

Shaping ARMM for the next generation through capacity building

There was an old saying that goes, a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. The adage rings some truth in it when one begins between conversation with the men and women that compose the workforce of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM).

The creation of ARMM is the result of the long, arduous journey of the Bangsamoro people towards a more developed and peaceful Mindanao. But this was just a beginning.

For many years, ARMM struggled as an autonomous regional government responsive to the people of Mindanao. Joining this struggle is the often underappreciated yet most crucial of the ARMM workforce: the middle managers. The changes in the ARMM leadership translated into many evolutions in ARMM governance but these middle managers have stayed put, with their managerial talent and skills untapped, yet they continued to provide the strong, remaining link between the mission and execution of good governance for ARMM.

This story sets the backdrop of the capacity building program of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and ARMM in terms of improving administrative, infrastructure, and economic development of the region.

"The technical knowledge from the training allowed us to see what we can do. We were able to identify the issues and explore recommendations that affect administration problems in ARMM," said Director Lydia Mastura of ARMM's Administrative Management Services.

"ARMM represents the century-old struggle of the Bangsamoro people. The training is important for us because we were all involved in the crafting of the Administrative Code we have longed to have for some time," added Engineer Baintan Ampatuan, chief of ARMM's Macro-Intersectoral Coordination Assistance Division.

Under the JICA capacity building program, ARMM middle managers have risen to the forefront to shape the future directions of ARMM governance. They have confidently transformed development strategies into actions and shepherded the ARMM workforce into a common direction.

"Prior to the legislation of the Administrative Code, there are many issues affecting the operations of agencies. Some agencies even duplicate the powers and functions of other agencies. Now, even if we leave the bureaucracy, the next generation will be guided properly on the administration and operations of ARMM," Engineer Ampatuan said.

For the past years, the ARMM government officials have worked with JICA to finalize the Administrative Code of ARMM government.

As part of the training, the participants had exposure trips to Japan, Malaysia, and Marikina City in Metro Manila to see best practices in governance that they could apply to ARMM.

"The training broadened our experience. ARMM is not just about conflict issues. It's about time we think of real development for ARMM," added Ampatuan.

Director Mastura and Ampatuan said that ARMM now has a personnel database system as well, which is crucial in managing an organization like ARMM.

The same sentiment was echoed by the middle managers of the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) ARMM. "We are more confident now of what we can do in infrastructure management because of the training. Our engineers are now trained to make project proposals and are more equipped with the know-how of implementing and monitoring the project," explained Assistant Secretary for Operations of DPWH ARMM Gualoson Mamogkat.

Engineer Danilo Ong who also participated in the JICA training said, "Every organization depends on human resources. By equipping our engineers with needed knowledge on procurement and project management, we are also contributing to boosting transparency in ARMM governance."

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Mamogkat and Ong who used to be trainees of the program are now trainers for engineers in the ARMM districts. "We want to ensure sustainability by also training the engineers down to the provinces in ARMM," Mamogkat further said.

Indeed the middle managers of ARMM have risen to the forefront to shape the future directions of ARMM governance. They have confidently transformed development strategies into actions and shepherded the ARMM workforce into a common direction.

Assistant Secretary Maritess Maguindra of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) ARMM said, "One important impact of the training to us is that it has facilitated more interaction and increased cooperation of the different agencies and stakeholders in ARMM. We learned to appreciate each other's role and work together towards a unified goal of economic development."

The DTI ARMM has since worked with the local government and other government and non-government agencies. The DTI and the Department of Agriculture ARMM are working together to boost the goat farming business in ARMM.

"We were able to mainstream our development directions. Goat farming is one of the technically feasible businesses in ARMM and we are working closely with the farmers.

This way, we are also able to develop them into entrepreneurs," Maguindra said.

Dr. Abubacar Datumanong, deputy head of ARMM's economic cluster added, "We want to remove the dole-out mentality of our farmers. Animal husbandry like goat farming does not need much capital and which farmers could easily turn into business, not just for local demand but also for exporting."

Eventually, Dr. Datumanong said, they would want farmers to form themselves into cooperatives so they may have access to microfinance in the future.

"The capacity building program we got made a lot of difference. It has triggered opportunities for collaboration within ARMM and provided us the right perspective to move forward," Maguindra further said.

Indeed, the capacity building training experience was just a beginning. The middle managers of ARMM have proven that success in governance is a journey and that despite the twists and turns, the journey is almost always worth it.



ARMM middle managers (l-r): Engineer Danilo Ong; DPWH Assistant Secretary Gualoson Mamogkat; Director Lydia Mastura; DTI Assistant Secretary Maritess Maguindra; Engineer Baintan Ampatuan; and Dr. Abubacar Datumanong