



**Controlling Patronage Politics Through Good Governance:
The Case of GOA, CAMARINES SUR**

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**LOCAL
LEADERSHIP
CASES**

Philippines

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Overview of the Municipality of Goa. A landlocked municipality in the Third Congressional District (Partido District) of Camarines Sur, Goa is one of this province's 35 municipalities. It has 21,038 hectares land area, politically subdivided into 34 *barangays* of which 10 are considered urban. Official census placed the population at 54,035 (NSO 2007) with about 10,230 families.



Headed by Mayor Marcel S. Pan from July 1998 to April 2007, Goa progressed from a third income class municipality to second class reflecting an improved local resource management performance. Today, Goa serves as the trade, commerce and education center of the Partido District of the province. Local economy is basically agriculture as 85 percent of its land area is devoted to coconut, corn, rice, vegetable and animal production...

Development Challenges. Goa's history shows that not a single clan dominated the local political landscape. Nonetheless, patron-client relations characterized local politics before the advent of Mayor Pan in 1998. While the 1990s ushered in the birth of decentralized governance via the historic enactment of the 1991 Local Government Code, its promises of democratization and development saw no realization in this particular town during this point in time. Incongruent to the developmental orientation of the decentralized environment, Mayor Pan's predecessor (1992-1998), governed as a patron, dispensing favors to his constituents through dole-outs.

At that time, people's participation in local governance was non-existent; their participation was only when they had to queue to the mayor's house to get their daily financial ration. There was no trace of improved service delivery then as funds for the devolved basic services were diverted to dole-outs and other private purposes including support to the mayor's private army (locally known as *kalasag*), the countervailing force against insurgency. Even funds intended for development projects were used to pay the salaries of the local bureaucracy. Rule of law was unheard of during this era as the private army of the incumbent mayor sowed terror by burning houses and killing residents. A political warlord indeed, the mayor allowed his *kalasag* to operate without

¹ Data as of 2008.

compunction. Goa's environs was littered with heavily armed men reminiscent of the war-torn areas of Mindanao. The local police was co-opted as collaborators of the mayor and his *kalasag* that even its mobile patrol became the mayor's service vehicle.

No hint of good governance was manifested because patronage, greed and terror characterized the socio-political environment of Goa before the coming of the third millennium.

Administratively, the overstuffed local bureaucracy exhibited ills that mirrored the leadership of its corrupt leader. With low morale, most employees pretended to work; most of the time though, they were out of their offices during official working hours. *Barangay* officials and ordinary citizens who transacted in the halls of the municipality developed the notion that they had to shell out grease money every time they transact business therein. For them, bribery was the name of the game. Not a semblance of accountability in local governance was observed. Deficits that ran into millions were never accounted for. The local bureaucrat who held the moneybag was eventually sacked by the Commission on Audit (COA) for failing to account the P3.6 M funds that went missing from the municipality's coffers. All these ills and more plagued the local government organization.

The lethal combination of a corrupt and visionless political leadership and an equally corrupt and inept local bureaucracy drove the citizenry of Goa to civil disobedience by simply refusing to pay taxes. Local tax collections steeply declined in 1996 forcing the municipal government to resort to credit finance not for any development projects and basic services but for the salaries of an incompetent local bureaucracy and for the sustenance of the dispensation of dole-outs by the local chief executive. Around P12 M indebtedness had been incurred by the municipal government to support its senseless expenditures. Fed up from years of poor service if not utter neglect, the Goaeños became restless and clamored for change. Likewise, the business sector got fed up. Because the local government unit (lgu) failed to provide an environment conducive to them, capital flight took place as local investors moved their businesses elsewhere in the province. With this scenario, Goa appeared headed nowhere but to the depths of chaos and total disrepair.

In mid-1998 though, the dark ages of Goa's history came to an end when a new political leader, perceived by the people as their knight in shining armor, was catapulted to power through the electoral process. Offering a new alternative to governance and leadership, Mayor Marcel Pan conveniently won the 1998 local elections. Undaunted by the messy state of affairs of the municipality and the seemingly formidable development challenges that he had to face, he buckled down to work with dispatch, determination and passion to lift up his municipality from the muck and mire of dirty politics and dysfunctional local governance. His entry ushered in a promise of redemption from the sins of the past administration. A new sense of hope, a new lease on life, a new brand of politics and leadership loomed when he got hold of the reins of

local governance and administration. In a nutshell, good governance became his guiding light in the process of Goa's transformation.

Starting Over with a Bang. Left with a ravaged local government unit, Mayor Pan started the process of reconstruction with a bang by totally revamping the local bureaucracy to make it leaner but stronger. A massive reorganization swiftly took shape by trimming the excess fat and dismissing the misfits therein. The right person was placed in the right job. Discrete functions were either discarded or rationalized by integrating them into the functions of the appropriate offices. Relevant offices were created to take care of crucial functions that were neglected in the past. In keeping with the principles of good governance, a new work culture based on the values of transparency, accountability, professionalism, client- and output-orientation was instilled in the revitalized workforce of the new administration. This was made possible largely by the mayor's human resource development (HRD) program, a program he carried out side by side with the reconfiguration of the local bureaucratic organization. His HRD program not only enhanced the knowledge and skills of his workforce but it also revitalized up their morale with the financial and psychic incentives system that he devised. Thus, the erstwhile lethargic and demoralized workforce has been transformed over time into a vibrant, professional and capable one.

Backed by a bullish workforce, a supportive local *Sanggunian* and *barangay* officials plus a sympathetic civil society, Mayor Pan painstakingly orchestrated the transformation of Goa into one of the most responsive, development-oriented and fully accountable Igus the country has ever produced. Under his watch, Goa won two *Galing Pook* Awards: the first one was for the Local Government Reorganization Project and the second, for the Family ID System Project.

The Tabang Banwaan Center (*Tulong Bayan* Center) and Family ID System Projects

From mid-1998 to mid-2007, an array of high profile² and innovative development projects had been conceptualized and implemented by Mayor Pan. The case will however focus on just two of these projects as these complement and reinforce each other...

The *Tabang Banwaan* Center was part of the 1998 election promises or political platform of then mayoralty candidate Marcel Pan,...his subtle way of declaring war against the feudalist culture of his people. The project was designed to address the ubiquitous problem of solicitation of constituents from one elected (and even non-elective) official to another. It thus closed the doors to patronage politics and opened instead a novel approach to improved service delivery...

² High profile in the sense that these projects have caught the attention of other local government units as well as local officials from other countries who visited Goa as a study tour destination.

Another brainchild of Mayor Pan, the Family ID System project was conceived during his stint with the 45th Local Administration and Development Program in 2003. Inspired by the Minimum Basic Needs (MBN) Approach to service delivery, he came up with the idea of instituting for Family ID system that is backed up by an accurate management information system (MIS) or database containing the socio-economic profile of project beneficiaries. The system provides the data requirements for planning poverty reduction programs and projects, determines the level of assistance to be given to each constituent.

The project aimed to maximize the utilization of LGU resources by screening out non-Goa residents from availing free services. The database contained the list of legitimate Goaeños...

Achievement of Objectives. The avowed objectives of both projects have been attained to a large extent. As a new system of service delivery, the *Tabang Banwaan* Center effectively controlled the perpetration of patronage politics. Instead of going directly to the locally elected officials, especially the mayor, constituents have learned to approach the Center or relevant office for their various needs. Instead of feeling beholden to personalities particularly the local elected officials, constituents are grateful to their own LGU...

The Family ID System maximized the delivery of basic services in the sense that it effectively screened out untargeted beneficiaries, i.e., the freeloaders coming from neighboring towns. With the “no IDs, no free service policy,” the problem of freeloading (by non-Goa residents) experienced in the *Tabang Banwaan* system has been addressed. As of 2004, the Municipal Infirmary earned P220, 064 from the payments of non-residents for services availed of. This amount could have been lost without the ID system. For the financial assistance of the MSWDO, the LGU was able to save around P30,000 annually since the ID system was instituted...

It is interesting to point out that while these Projects are not large budget items, their impact on the people is truly remarkable as evidenced by the statistics mentioned above and personal accounts of project beneficiaries.

The Leadership Factor. While the success of the Projects can be ascribed to a host of factors, leadership played the central role.

It looks like Mayor Marcel Pan was born a leader. He was a consistent honor student. In his youth, he was an activist-leader who fought the tyranny of Pres. Ferdinand Marcos. He headed the NAMFREL chapter in his town before the collapse of the Marcos dictatorship. Perceived as a “shooting star” with great potentials to surge the heights of the firmament, the young Pan caught the attention of the “powers-that-be” in his province. He was inevitably appointed as a municipal councilor after the fall of the dictatorship in 1986. This first brush with local politics was followed by his stint as an

elected councilor when he topped the local elections in 1988. Full of youthful idealism, he served his first year as an elected councilor but the dark forces of a corrupt leadership in the LGU dampened his idealism and offended his sensibilities. Frustrated and disoriented, he quit his job in 1989, shifted to the private sector, and worked with San Miguel Corporation (SMC).

At SMC, armed with a double major's degree in management and accounting and an extensive experience in managing his family's business, he still underwent baptism of fire in handling his workforce and customers. As a supervisor cum salesman in the beer division of SMC, he was given the huge responsibility to trouble shoot for the "problematic routes" of beer delivery in Metro Manila. He dealt with scalawags and thieves within the ranks of his men on top of the sometimes unbearably demanding, fastidious and cantankerous retailer-customers in the seedy parts of the metropolis. He endured, persevered and survived his job with flying colors. As a result, he garnered the Quality Achiever's Award from his employer. At hindsight, he realized that his joining the corporate world was providential. This was his training ground for his next destination—his comeback to the tough and topsy-turvy world of local politics...

Leadership does matter! This is the explicit message of Mayor Pan's case. The success of his projects and other undertakings can be traced to his exceptional capacity to orchestrate the various talents and resources from within and outside his local government organization towards the achievement of desired goals and objectives. This exceptional capacity is a by-product of his extensive experience (both in private and public sector) in relating with people, his innate talent to lead, his personal traits and values in life, and most of all, his passion and great sense of service. These qualities of a leader blended beautifully such that he was able to demonstrate what new politics is all about. This brand of leadership and innovative management effectively controlled patronage politics.