

# **The Minimum Basic Needs Approach to Development: The Davao del Norte Innovation**

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*The adoption of the Minimum Basic Needs strategy to adequately and efficiently respond to the problems of poverty and underdevelopment has been the showcase program of the provincial government of Davao del Norte in order for development concerns to be immediately addressed. The quality of life of the people could be best improved if the basic needs for survival, security from harm and the enabling needs of the individual, family and community are met and prioritized. The article illustrates that there is a need to reinvent service delivery initiatives to make them responsive to the people's basic needs. By identifying the needs of the people, prioritizing projects and focusing attention on target beneficiaries, the provincial government is able to effectively deliver basic services while efficiently managing meager resources.*

## **Introduction**

The things people expect from the government are simple. These are equal opportunity for all, jobs for those who can work, security for those who need it, repeal of special privileges for the few, the preservation of civil rights, and the enjoyment of the fruits of progress.

For Davao del Norte, the ultimate end is to free the people from the constant threats of hunger, disease, crime and repression, and to nurture in everyone the will, the drive and the energy to dream of and achieve a decent and meaningful life.

These are lofty goals by any standard and may overwhelm even the most well-meaning public servant. But the Provincial Government of Davao del Norte has cut ambitious objectives into manageable projects that ultimately lead to its final goal.

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This study outlines the process adopted in Davao del Norte and the innovations introduced to systematize the collection of data on the quality of life in the province, and the interventions to address these concerns.

### **A Provincial Profile**

The province is strategically located at the southern part of Region XI in the island of Mindanao. It is bounded on the north by Agusan del Sur, Compostela Valley on the east, Bukidnon on the northwest, Davao City on the west, and the Davao Gulf on the south.

The total land area is 3,640 sq. km. covering three component cities and seven municipalities with 223 barangays. It is basically an agricultural province owing to its fertile soil and favorable climate.

Based on the 2000 census, the population of Davao del Norte is 743,811 of which 51.3 percent are males and 48.7 percent, females. Data indicate that 42 percent of the population live in urban areas and 58 percent in the rural areas.

### **The Local MBN Approach**

Upon election as Governor of Davao del Norte in 1998, Governor del Rosario immediately adopted the Minimum Basic Needs (MBN) Approach to adequately and efficiently respond to the problems of poverty and underdevelopment in the province. This has become the centerpiece of his administration to ensure that development concerns are given priority attention.

They believed then, even now, that the quality of life of the people could be best improved if the basic needs for survival, security from harm, and the enabling needs of the individual, the family and community are met and given priority.

Survival needs refer to biophysical requirements of the family and individual to assure life sustenance. These include health, food and nutrition, clothing, and safe water and sanitation. Security needs are the requirements to protect the family from physical harm. These include shelter, peace and order, public safety, and income and livelihood. Empowerment or enabling needs refer to the requirements that facilitate the attainment of survival and protection needs. These include basic education and functional literacy, participation in community development and psychosocial care.

The challenge then was to reinvent service delivery initiatives so they become responsive to people's basic needs. As expected, the strategy provided the provincial government the opportunity to touch base with the people. It provided benchmarks for performance, the directions for local development planning, and the basis for improved service delivery.

### *The Technical Working Group (TWG) and Project Design*

The MBN Approach to development was institutionalized through an administrative order creating the provincial Technical Working Group (TWG) to manage and coordinate the MBN program implementation. Down the line, all mayors and barangay chairpersons created their respective TWGs. These TWGs served as the convergence points of all concerned line agencies, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector involved in the program.

Towards the end of 1998, the provincial government adopted a project design for the equitable and efficient implementation of basic service delivery. The plan sought to install the computerization of the MBN data at the provincial and municipal levels.

It also detailed the concept of Big Brother guardianship where four big municipalities of the province would demonstrate to Small Brothers how to execute the MBN Approach. The idea was to involve the more progressive municipalities in the implementation of the MBN Approach in less progressive municipalities in order to cover the entire province.

### *Identification of the Top MBNs and Priority Barangays*

The plan led to an assessment workshop to determine the current status of the MBN implementation. As a result of the workshop, three indicators were added to the 33 conventional indicators to measure the degree of meeting a family's basic needs. These new indicators obviously responded to the issues of sustainability and agricultural development in the province as they relate to households with livestock, backyard/farm garden and compost pit.

After the assessment workshop, an orientation was undertaken to ensure the understanding of the program. An action plan was also adopted to install the MBN system in all the *barangays*.

A survey was formulated using the 36 indicators of meeting a family's basic needs (a result of the earlier assessment workshop). This survey was

distributed in the purok (a cluster of 15-10 households) and barangay to gather information about the basic needs of the families residing there. The municipal government then consolidated, computerized all the information, and culled the top two ranking problems or needs of each barangay. The municipalities were then urged to prioritize according to their funding capability. And from the pool of needs, the provincial government selected only the top two from each municipality, to come up with the *top ten priority unmet MBNs* of the province.

These unmet needs, in turn, were used as the criteria for the selection of the priority barangays. Categorically, these barangays were the most deprived and underserved, and thus required utmost attention. Out of the 223 barangays, 38 were selected as priority barangays for the MBN interventions.

### *Seeking Funds and Participation*

For the successful implementation of the MBN intervention, the provincial government sought the financial resources and its effective management, and the participation of the people.

They established the Hugpong Dabaonan Fund with an initial appropriation of P19 million to support priority projects for the 38 barangays. Thereafter, in the annual budget of the province, close to 50 percent is allocated for social and MBN projects.

To maximize participation and efficiently manage resources, some social preparations was conducted through (1) the *Hugpong Pulong*, (2) the Sambayanihan sa Barangay Seminar, (3) Situation Analysis, Planning, Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation (SAPIME) Seminars for the Barangay Development Councils.

### *Interventions*

Within the framework of self-reliance and people empowerment, the provincial government initiated programs and projects that raise the quality of the lives of the people of Davao del Norte. Some of these interventions may be commonly heard in public discussions, but they answer basic needs, and have made marked improvements in the people's lives.

To address the low income of families, livelihood projects were introduced and human resources development was pursued. The provincial government provided fishery and agricultural programs, and built infrastructures to facilitate the movement of goods and services.

To resolve the issue of lack of opportunities for the youth, Davao del Norte adopted development programs and extended scholarship grants to almost 2,000 students.

To address the problems on potable water and sanitation, several water systems were installed immediately to serve 14,684 families and 109 barangays.

To meet the requirements for compost pit and waste management, traditional and environment-friendly practices were pushed and the cleanest barangays were recognized.

To raise the number of households with livestock, the provincial government volunteered to disperse livestock and poultry to 2,408 families.

To provide childcare and early education to children, 3-5 years old, the provincial government ordered the construction of 39 day-care centers with 3,676 enrollees.

To improve the number of households with backyard or farm gardens, Davao del Norte established a farmer field school on vegetable and corn. It also initiated mushroom spawn production, and vegetable seeds distribution for backyard, communal and school gardens.

To support families affected by calamities and disasters, the provincial government has put in place disaster management programs to prevent and mitigate loss of lives and properties. It provides shelter assistance, relief, and immediately concentrated on rehabilitation.

To address sanitation problems, construction of toilets and facilities was initiated and volunteers for the purpose were enlisted.

And, to control population growth, the usual family planning programs were given adequate support.

### *Grassroots Change*

All of these interventions are obviously consistent with the mission of the province to uplift the quality of life through the MBN Approach by providing adequate services and facilities, effective local governance, people empowerment and ensuring sustainable development.

In the end, by adopting the process of identifying the needs of the people, prioritizing projects and focusing attention on target families, the province was

able to effectively deliver basic services, and efficiently manage meager resources.

### **Conclusion**

The MBN Approach to development is not entirely a fresh idea. But the Davao del Norte provincial government was able to adopt it in the entire province, and foster community participation and empowerment. By engaging the people to participate actively in local decisionmaking, and in setting targets for basic service delivery, significant changes were seen and felt even in the most remote and far-flung areas of the province.

Admittedly, the strategy caused a paradigm shift in the Filipino brand of public service. Slowly, the province is becoming more people-centered and development-oriented. In the days to come, the provincial government is confident that through this strategy, it will surely alleviate poverty in Davao del Norte.