

Column for Business Mirror
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The Entrepreneur

Islands of Excellence: Tagum

MY love for travel has enriched my knowledge and widened my experience, which contributed to my success both in business and in public service.

The numerous trips I made in the Philippines, particularly during the campaign in 2010, left some impressions not related to, but more lasting, than that year's political contest.

The campaign did not stop my observant eye, so I am now able to share with readers some of those impressions and their underlying lessons, which I believe will contribute to our country's development.

I saw most of the cities, which have since increased to 143 with the addition in September 2012 of the new cities of Ilagan in Isabela, Mabalacat in Pampanga and Cabuyao in Laguna. And I noted how the different cities were developed and how they were evolving, and the cities that were well-planned and were properly developed stood out among the rest.

I was reminded of the remarks made by former World Bank Country Director Joachim von Amsberg at the end of his three-year assignment in the Philippines in 2007. He said "there are numerous islands of good governance at the local level—the local government executives and their staff, communities and non-government organizations who chose to make a difference in their towns, despite the odds; those who chose to innovate and take risks to upgrade slum areas, to provide water and sanitation, to manage solid waste, to connect to other cities, to prevent and manage disasters, to make local bureaucracies more responsive to people's needs, and to encourage and empower their constituents."

The best city I saw during the 2010 campaign was Tagum, and I will rate it as excellent in terms of quality of development. As a developer, I was really impressed with the layout and construction of roads in Tagum, which were made more beautiful and attractive by the lines of royal palm trees—really world-class. The mangrove trees, too, were orderly planted along the highway.

Tagum City has a very beautiful city hall, a clean and orderly public market and a quality hospital. The local government also purchased some equipment and integrated some activities, including the manufacture of desks for the local public schools, which reduced costs and, at the same time, enabled the city government to respond promptly to public needs.

Other than Tagum City, I also saw other cities that were clearly superior to many of their peers, like Bacolod in the Visayas and Butuan, also in Mindanao. Bacolod and Butuan were developed over time, but Tagum is a recent development. I believe its transformation into a world-class city happened only in the past 10 years.

Tagum has received numerous awards and recognition in different aspects of governance and development, including the following: 2012 First Placer National Champion for Most Efficient City Division in the implementation of the alternative learning system, citing the very strategic partnership of the Department of Education and the local government of Tagum City. In 2011 Tagum received the Unesco King Sejong Literacy Prize, Gawad Pamana Ng Lahi Award for Davao region, Consistent

Regional Outstanding Winner In Nutrition and the National Literacy Award Hall Of Fame.

In 2010 Tagum was named, for the third time, the National Literacy Champion for Component City Category, and in 2008 Tagum was awarded as Outstanding Local Government Unit—Component City Category in the Philippine Cities Competitiveness Ranking Project of the Asian Institute of Management Policy Center, USAID, Germany Technical-Cooperation Unit and the Philippines Cities Competitiveness Ranking Project. Tagum City got a Rank 1 in Cost of Doing Business and Responsiveness of Local Government Units to Business Needs.

We always look at government as inferior to private developers and we assume that first-class development is the work of the private sector. Tagum has proven otherwise.

In my view, it is fair to say that the local government of Tagum developed the city the way Ayala developed Makati, Santa Rosa in Laguna and Alabang in Muntinlupa. In Tagum we can see that cities or towns, with capable, competent and dedicated local executives can be developed to become at par with the best communities in the world.

(To be continued)

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