

## Case Study 1: Mayor Belmonte and Quezon City

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### INTRODUCTION

Feliciano “Sonny” Belmonte, Jr., during his 9-year tenure as Mayor of Quezon City, Philippines, transformed the largest city in the Metro Manila National Capital Region from an economic laggard to one of the country’s wealthiest and most well managed. Quezon City’s achievements have attracted the attention of international development institutions, business conglomerates, and urban developers. This case study aims to identify how this local leader was able to use tacit knowledge and

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The initial draft of this section was written with the assistance of John Lee Candelaria. However, the views and opinions expressed in this final report are those of the authors.

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practical wisdom to fundamentally transform his constituency. We concentrate on fiscal management, the solid waste management program, poverty reduction, and business productivity (particularly the development of the Quezon City-Central Business District) in this discussion.

### THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF QUEZON CITY

Quezon City was created by Commonwealth Act No. 502 on October 12, 1939. It is part of Metropolitan Manila, or the National Capital Region, which accounts for 37.2% of the GDP of the Philippines. Quezon City comprises one-fourth (25.23%) of Metro Manila's total land area of 638.55 square kilometers, making it the largest in the region. It consists of 142 barangays divided into six congressional districts. The city is number 1 in the National Capital Region in terms of total income, earning P10.3 billion in 2009. It is a key destination for global firms such as HSBC and Google as they seek to outsource business processes in the Philippines.

The city's official website shows that its population was estimated to have reached 3,179,536 by 2012, making it the most populated local government area in the country. More than half of the increase in the period 2000–2008 was contributed by in-migration. There are 706,564 households in the city. Around 38% of the population is considered young, aged 21 years and below. Its annual growth rate is naturally high at 2.92%, a little over 50% higher than the national rate, which is 1.9%. Finally, the city boasts a very high literacy rate of 98.3%. It is home to 373 public and private elementary schools, 223 public and private high schools, and 90 colleges and universities including the University of the Philippines, the country's premier university.

Recognized as the *Most Competitive City* in Metro Manila and the second most competitive in the Philippines in the Asian Institute of Management's 2007 Cities Competitive Ranking Project, Quezon City had 62,679 registered business establishments as of 2012. These were made up of financial services, communications and media, information and communications technology, utilities, health and wellness, hotels, restaurants, retail and wholesale businesses, and schools, among others. Prominent business re-locators are broadcast networks (including the two largest in the country), information and communications technology (ICT) parks and buildings, and large department stores. Envisioned as the government center, Quezon City also now hosts 125 national government institutions including the House of Representatives, the

Audit and Civil Service Commission, and 25 government-owned and controlled corporations (GOCCs).

### *Financial Turnaround: From Deficit to Sustainable Surplus*

Immediately upon assuming the post of mayor on June 30, 2001, Belmonte was faced with the sad reality that the city coffers were in the red. By year's end, it was evident that total revenue collection had fallen short of meeting the city's budgetary requirements by around 1 million pesos. In fact, for some years preceding 2001, the city government had been engaged in deficit spending.

As if this situation was not bad enough, the city government was likewise confronted with billion-peso unpaid invoice claims from various suppliers, contractors, banks and government corporations. The contractors for garbage collection and disposal, who a year before were partly to blame for the tragic trash slide in the Payatas dumpsite (Cruz, n.d.), were claiming P560 million in payment arrears; general suppliers and infrastructure contractors were claiming P1.4 billion; and the Landbank of the Philippines, P1.25 billion. The Government Service Insurance System had also suspended the loan privileges of employees due to accumulated unpaid employees' contributions, while the Bureau of Internal Revenue was demanding the remittance of withholding taxes collected in the previous 6 years.

Taking on the challenge, Belmonte declared: "I drew on years of my experience in turning around financially ailing government corporations, recognized the do-ability of common sense solutions, tapped the rich repository of experience of the local government bureaucracy, studied root causes of success and failures, and observed other local and international examples to guide what is now the Quezon City transformation story"<sup>1</sup> (Quezon City Government 2010, 7). Belmonte's goal in building up the City's financial position was to create and sustain a viable resource base that could continuously fund its economic transformation (Quezon City Government 2010, 28).

Crisis situations required urgent and innovative solutions. He wasted no time in convening his Management Committee<sup>2</sup> to brainstorm with them an array of possible solutions to the problems at hand. Chaired by Belmonte himself, the Management Committee was considered the "top-level, policy-setting body of the QC-LGU," and consisted of a pool of 11 close and trusted advisers, possessing multidisciplinary expertise in

law, budgeting, accounting, management, architecture, and related fields (Quezon City Government 2005). Some of the members had worked with him in his previous stints in the private and government sectors, and would later occupy department head and other high positions in the city government. Throughout his 9-year term as mayor, his Management Committee would play a significant role in providing technical advice, exploring new ideas, and conducting technical studies on those ideas that the mayor considered innovative and out of the box, being seemingly promising but relatively untested.

Aside from the Management Committee, Belmonte also worked closely with the Executive Committee of over 50 heads of city government departments, offices, task forces, and other units, to find solutions to urgent concerns, promote good coordination of the different operations in the city government, and to chart the development direction of the city. He met with the Management Committee and Executive Committee on alternate weeks. To outsiders, having two Committees, with seemingly different working styles at the management level, may have looked confusing, but the consultants and department heads who worked with him would attest to his uncanny ability to negotiate through diverse ideas and opinions using such a structure. “His genius for forging consensus and conciliation is legendary,” said Atty. Ismael G. Khan, Jr., a Supreme Court spokesperson who worked with him at PAL (Cruz, n.d., 163).

### INTRODUCING REVENUE-GENERATING MEASURES

Simultaneous revenue-enhancing measures were immediately put in place, turning the city’s financial condition from deficit to a surplus in 1 year, a feat that was hard to duplicate in any other part of the country. An important revenue-enhancing measure introduced by the Belmonte administration was the computerization of the assessment and collection of taxes, the first such program in the country introduced by a local government. It covered large local revenue sources such as real property taxes, business registration, and building permits. Computerizing the tax assessment and collection systems was both a challenge and an imperative, considering that the city government “has a huge tax base, with real estate tax transactions alone involving about half a million real property units and a business tax base involving about 60,000 establishments” (Quezon City Government 2010, 27). Before the computerization program, taxpayer records were written on index cards, which were filed in

the desks of the employees concerned, some of whom were employed on a casual basis, and hence bore no accountability.

To strengthen the assessment and collection of real property taxes, the Assessor's Office prepared an updated inventory of taxable properties throughout the city. Applying the geographic information system (GIS) methodology to its tax-mapping activities, it could locate taxable properties, including those that had been previously unidentified or undeclared, as well as information on their owner and payment histories. Based on this updated inventory, it reconciled the manual records and data base of taxable properties. Moreover, it streamlined the processing of real property tax declarations, drastically reducing the number of steps from 20 to 5, and processing time from several months to 7 days. With computerization in place, the city government's "central data system can process more than 440,000 real estate payment units and has the capacity to service 20,000 taxpayers in one day" (Quezon City Government 2007, 6). The computerization program produced an added benefit of minimizing corruption by "providing checks and balances, and lessening the need for individual discretion in most stages of the assessment and payment system" (Quezon City Government 2007, 6). Moreover, it allowed the mayor to generate a daily report on revenue collections, thus enabling him to monitor the performance of revenue collection agencies. Overall, the computerized system helped the city government improve its tax collection efficiency, cut down on red tape, and reduce if not eliminate the need for fixers.

Several other initiatives by the Treasurer's Office were likewise designed not only to encourage the taxpayers to pay their taxes on time but also to promote their ease and comfort when doing so. Air-conditioned lounges with a plentiful supply of coffee were set up in the city hall. Taxpayers could also opt to pay through accredited banks, offsite branches and Special Tax Teams assigned to selected villages. Belmonte explains, "I applied commonsense approaches; plugged leaks where they existed, and encouraged a culture of prudent spending and value for money" (Quezon City Government 2010).

### SPECIFIC STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE REAL PROPERTY AND BUSINESS TAX COLLECTIONS

Throughout his 9-year term as mayor, Belmonte would become known for taking bold steps in maximizing the revenue potentials provided for by the Republic Act No. 7160, otherwise known as the Local

Government Code of 1991; some of which were hardly explored until his administration took the initiative and led the way for others to follow. Governing a highly urbanized area that relies on business tax and real property tax (RPT) as the two most important local revenue sources, he naturally focused his reform measures on these two sources. In particular, to improve the collection of business taxes, the Belmonte administration adopted the following strategies (Endriga 2006, 8):

- Required taxpayers with gross receipts of over P500,000 to submit Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) statements of monthly payments of value-added tax (VAT) and non-VAT for 2005;
- Utilized the concept of presumptive income level to make gross tax declarations more realistic and current;
- Required contractors to pay business tax prior to the release of building, excavation, and occupancy permits;
- Grounded revenue examiners with low monthly collection outputs, and rewarded top grossing examiners with free trips to Hong Kong;
- Auctioned delinquent real property instead of giving a tax amnesty, this raised P10.7B;
- Reassigned permanent employees to avoid familiarization with taxpayers;
- Increased the discount given to real property owners paying annually from 10 to 29%, and quarterly from 5 to 10%;
- Filed anti-graft cases against erring employees with the Ombudsman; and
- Posted 300 billboards in major thoroughfares indicating the auction date of delinquent real properties and applicable discounts.

In addition to the above, Belmonte, realizing that the city's business tax rates fell below those of other Metro Manila cities, raised these despite the strong protests of big business, some of whom even filed cases in court. Yet when they saw where their money went and how it was effectively utilized to improve the delivery of basic services, they started to support the mayor's tax initiatives. Mayor Belmonte explained, "We have proven that a good financial foundation is a solid springboard for sustainable investments in city transformation because even the best ideals cannot become a reality without any resources" (Quezon City Government 2010, 8).

### *Instituting Cost-Saving Measures*

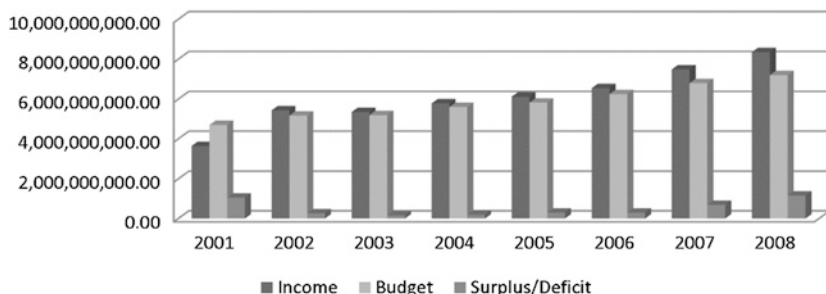
One of the first cost-saving measures Belmonte introduced was to revamp the payment scheme of garbage collection and disposal from a “per trip” basis to “package clean-up,” and he managed to slash the cost of this service by as much as P20 million monthly, for a total of P240 million yearly. Another cost-saving measure was allowing the contracts of 7000 casual employees to lapse after their term expired. Casual employees are not part of the city government organization and their services are supposedly tapped on an as-needed basis. Explaining why their contracts were allowed to lapse, Mayor Belmonte said, “We were a good money source for people who had very little to do in City Hall” (Quezon City Government, n.d. (a), 26).

### PRODUCING IMPRESSIVE RESULTS

The serious and combined efforts of the city government to improve its financial condition immediately bore impressive results. Between 2001 and 2008, city income rose by an average of P629,300,053, or 13.3%. In 2002, a year after Mayor Belmonte assumed office, the city government declared a surplus of P262,610,094, and the trend of surplus budgeting would continue until 2008 (see Fig. 2.1). Moreover, the percentage share of surplus income to city income rose from 4.8% in 2002 to 13.8% in 2008, posting an annual average rise of 1.8%. Due to the city government’s favorable financial condition, it was able to settle all its obligations, including a P3 million payment in arrears with the GSIS from 1997.

The city government’s efforts would also be recognized by various awarding bodies here and abroad. In 2003, it was the first local government to receive the Galing pook Award for Effective Fiscal Management (Ford Foundation et al. 2008). Having won the Most Business-Friendly City award for four consecutive years, it was elevated to the Hall of Fame in 2005 by the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

On top of the local awards, Quezon City’s reform efforts reaped international recognition when it was adjudged number 7 out of 200 Asian city contenders in the Top Asian Cities of the Future 2007–2009 survey sponsored by the London Financial Times through Singapore’s AsiaBiz Strategy. In 2009, it received a ph+A credit rating from Standard and Poor’s for “solid liquidity levels and strong budgetary performance, debt-free and financial flexibility” (Quezon City Government 2010, 29).



**Fig. 2.1** Income compared with budget (in Pesos), Quezon City 2001–2008. *Source* Quezon City: The Belmonte administration 2003–2004, 10 and Quezon City: Future perfect annual report 2007–2008, 62

Comparing Quezon City’s overall financial management performance with that of other local government units (LGUs), Standard and Poor’s declared that the City was far more advanced than its contemporaries, especially in its capacity to establish a consistent budget surplus. Standard and Poors were the designated credit rating agency of the World Bank in its pilot project designed to provide credit ratings to participating LGUs in the Philippines.

### KEEPING THE CITY ENVIRONMENT CLEAN

Aside from fiscal deficits, Belmonte faced serious problems with garbage collection and disposal at the start of his term. The streets were littered with piles of uncollected trash. The garbage collection and disposal contract easily stood out as expensive and hard to justify. Garbage collection in Quezon City operated on a “per trip” payment scheme: payment was based on the number of trips made from the collection area to the dumpsite daily, regardless of whether the collectors did their jobs efficiently or not. The scheme was vulnerable to claims manipulation by contractors as there was no effective monitoring mechanism in place.

#### *Testing and Analyzing Proposed Solutions*

Mayor Belmonte tasked the Environmental Protection and Waste Management Department with overhauling the system. As a department,



the EPWMD is equipped with the authority and resources to pursue its plans of action. The head of the department, Frederika C. Rentoy, deemed it wise to implement a solution that was backed up by a methodical study. She organized a team to study the feasibility of a solid waste management program patterned after a similar program in Japan that she had learnt about while attending a course there.

Based on the data this team gathered,<sup>3</sup> the EPWMD formulated a solid waste management program dubbed the “package clean-up.” The new system entailed assigning garbage contractors to specific cells/zones and holding them responsible for keeping the areas clean as basis for payment. Belmonte readily provided the package with needed political support. The package clean-up entailed the division of the city’s 142 barangays into specific cells, and each cell be assigned a contractor who would be responsible for keeping it clean and free of uncollected piles of garbage as a basis for payment, unlike the previous system where payment was made based on the number of trips the garbage truck made to a dumpsite. It also included the collection of garbage in 239 inaccessible areas via pushcarts and pedicabs. This program easily generated monthly savings of P20 million from the previously identified contract costs. The package clean-up was also complemented by the assignment of 275 street sweepers to the city’s 450 km of major thoroughfares.

Ms. Rentoy became a fan of Belmonte’s leadership, and this sentiment would eventually reverberate throughout the city government. Ms. Rentoy was affiliated with the previous mayor, and had earlier offered to resign. But Belmonte, known for his uncanny ability for spotting and harnessing talent when he sees it, instead appointed her as department head of the EPWMD instead. He was comfortable working with people regardless of their prior affiliations, which testifies to his political maturity and leadership acumen.

### *Engaging Multi-sectoral Support for the Program*

Emphasizing that keeping the environment clean is everybody’s business, the package clean-up needs multi-sectoral support to make it work. The barangays have been tapped to assist in monitoring the performance of contractors. Barangay officials were given various training programs to raise their awareness of the ecological solid waste management program. Ms. Rentoy held one-on-one meetings with them to encourage them to support the program, especially those who were initially hesitant to

do so. The mayor asked the Sangguniang Panlungsod to pass two ordinances, one of which enjoined barangays to formulate their own ecological solid waste management programs designed to continually reduce the volume of waste generated, while the other one allowed autonomous barangays like Barangay Holy Spirit to manage their own garbage collection and disposal systems. Based on the performance of the barangays according to the criteria set by the EPWMD, they are given corresponding monetary incentives which they can use to strengthen their own ecological solid waste management program.

The combined efforts of the city government have finally paid off. Not only have the streets been rid of uncollected piles of trash, but the city coffers have gained savings in the process.

## POVERTY REDUCTION AND LIVELIHOOD GENERATION

### *Rehabilitating and Opening up Opportunities in the Payatas Dumpsite*

On July 10, 2000, a tragedy befell the Payatas dumpsite when a portion of the mountain of trash went crashing down on the surrounding communities below, killing 232 people and destroying the homes of 655 families. It was a tragedy waiting to happen. Over more than three decades, the Payatas dumpsite, which was originally planned as an open pit landfill, inevitably transformed into a huge mountain of trash and ironically became a primary source of livelihood for one of the biggest informal settler communities in the country. Incessant heavy rains prior to the trash slide itself caused a particularly steep portion of the mountain of trash to weaken and eventually collapse, crushing with its hundreds of people and shacks. When Belmonte took over the reins of the city government in 2001, the affected communities were still waiting for concrete government intervention to alleviate their plight. Mayor Belmonte himself went to the Payatas dumpsite prior to his oath-taking as mayor to observe the actual disposal system employed by the contractors, and talked with the residents-cum-scavengers to find out their real condition, as recounted by Mr. Salvador Enriquez, former Budget Secretary, Head of the Technical Assistance and long-time consultant to Mayor Belmonte.

The poor and unsafe conditions at the dumpsite justified its immediate closure, but doing this could lead to serious problems. First, closing the city's sole waste disposal facility would imperil the city's overall

sanitation and hygiene conditions. Second, after operating for over 30 years, the dumpsite has created a tangled web of income opportunities for around “5000 individuals, including approximately 2000 engaged in waste picking and around 3000 in the underground economy,” thus closing it would endanger their livelihood sources (Quezon City Government, n.d. (b)). Weighing in on the serious problems at hand vis-à-vis the provisions of Republic Act 9003 (the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act), Mayor Belmonte decided to proceed with the rehabilitation of the Payatas dumpsite. “Had it been another mayor and not Belmonte in the said situation, that mayor would have opted to just dispose of the city’s garbage in another LGU’s waste disposal facility,” Ms. Rentoy commented.

### *Introducing Engineering Interventions*

To keep the dumpsite safe and stable for the communities, the city government undertook a series of engineering interventions. The site was transformed into a controlled waste disposal facility which entailed a series of engineering works consisting of “developmental and rehabilitation works, including slope reprofiling, stabilization and greening, leachate collection and recirculation, drainage system improvement, fortified roadways and access to the site, gas venting and material recovery” (Quezon City Environmental Protection and Waste Management Department, n.d.).

### ORGANIZING THE PAYATAS STAKEHOLDERS

Alongside the engineering rehabilitation works was a series of organizing activities conducted with the waste keepers or scavengers, recyclers, and junkshop operators<sup>4</sup> to make their communities safe and stable for residing and earning a living. These groups have been organized into formal organizations, accredited and provided with financing and skills training to enable them to seek additional or alternative income opportunities. In particular, the waste keepers are consulted for their input and opinions whenever there are proposed changes in the operating systems of the controlled landfill. One important operating procedure is the identification of areas for picking waste, sorting and recycling in the controlled landfill, unlike before when they could scavenge anywhere they wanted

to, and allocation of such areas to the different organized groups. On the other hand, one of the perks of being part of the organized groups is the opportunity to be invited as resource persons within and even outside the country. Wearing IDs and uniforms, and being invited to speaking engagements gave them a sense of pride. Whereas before they were looked down upon as scavengers, now they are looked up to as sources of practical, sensible solutions to serious problems.

### LGU-PNOC PARTNERSHIP FOR GAS TO POWER GENERATION

The Payatas Operations Group (POG) has been setup to oversee operations in the Payatas controlled waste disposal facility. Belmonte forged a partnership agreement with the PNOC in 2002 for the latter to put up a Pilot Methane Power Plant at the dumpsite capable of converting methane gas (which abounds in the area) into up to 100 kW of electricity. The plant also serves as a model for similar projects in the future. The electricity derived from the plant is used to light up the facilities and the fence around the dumpsite, generating savings for the city from reduced electricity expenses.

### LGU-PANGEA PARTNERSHIP FOR CLEAN ELECTRICITY

Belmont likewise forged a partnership agreement with an Italy-based company called PANGEA Green and its local partner, PANGEA Phils., for implementation of the Biogas Emissions Reduction Project in 2007. The city government leveraged the dumpsite as its equity while the capital investment was borne by its partner. The scheme was designed to convert biogas emissions into electricity, and in the process, decrease greenhouse gas emissions.

Considered as the first clean development mechanism (CDM) in the Philippines and Southeast Asia, this project was registered under the Kyoto Protocol of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) on February 1, 2008. This means that whenever the PANGEA company is able to sell CERs (Certified Emission Reduction), the city government gets its modest share, which has already reached 100,000 Euros or P7 million carbon credits equivalent, the Quezon City Government's Annual Report for 2007–2008 reported, and at the same time, is able to make a humble contribution to improving the air, water, and soil quality around the city.

## AWARDS RECEIVED

The Payatas disposal facility of today is a far cry from the miserable, deplorable, and accident-prone open dumpsite of 14 years before. Not only does it offer a practical solution to the livelihood problem confronting thousands of people who depend on it, but it also inaugurated pioneering initiatives as far as addressing solid waste management and other environment-related concerns, thus serving as a model for other similarly situated LGUs. Five years later, on January 26, 2009, the Payatas Disposal Facility would be recognized by the prestigious Galing Pook Foundation (Ford Foundation et al. 2008).

## SIKAP BUHAY: PROVIDING LIVELIHOODS FOR THE POOR

The Belmonte administration established the Sikap Buhay Center to address the unemployment problem in the city. It adopted a microenterprise lending program for the poor in 2002, patterned after a Grameen bank micro financing system made popular in Bangladesh. In 2010, the total amount of loans extended reached P2.47 billion, providing an average loan of P17,739 per client to a total of 179,743 clients. In 2008, 135 out of 142 barangays were covered by the lending program.

The capital for the loans did not come from the city government but from its partners consisting of local banks and private lending institutions, which enabled these organizations to expand their business operations and consequently increase their income. Between 2002 and 2009, the number of lending partners grew from one to nine<sup>5</sup>. Ninety-five percent of the borrowers are women, though the lending program is open to both men and women. Studies done to assess the benefits derived from the lending program showed that the beneficiaries were able to increase their income by 200–600%. The impact study conducted by the International Labor Organization (ILO) considered the lending program as an “effective poverty alleviation tool for the entrepreneurial poor” (Quezon City Government 2009, 31). Some studies showed that the beneficiaries’ incomes enabled them to send their children to school, serve their families nutritious food, and make home improvements.<sup>6</sup> The program was likewise credited with inculcating among its beneficiary’s certain important values that could help them live a better quality of life such as “credit discipline, self-reliance and greater financial independence for their families” (Quezon City Government 2009, 31). Moreover,

the successful beneficiaries had learned to avoid the usurious lenders and instead deal with reputable banks.

The repayment rate averages 94%. The high repayment rate can be attributed to the multi-sectoral approach adopted by the SikapBuhay Foundation in monitoring the performance of borrowers. Barangay officials, community-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and community civic associations, along with the SikapBuhay staff, monitor group loan collection, and organize entrepreneurship and livelihood skills training (Quezon City Government 2009, 36).

## THE QC-CBD: CREATING A COMPETITIVE CITY

### *How the Concept of QC-CBD Was Born*

The concept of developing the Quezon City-Central Business District (QC-CBD), or simply “Triangle Park,” arose during one of the management committee meetings, when Mr. Salvador Enriquez explained that the city government had already maximized the taxing powers that it needed to explore alternative sources of revenues. During subsequent meetings of the management committee, Mr. Enriquez proposed that they consider developing the 250-hectare lot encompassing the Northern and Eastern Triangles, which was located across from the city hall, but provided the city government a mere P500,000 in annual taxes, into a new central business district. In his second term in office, Mayor Belmonte himself was not interested in imposing new taxes or raising the existing rates. Rather, he was focused more on transforming the city into a “center of gravity for business and the collective good of his constituents,” to become “one of the most competitive in the metropolis and the nation”, thus the proposal resonated perfectly with his plan (Quezon City Government 2010, 57; Alcazaren, n.d., 269). Anticipating the huge potential of the proposed CBD, he thus directed his Management Committee to conduct further studies on its feasibility.

### *Advantages and Challenges*

The proposed QC-CBD possesses several advantages. It sits strategically at the heart of Metro Manila, has easy access to different modes of transport including three mass transit railway stations, and has the widest frontage onto EDSA, a 24-kilometer major road that connects the

different cities in Metro Manila. These advantages make it an attractive location for retail and wholesale businesses, ICT companies, mixed use condominium buildings, and other types of businesses. Likewise, it connects with two large parks in the city, namely, the Ninoy Aquino Parks and Wildlife Center and Quezon Memorial Circle, which can potentially also turn it into an eco-friendly QC-CBD.

Two large real property developers, SMDC and Ayala Land, saw the tremendous economic potential of the proposed QC-CBD, and started their own investment programs. The Ayala Corporation put up the Trinoma Shopping Mall, which was inaugurated in April 2007. SM Development Corporation had earlier built the SM City shopping mall, and later constructed a three-tower condominium complex called Grass Residences, on a 2.5-hectare lot connected to SM North EDSA via a bridge way.

Yet, there were challenges that needed to be resolved before the development of the proposed CBD could proceed. Most of the site was owned by the national government. A large portion of it remained undeveloped, and a sizable part was occupied by a huge colony of informal settlers. Moreover, the city government was apprehensive that if it did not move fast enough to develop the property, the national government might just convert it into a huge on-site development for the existing informal settlers through its Community Mortgage Program. Thus, the city government offered the affected informal community the opportunity to avail itself of either an alternative housing relocation site or of the *balikprobinsya* (going back to their places of origin) program. It also linked up with concerned national and local government offices to provide the basic facilities in these resettlement sites and help the beneficiaries get settled in their new life.

### THE PROPOSED QC-CBD GENERATES SUPPORT

Belmonte sought the assistance of the World Bank to determine the feasibility of the proposed QC-CBD. The World Bank funded a technical study which identified the area “as the center of gravity of all commercial activities in the coming years” (World Bank Technical Study in Alacarazen, n.d., 271). Moreover, the proposed QC-CBD generated support from former President Arroyo, who issued Executive Order Nos. 62 and 62-A creating the Urban Triangle Development (TriDev) Commission. The TriDev Commission consisted of the heads of the



**Fig. 2.2** The new Quezon City central business district: Triangle park. *Source* Quezon City government. <http://quezoncity.gov.ph/index.php/quezon-city-business-district>

HULRB, NHA, the Office of the President and Quezon City government. Belmonte sat as co-chair.

### *The QC-CBD Plan*

The whole QC-CBD plan envisions a mixed use and environmentally friendly community. It has allocated spaces for the following uses: (1) parks and open spaces; (2) mixed use with retail ground floor; (3) mixed use institutional; (4) mixed use residential; (5) mixed use commercial; and (6) transit-oriented mixed use (Fig. 2.2). The plan's entire geographical coverage stretches toward the four major thoroughfares in Quezon City (Quezon City Government, n.d. (c)).

### JOINT EFFORTS TO RELOCATE THE INFORMAL SETTLERS

To commence the development of the area, the city government coordinated with the NHA, which owns 30% of the CBD, regarding the relocation of some 14,000 families of informal settlers. It also had to wrestle with overlapping transfers of rights among the informal settlers.



The city government conducted consultations with the informal settlers, and offered them transfer choices: placements in relocation sites in other cities such as Montalban, Rizal, or Caloocan City; or *balikprobinsya* (going back to their places of origin). If they opted to relocate, they had the privilege of eventually owning the housing units assigned to them by paying the highly concessional amortization fee of P200 monthly. Moreover, the city government shouldered the electrification of the housing units as a relocation incentive. Finally, they were given transfer assistance of around P15,000–20,000 per family, which they could use for immediate or necessary purchases.

### LEAVING A LEGACY OF DEVELOPMENT

Development has started and proceeds in some parts of the QC-CBD, in the mixed use commercial, transit-oriented, residential, parks, and open space areas. The next big challenge will be convincing the affected national government offices located within the QC-CBD to relocate to the designated institutional zone, and allow the vacant portions of their properties to be part of the designated mixed use retail zone. This will entail a lot of persuasion and will power on both sides, and will take time. What should be stressed is that Belmonte has planted the seeds for a planned, organized urban development site that can well be a model for similar development endeavors.

### A PEOPLE-FRIENDLY MANAGEMENT STYLE

In a statesmanlike manner, Belmonte has never played the blame game against his predecessor, as most Filipino politicians are wont to do. He avoided firing or “floating” those affiliated with the previous administration, thus allaying the apprehension of officials and staff. When some members of the Management Committee were later appointed as heads of departments and other offices, they adopted the same policy of not firing any incumbent in their respective offices.

He kept Monday as People’s Day, where he received in his office people from all walks of life without prior appointments. He kept an open-door policy where employees could enter his office to discuss their concerns even without prior appointment. By listening to their needs, sentiments, complaints, and suggestions, he would know who among the heads of departments and offices were performing, and who were

lagging; who among them were delivering services efficiently and effectively, and who were performing poorly. He did not rely solely on written reports submitted to his office. He visited project sites, and talked to the workers and people alike in the field. His very hands-on management style impressed upon them the need to take their work seriously. His colleague in the GSIS summed up his leadership style as lead by example and manages by exception. He also institutionalized the participation of civil society organizations in the City Development Council, which gave him valuable information on the development needs and priorities of the people.

As if to remind his constituents that the progress of their city springs from their own collective effort, emblazoned on one of the front pillars of the city hall are his words, “Our great city is not the result of chance, but of the vision, strategies, and hard work of the people and their leaders.” Recalling the important lesson of taking care of the people, the most valuable resource in an organization, he declares, “My experiences made me understand that the whole thing is composed of human relations and the knowledge of good procedures” (Cruz, n.d., 156).

## LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

### *Phronetic and Distributed Leadership*

There are two key tasks of a leader in a knowledge management and innovation environment (Martín-de-Castro and Montoro-Sanchez 2013): first, to manage and harmonize the different perspectives found within both organizations and teams; and secondly, to stimulate a high care atmosphere—creating trust among team members—as a common space for singular and collective collaboration to generate and convey knowledge. Belmonte’s management team was a group of diverse individuals with varying styles and outlooks in law, budgeting, accounting, management, and allied fields. They had a high level of association with him—some had assisted him in his previous stints in the private and government sectors. These consultants, along with the city’s department heads, addressed the challenges facing Quezon City at a time (Alavi and Leidner 2001), when a high degree of uncertainty existed and where group synergy remained to be exploited. The team started off as a transition team which was formed prior to his assumption of office.

This case study credits Belmonte with successfully negotiating through diverse ideas and opinions within the group to come up programs and projects that were pragmatic and certain to generate quick wins. Seidler-de Alwis et al. (2004) describe this as a process where varying perspectives and intellectual encounters between diverse viewpoints foster creativity that translates into new ideas and products.

### *High Care Milieu*

At the same time, Belmonte's leadership style emphasized a high care milieu marked by human interaction (field and corridor encounters), assurance (wage incentives, altruistic spirit), and cohesion and workplace harmony (no blame culture). He set aside time for strategic reflection (he carefully studied proposals), he took time to listen and share his knowledge (he talked with the Payatas residents-cum-scavengers to find out their real conditions and impart his own views), and he led by example (he was comfortable working with ordinary people and always kept an open mind to new ideas). These were concrete instances of nurturing *ba* by reserving time and space for people to alleviate their personal concerns and encourage them to take part in the learning process through conversation (Hong, n.d.). These are illustrations of distributed leadership—unprompted alliances, hands-on engagements, participative duty calls, all of which, according to D Castro and Montoro-Sanchez (2013), serve as sources of leadership legitimation.

### *Business Unusual*

This case also points to Belmonte's preference for transformational rather than transactional leadership. It shows how he successfully challenged entrenched thoughts: the business as usual, pay-per-trip mode in trash collection (transforming it into the cell-based garbage management scheme), the aversion for higher tax rates (which he implemented despite the strong protests of big businesses, whom he won over later when he proved to them that their money was spent wisely on more efficient services), the dependence on city government subsidies (the capital for micro financing came from local banks and private lending institutions), and the patronage practice of hiring political protégés (allowing the contracts of 7000 casual employees to lapse after their term expired).

### *Middle-Up-Down Management*

Belmonte was also focused on motivating middle-level managers to explore knowledge utilization. As crucial links between the top-level managers (with their grand concepts) and frontline workers (with their more practical, problem-solving approaches), middle managers undertake knowledge “cross-leveling” tasks (Sarayreh et al. 2012; Hong, n.d.) that give shape to a phronetic “middle-up-down management.” In the case study, this was demonstrated in the way he encouraged autonomous barangay officials (the link between city hall and the communities) to set up their own garbage collection and disposal system. Monetary incentives were added to strengthen the barangay-based ecological solid waste management program.

At the frontline level, Belmonte raised the spirits of individuals by showing confidence in their abilities and treasuring their contributions. For instance, organizational processes were formalized among the waste keepers or scavengers, recyclers, and junkshop operators in Payatas, giving them a solid footing on which to earn a living and seek job opportunities. Of particular significance was the active participation of waste keepers in redesigning the waste recycling system in the landfill. Equally noteworthy was the scavengers’ newfound confidence as resource speakers in various waste recycling forums, thus creating new meaning in their lives.

### *Entrepreneurial Ethos*

Belmonte also calibrated the level of phronetic thinking by encouraging an entrepreneurial culture. As with Seidler-de Alwis et al. (2004), he recognized that practical innovations required a rhythm of search and selection, involving alternative pathways. Drawing on the Grameen banking experience in Bangladesh, he created a microenterprise lending program, *sikapbuhay*, for the poor (especially women) during his first years as mayor. In lieu of simply dumping waste in another local government unit’s backyard, Belmonte opted for a controlled waste disposal facility in Payatas, which entailed development and rehabilitation works, and a Pilot Methane Power Plant capable of lighting up the facilities around the dumpsite and generating savings for the city from reduced electricity expenses. The dumpsite rehabilitation gave other income opportunities to the waste foragers.

## THE NEED FOR A PHILIPPINE CONTEXT

It is thus clear that the phronetic leadership model is appropriate in the Quezon City setting. It has its foundation in Japanese community harmony, yet a community-type culture similarly governs the behavioral temperament of the actors in Quezon City, a Filipino setting. However, as indicated by Hong (n.d.), it is important to emphasize the context-dependent and localized setting of knowledge management cultures. This is because there are socio-cultural variations in Japanese and Philippine landscapes that, if neglected, may undermine the cogency and relevance of the case study. By looking for contrasts between the two country contexts, it would be easy to tell apart the ingredients of the SECI model that are culturally entrenched in Japan, and those that are more universal in character and could be applied (with some adjustments) in other settings like the Philippines (Hong, n.d.).

To be sure, Belmonte had no knowledge of SECI, but it is instructive to learn how, from a third-party point of view, the Nonaka framework has been subconsciously “glocalized” in a Philippine setting. A crucial advantage for Belmonte was his belief in *knowledge-as-practice* rather than knowledge-as-commodity, in which he saw collective items of information from Quezon City constituencies not as “reified objects that can easily be acquired, processed, transferred, spread and stored across different geographic domains,” but as “a system of socially constructed activities embedded in different contexts of knowledge work” (Hong 2011, 201). Since practice is localized, Belmonte could dis-embed community inertia, and re-embed and materialize community knowledge into a recontextualized set of innovative actions (note the transformation of Payatas from a garbage dump into a livelihood base). This was, borrowing the characterization of Hong (2011), a performative act of socially constructing a host of localized approaches to create new meanings. He was able, with the assistance of his team and middle-level city managers, to explore the complexities and challenges of investing in knowledge-as-practice.

But much of the knowledge creation and retention in a developing country like the Philippines is tacit, which is both an advantage and a limitation in translating knowledge bases into codified forms (which are required for long-term rule-making). The principal benefit of extensive tacit knowledge is that it forms part of specific cultural norms that are easily handed down from generation to generation. But the drawback

is its inability to harness cross-cultural sharing and management, as the behavior and attitudes of local managers remain rooted in a very specific cultural context (Hutchings and Mohannak 2007). The context-based hurdles along the SECI continuum are illustrated by the following:

1. The hierarchical nature of the QC organization also did not help in the sharing of tacit knowledge. Based on the Weberian model, the city hall structure did not allow socialization to happen easily (Hong 2011). The effectiveness of externalization (Hong 2011) depends crucially on incentives for making it available to other coworkers. Hierarchy, however, generates silos, which create disincentives for knowledge dissemination. The principal-agent literature suggests that knowledge, being the source of power and authority, makes it hard for a typical bureaucracy to indulge in knowledge sharing. Belmonte succeeded in overcoming this hurdle, not by reorganizing the bureaucracy (he did make it more efficient), but essentially by sidestepping bureaucratic routines using nonbureaucratic tools such as outsourcing, and involving NGOs and the private sector; and
2. In turn, knowledge hoarding made it difficult to put together coherent, explicit rules during the knowledge combination stage. This comes as no surprise, as urban development has made Quezon City dwellers less oriented to group culture (which was a traditional norm) and more inclined toward individualistic career orientation. That was clearly an obstacle to finding collective solutions to common problems. Knowledge hoarding also bred corrupt practices. Belmonte employed unconventional methods to overcome the lack of critical background information, by encouraging people to speak up during his People's Day conversations, and likewise by encouraging team-based discussions outside the typical business-as-usual routines of different city hall units. He also formulated new transparency rules to coax managers into becoming more open.

If SECI is interculturally valid, how does it translate into a Filipino cultural setting? Belmonte, after all, is a product of Filippino culture, and cultural attitudes, following Co and Mitchell (n.d.), influence the way in which he perceived and acted on opportunities created by the institutional environment in the Philippines. Thus, we added to Table 2.1, originally constructed by Hong (2011), two additional columns

Table 2.1 Nonaka’s knowledge creation model

Nonaka’s knowledge creation model and its underlying cultural assumptions			
Modes of knowledge creation	Behavioral patterns	Underlying assumptions	Filipino values
			Convergent
			Divergent
Socialization	Engage in day-to-day social interactions. Observations, intuition, and direct experience	A strong desire to identify and interact with others. Mobilizing people and spurring them to actions	Filipinos are usually collectivists; they identify with their families, regional affiliations, and peer groups (De Torres 2002)
			The struggle between individualizing conscription and communalizing reciprocation (Mendoza and Perkinson 2003)
			arising from past Spanish and American colonial experiences (Chao and Tseng 2002)
			Major strengths: <i>pakikipagkapwa-tao</i> (having a regard for the dignity and being of others) (Enriquez 1994; Okamura and Agbayani 1991), <i>pakikiramdam</i> (heightened sensitivity: Filipinos are good at sensing cues, and “sizing up each other”), and <i>pamathalaan</i> (committing to their communities) (De Guia 2005)

(continued)

Table 2.1 (continued)

<i>Nonaka's knowledge creation model and its underlying cultural assumptions</i>				
<i>Modes of knowledge creation</i>	<i>Behavioral patterns</i>	<i>Underlying assumptions</i>	<i>Embedded Japanese cultural values</i>	<i>Filipino values</i>
Externalization	Convert abstract ideas into concrete forms of information through text, symbols or metaphors. Demonstration, comparison and experimentation	A strong motivation for reducing ambiguities through feedback seeking. Being assertive and determined in coping with uncertainties	High uncertainty avoidance. Masculinity	Concept of <i>babalana</i> ("it is up to God" or "leave it to fate") operates psychologically to elevate one's determination and risk-taking to endure in the face of adversity or ambiguity and to improve one's situation (Enriquez 1994; Okamura and Agbayani 1991; Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino 2002)
				It also operates to discourage the individual from becoming more entrepreneurial and tends to take away their initiative in making decisions (Co and Mitchell n.d.);

(continued)



**Table 2.1** (continued)

<i>Nonaka's knowledge creation model and its underlying cultural assumptions</i>				
<i>Modes of knowledge creation</i>	<i>Behavioral patterns</i>	<i>Underlying assumptions</i>	<i>Embedded Japanese cultural values</i>	<i>Filipino values</i>
Combination	Exchange ideas and thoughts with coworkers. Accumulation, reorganization and evaluation	Value the creation and sharing of joint resources. Energizing people and connecting them to dialogues	High collectivism. Large power distance	<p><i>Convergent</i></p> <p>Mutual caring and support within the family and peer groups (De Torres 2002); <i>Kagandahang-loob</i> (shared inner nobility or shared humanity) nudges people towards genuine acts of generosity; quick to lend a hand and share skills and knowledge freely (De Guia 2005); <i>Bayaniban</i> (spirit of communal unity or effort to achieve a particular goal) reflects the customs of working, playing, and thinking in cooperative kin and community groups (Wong and Tsai, n.d.)</p> <p><i>Divergent</i></p> <p>Filipinos perceive authority to be ultimately personal and thus subject to influence, affiliation, and patronage (Herrington 2011)</p>

(continued)

Table 2.1 (continued)

Nonaka's knowledge creation model and its underlying cultural assumptions				
Modes of knowledge creation	Behavioral patterns	Underlying assumptions	Embedded Japanese cultural values	Filipino values
Internalization	Receive and digest others' ideas for one's own use Embodiment, reflection in action	Willing to open oneself up for new ideas, perspectives and thinking by reflecting from the experience. Striving for continuous improvement and advancement	High uncertainty avoidance Masculinity	Convergent
				Divergent
				Self-regulating mechanism of sensitivity towards others leads to openness, creativity and tolerance (De Guia 2005)

Source After Hong (2011), as modified by the author

representing convergent and divergent Filipino values. Convergent values are those consistent, or at least reconcilable, with the SECI framework, while divergent values are those incompatible, wholly or in part, with SECI.

How did Belmonte manage the interplay between convergent and divergent aspects of Filipino culture in promoting his vision of a progressive Quezon City? As with other cultures, Filipino ways of life have a conflicted structure; there are pillars of strength as well as inherent fault lines of weaknesses. Convergence and divergence can, often unhappily, coexist. Family-centric and community-centered cultural principles, although dominant, are often challenged by an individualistic attitude fostered by extensive Spanish and US colonization. Family or community solidarity may cultivate subservience and dependence (Okamura and Agbayani 1991). A long-lasting *utangnaalob* (“debt from within”) generates reciprocity—there is always an opportunity to return the favor, thereby creating binding relationships (Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino 2002)—but this is also the source of patronage and clientelism. *Bahala na* connotes determination and readiness to confront difficult situations (Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino 2002), but it also gives rise to a stoically submissive outlook that is supposed to cushion people from disappointments. Then there is the matter of how to manage both shame and guilt, when something dishonorable or morally untenable happens. The Philippines and Japan are collectivistic countries, where both self- and other-regarding stances are viewed as interdependent, and shame arises when norms and standards are violated (Wong and Tsai, n.d.). But, in addition, a guilt culture (arising from the Roman Catholicism introduced by Spain) is also prevalent in the Philippines, and in consequence, an individual who commits an offence will likely weigh himself or herself up in a negative way.

To deal with such contrary postures, Filipino leaders or elders typically follow what Root (1997) calls “code-switching,” in which the protagonist switches from one value to another to resolve the contradiction. Belmonte made progress during his tenure by judiciously observing code-switching in many instances. To counter a too family-centric orientation among his constituents, he made sure individual professionalism and enterprise was a centerpiece of his administration. A seasoned politician, Belmonte also made deft use of patronage to gain the support of individuals and groups for his projects, but was careful enough not to upset the emerging meritocracy in the city’s bureaucracy. For the city’s

offenders, such as drug-users (the city also established a rehabilitation center for drug addicts), Belmonte relied more on renewal rather than severe punishment. This can be interpreted as depending more on reparative action that comes with guilt (Wong and Tsai 2007), rather than on the permanent disgrace and humiliation associated with shame.

## EPILOG

In a recent interview, Belmonte (now Speaker of the House of Representatives)<sup>7</sup> has indicated that he is pleased that his successor, Mayor Herbert Bautista (who, as vice mayor during his term, was his understudy) is continuing most of the programs and reform initiatives he had undertaken. The Payatas livelihood program, City Hall's program for urban poor entrepreneurs, and the balanced budgeting scheme are still in place. The CBD blueprint is entering a more aggressive implementation stage, as many big players, like Ayala Land, are making significant infrastructure investments in the business area (although key social issues, like the relocation of undocumented settlers, remain to be resolved amicably). Knowledge as a process, Belmonte thinks, is still leveraged in the Quezon City community, although probably in quite different ways, as the new mayor also has his own distinctive style of using both tacit and explicit information to further the city's purposes. Sustainability remains on the agenda, as the deployment processes of Quezon City have not entered a mature stage. Much remains to be done to preserve and expand the gains accomplished during Belmonte's term.

## NOTES

1. After the 1986 People Power revolution, Belmonte would be known for his proverbial "Midas touch" as he turned one financially ailing enterprise after another to financial health in record time. As President and General Manager of the Government Service and Insurance System (GSIS), he resurrected it from bankruptcy. He did the same as government representative in three "big ticket" firms, the San Miguel Corporation, the Philippine Long Distance Company, and Manila Hotel. Under his watch as Chief Executive Officer, the Philippine Airlines, another financially troubled company, earned an unparalleled profit of P1.2 Billion, allowing it to pay its debts without resorting to borrowing or even firing anyone. His strategy was simply to focus on the do-ables—"better cabin service, improved customer courtesy and faster refunds" (Cruz, n.d., 163).

2. The Management Committee was composed of the following: (1) Salvador M. Enriquez, Jr, Head of the Technical Assistance Committee; (2) Herbert M. Bautista, Vice Mayor; (3) Paquito N. Ochoa, Jr., City Administrator; (4) Tadeo M. Palma, Secretary to the Mayor; (5) Gerardo G. Magat, former City Planning Head Architect; (6) Manuel N. Sabalza, Assistant City Administrator for Operations; (7) Joselito B. Cabungcal, City Engineering Office Head; (8) Pacifico F. Maghacot, Jr., Assistant City Administrator for General Affairs; (9) Aproniano M. Boongaling, Senior Adviser to the Mayor; (10) Victor B. Endriga, City Treasurer; and (11) Jose O. Castro, Assistant to the Mayor (Composition of the Management Committee is taken from Quezon City Annual Reports).
3. For several days, Ms. Rentoy and her team observed the actual garbage collection and disposal system. They boarded the garbage trucks to determine the actual capacity of each truck per trip daily in terms of the following: (1) number and length of streets covered; (2) volume of trash; and (3) number of trips daily.
4. These organizations include the following: BULASI (Buklod Lakasng Scavengers Ini); PARE (Payatas Alliance Recycling Exchange); AMPAT (Alyansang Maralita Payatas Estate); BSSAI (Bagong Silangan Scavengers Inc.); PAJOSA (Payatas Junkshop Operator Scavengers Association); PKR (Payatas Kabuhayan Recycling); PRM (Payatas Recycling Movement); PSAG (Payatas Scavenger Association); PSAI-SAMPIU (Samahang Mangangalahigng Payatas Inc.); SAMAMI (Samahang Mangangalahig); UPC (Urban Poor Central); and PARE (Multi-Purpose Cooperative, registered with the CDA).
5. The following are the lending units and the year they joined the Sikap Buhay program: Cooperative Rural Bank of Bulacan (CRBB)—2002; Novaliches Development Cooperative—2002; Euro Credit Cooperative—2003; ASA Philippines Foundation—2006; Center for Community Transformation Cooperative—2007; UPLIFT Philippines—2008; Bagbag Multipurpose Cooperative—2008; ECLOF Philippines—2008; and Caritas Salve—2009 (Quezon City Government 2010, 36–37).
6. Let us hear from two successful beneficiaries of the lending program: Mrs. Laida Sarabia of Lupang Pangako, Payatas, borrowed P5,000 in 2002 to put up a “gotohan” (congee or rice porridge outlet). Three years later, she put up a sari-sari store with a capital of P30,000 and rents out half of the sari-sari store to a water station; and Vilma Oktubre initially borrowed P5,000. After 2 years, she borrowed P10,000 to put up a carinderia (small canteen) employing three household members. She also bought a refrigerator worth P26,000, and construction of a sari-sari store separate from the house will soon start (Quezon City Government 2007, 29).
7. After serving as mayor for 9 years, Belmonte ran to represent his old Quezon City district in the Philippine Congress.

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### *List of Interviewees*

- Salvador M. Enriquez, Jr. CPRM Consultants. Interviewed on 8 September 2014.
- Frederika C. Rentoy. Head, Environmental Protection and Waste Management Department, Philippines Government. Interviewed on 12 September 2014.
- Regina A. Samson. Assistant Secretary to the Mayor and Head, Communications Coordination Center, Quezon City. Interviewed on 10 September 2014.



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