimation of faith that you would consequently and voluntarily come out and take some of the load so that we, as a community, can eventually move up. It is, to be honest with you, a call for support.

I am expressing this to you fully aware that my administration has already built the foundations wherein our development shall be mounted on my first year and began implementing development programs and projects based on these foundations on my second year. These are records of performance from where we can take off.

I am disclosing the hard realities that our city has to face with the full knowledge that our city officials have just been elected or reelected and therefore have just been charge or recharged for fresh or renewed vigor.

I am intimating a call for support from you because I have the confidence that if we match our records of performance and the vigor of our new officials, we would naturally end up rubbing off on our fellow *Cabadbaranons* new insights, charging them with high energy to work on things out and make them face the crisis brimming with fresh hopes for better days ahead.

I am saying all these before you right now to assure you that our city is in good hands and that with just a little support from you we can move up and live the satisfying life that we all deserve.

MY FELLOW CABADBARANONS, to be more straightforward and to be able to directly link my report to my appeal for support from you, let me deviate from my usual way of reporting using the DBC CARES framework. That remains as framework in our programming but let me do away with it in the meantime and rather go directly to the assessment on how we performed in terms of ratings, the measures that tell us whether or not we are faring well vis-à-vis in addressing the needs of our people and whether or not we are covering all the development fronts. This way, you can immediately see the impact of projects where your taxes have been going or which service area where your other possible support is most needed.

My colleagues in government, ladies and gentlemen, the cityhood crisis may have battered our city with financial constraints but we are still delivering a highly satisfactory service performance in this reporting year.

It's not me saying that. It is the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG), the agency tasked in reviewing the performances of local government units, that gave our city that mark after assessing our accomplishments during the period.

With a measure that has five as the highest, the DILG rated our overall service performance in this review period at 4.26 or "High" in descriptive mark. I have to repeat "High" to emphasize my gratefulness to all of us for making that mark possible despite the belt tightening, the frustrations and everything.

Admittedly, however, that mark is slightly lower than our 2008 rating of 4.32. I have to also repeat "Lower" to emphasize that we could have done more.

This, in my assessment, is a direct result of the crisis that we are currently facing. Financial constraints have made us postpone the implementation of several environmental and economic support projects during the period. And rightly so, it is in these areas where our performances slid by certain points.

As broken down into service areas, our city has improved ratings in the area of Social Governance to 4.85, in Valuing the Fundamentals on Good Governance to 4.68, and Administrative Governance to 4.05. Our mark decreased from within 4 to 3.87 in Environmental Governance and 3.84 in Economic Governance.

What these levels of performance speak out, ladies and gentlemen, is that despite the disturbances in the city's service delivery financial support system my administration has consistently increased the quality of services that address the basic social needs such as those in health, education and social welfare support for our people. Despite the hard times, my administration has also consistently raised the bar of standards in observing the fundamentals of good governance and development administration.

We have to admit, however, that we deserve the slight reduction in our performances in both environmental and economic governance. This is simply because it was these service areas that were affected by our cost-cutting measures. We postponed most of the projects already set for implementation in these development fronts.

BASED ON THESE RECORDS of performance, the lines are drawn and it is clear that the condition calls for our city to give increased attention on economic and environmental development support services.

It would also mean that it is in economic and environmental development support services where your support is most needed that where most of the taxes you pay would be allocated.

Getting a better performance mark in the economic development front, I must say, actually needs not much effort on the part of city government. The role of the government sector here is actually just initiate leverage efforts in establishing support mechanisms to trigger the interests or enable those in the private sector to engage in more productive activities, get a better deal in terms of getting a fair value of their produce, and advice them to give attention to businesses that create more jobs. Beyond this, the economic front is actually the private sector's arena. And even an organization of economic players can easily take the role of running support services for the business sector. Other than helping the city government out by volunteering to keep your tax accounts updated, therefore, I urge the businessmen among us to also exert effort to develop business organizations that can help in attending to the economic needs of our people.

Improving the mark in the environmental governance front may be more of a government concern but the private sector hands must be around to help us keep our streets clean and guard against those who would be a menace to our already fragile ecological balance. Several environmental development projects are currently on the pipeline and I would be expecting the presence of many of our residents to discuss how we shall go about them in the coming days.

The support of our residents and our partnership with private organizations have been more felt in services areas on social governance, good governance and administrative governance, the reason why our city has kept its upward performance marks. A private company, Pacific Cement Philippines, Inc. in coordination with TESDA, is with us in this endeavor with the training of 34 masons in proficiency of their trade. My administration will be welcoming any other support to keep or continually improve our performance in these areas.

MY FELLOW OFFICIALS, FELLOW *Cabadbaranons*, with the calls of support that I have just issued, your minds must by now be already bothered with thoughts on what ought to be done and how to go about them. For you to have a feel on which specific areas you can go into, may I make a rundown on where this administration would be focusing its efforts in the next six months.

As backdrop, may I share what we think could be the condition in relation to our cityhood case. We foresee that the case would be finally resolved on or before December 2010. But that may not mean victory for us. It could also be a final reversal of our status into a municipality. This means that we can't help but project from the position of being a municipality. Of course, with our prayers, our hopes are high.

Given the above backdrop, the city government's operation would continue to observe the austere mood, limiting to the very basic that has been the tack for a year now but without losing hope, and instead turn these daunting challenges into opportunities to learn new ways to improve rather than feel victims of the situation. This is our incentive to reconsider our priorities. As what Helen Keller said " a happy life consists not in the absence, but in the mastery of hardships".

On the economic development front, our services would mainly be focused on support to abaca production, the primary crop that we choose as our OTOP or One Town One Product. We have already made headways in this program with around 500 hectares of our vacant uplands already planted with the crop and with three farmers and women cooperatives already enabled to attend to sustaining activities. The Department of Trade and Industry and DILG have recognized our exemplary effort in pushing our OTOP project and each handed our city an award during the period.

But we will also sustain support for other crops, as well as in activities in fishery. And we would be glad if more efforts from our residents, the business sector or the civil society could be extended in all these agriculture endeavors especially in ampalaya and banana productions, the other crops our city is prioritizing and maybe left out for lack of funds.

In the area of commerce, you may note that I have pushed for the rise of a community mall at the site of the old public market in my last two reports. The feasibility study is already done and the detailed engineering study is already in place but we have made to momentarily hold its implementation because of the huge reduction in the city's fund. While we are now thinking of another option for the utilization of the property, maybe leasing it to a private entity to construct a shopping center or mall, a committee chaired by SP Member Ernie M. Ceniza has been formed to study the possibility of turning it into a night market site before its final disposition.

Of course the need for our businessmen to go into manufacturing is a continuing call.

Our city would also like to inform our farmers, businessmen and the miners among us, that the city would be reaching out to you through a consultation soon so that we can map out plans on how to run over the hurdles of economic staleness and unemployment and leap into an economically prosperous city.

The same tack of holding consultations would also be made by the city for stakeholders in our environmental governance front, the other development area where we shall be able to forge a common understanding on our duties and play our role to promote environmental soundness and ecological balance.

For our partners that made us score high in the area of good and administrative governance, our comprehensive planning is continuing and may eat up much of our second half this year.

It is hoped that you can keep up with us in our efforts to keep our record, if not surpass it this year for more benefits to our people. We advise you, however, that the city will continue to make the development workers in this service area as the most observant of the austerity measures. We have to limit the use of vehicle to save on fuel. While we are proud of having a new and modern cityhall, perhaps the best in the region, we have to be in a working space with no air condition at certain times, and no more allocation for cellular phone expenses.

For those in the social governance front, rest assured that no matter what happens to our cityhood case, you won't be shortchanged by the city leadership. You are the very reason why we, the city officials, are always on our feet. Not having a budget for programs directed for your benefits would always cause us sleepless nights. These are proven by the fact that it is in this service area where our city got a near perfect rating.

The city's drugs, medicine and vitamins support for our barangays as well as the cash incentives of Php2,000.00 and vitamins for our Senior Citizens would continue. The same for payments for Philhealth premiums for indigents. And yes, we will continue to make our *lolo* and *lola* laugh in gatherings to celebrate their birthday.

We will keep our scholarship program for college, high school and Children in Especially Difficult Circumstances as well.

MY FELLOW *CABADBARANONS*, this is the state of our city now.

Yes, I have to say this, Cabadbaran is in the midst of a storm.

Yes, Cabadbaran is gasping from a lot of austerity measures.

Yes, Cabadbaran needs all the support it can muster.

But Cabadbaran is in no way down in not being able to provide the basic services to its people. Cabadbaran would also in no way be stuck to such a condition for long. Cabadbaran would be back to its sturdy feet. Be it a city or a municipality, Cabadbaran would rise, and claim its position as a place that satisfies the need of its people. For the bottomline in whatever we aspire for Cabadbaran – a city or a municipality – is that it has to be a place that its people would find worth living in.

And as we shepherd our city into a place that we all want it to be, I urged everyone to join the city leadership as it revisits our vision. We have to be rooted with the changing realities then sharpen our vision, make it clearer and more achievable in line with our desire to see the rise of Cabadbaran as the administrative, educational and commercial center of Agusan del Norte through good governance as we have our beginnings set into that direction on the first year of our administration.

A vision, my fellow *Cabadbaranaons*, must not remain an idea. It has to be translated into work, a work that is constantly evolving. It may just be an idea today but tomorrow it will become a reality if we join our hands in working to achieve it.

The signs that the ideas in our vision have become more achievable are now beginning to surface before us. We now have the Caraga State University. Aside from attaining our idea of becoming an education service center in the province, the coming in of a good number of students from other places would follow. This would in turn result into improving the income of our small entrepreneurs, setting the stage for our rise as a commercial center.

In line with our idea of serving as the administrative center of the province, we will make a strong representation to convince the provincial leadership that now is the right time to transfer the Capitol to Cabadbaran, being the capital of Agusan del Norte.

All these will certainly hasten the development of our city.

In this connection, I urge the *Sangguniang Panlungsod* to pass back-up legislations directed to the attainment of our vision.

My colleagues in government, ladies and gentlemen, what I have just outlined are marching orders that would generally dictate the cadence of activities this year. I have to emphasize this to assure you that despite the challenges and the frustrating realities as well as the mud thrown at me by my political opponents in the May elections, my preoccupation has, as it has always been, not to jeopardize our city and shortchange you.

Pardon me if I have to touch on what some people have done to besmirch my reputation during the election season. I just can't help but remember having been practically placed on the line of fire when my opponents associated my name to the fire that gutted down our public market. Despite this accusation and other lies, I and my team got the support of our people and overwhelmingly voted for us. This renewed trust of our people has in the same breath also renewed our vigor and, with this, now face the first year of our second term with showers of fresh hope that can send us through to withstand the storm that our city is now facing. And for as long as we sustain such trust, continue to be positive, stay optimistic and work together with a common sense of purpose and intention, Cabadbaran, be it a city or municipality, will overcome.

The Lord, I know, will not leave us as we embark on a continued journey to a better life.

IN CLOSING, LET ME ONCE AGAIN ask you to trust that we can make it. We have done it in the last three years and we will continue making it because as I have been saying, DBC CARES. And yes, more than that, and like the Green light of the traffic light, Cabadbaran will GO and move forward and *we Cabadbaranons* can do it!

Daghan salamat ug sa makausa pa, maayong hapon.