



INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

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SCHARFF: This is Michael Scharff. The date is March 8th, 2011. I'm sitting with Secretary Robredo who is the Secretary of the Department of Interior and Local Government and a former mayor of Naga city. Mr. Secretary, thanks very much for agreeing to this meeting.

ROBREDO: *Good day and thank you also for the opportunity. Now I think the subject matter essentially will be my experience as mayor. So I was mayor in 1988 and this was really immediately after [edsa?] so people were hopeful. There were opportunities for young people like myself, I was only 29 then to serve the government. I took up the challenge of working in the government at the local level. So I ran for mayor. I won with only 23% of the vote. Majority of the members of the city council belonged to the opposition.*

Naga City traditionally has been the premier city of the region but when I returned—I was born in Naga—I took up secondary education in Naga and then I moved to Manila. So when I returned in 1986 I worked in a national government agency. It allowed me to really look at the problems of the city, not the superficial ones, but the problems which I felt were retarding the development of Naga.

So when the opportunity was presented to run for public office as mayor I ran for Mayor in 1988. As I said I won but I think the more important dimension was the kind of Naga that we had in 1988.

SCHARFF: That's interesting. Maybe you can describe some of the major problems.

ROBREDO: *Say for instance Naga was, as I have said traditionally the premier city of the region, but from a first class specification from the Department of Finance we went to a third class specification in as much there was not much investment or increase in local income or local revenues. Of course the superficial part is that there was not much new investment. But I think it was not just opportunities, it was how the systems worked, what incentives were given, the kind of infrastructure that we had during that time.*

Hand-in-hand with that was the doubling of the number of informal settlers since I left. If I recall it right, I think it was 20% of the population belonged to the informal sector. Now, of course, when you have all these types of problems it reflects also on the service delivery system, the service delivery outcomes of the city. So we were not really doing well in so far as education outcomes were concerned.

In like manner the preventive aspect of healthcare as seen by the indicators were not really taken care of. To my mind the basic reason was that we relied a lot on national government. We did not raise local income. Raising local income is politically difficult inasmuch as, especially during that time that I ran for office. That term was now limited, during that time, four years. So we had to demonstrate improvement in outcomes in that period of time and without the money how would you be able to do it? I think that was the challenge.

Given the limited resources that the city had during that time, how can we improve the outcomes, get reelected and build stakeholderhip on what we were doing.

Now, as I have said, the other dimension is political. In the Philippine context when majority of the membership of the city council belongs to the opposition usually what the mayor would like to happen doesn't happen. In like manner,

what the council would like to happen doesn't happen, so it is really gridlock. Accepting that as a given I felt that it might be good to look at the private sector as partners in making the system work. Given the fact that I was a minority mayor I told myself that it was important to build constituency support coming from the nontraditional political supporters that you have in the locality.

So we immediately addressed long-standing problems that were do-able but difficult just to gain the confidence of the constituency. I think what was obvious was how we addressed the tenure problems of the informal settlers. To my mind it was do-able inasmuch as it was a new government, there were large, owners of large tracts of land, that institutionally if we're able to negotiate and deal with them we'll be able to resolve them. One of the biggest landowners actually in the city is the Roman Catholic Church.

So we negotiated with the church. The tenure problem has been there in the 50's. So we leveraged on good will. We improved revenue colleges. We leveraged on future income and good will and assured the archbishop that we'll pay the property upfront. So we settled that. We also did a difficult—you know the reason why there were not much new investments in the city was that it was constricted in terms of space meaning it was confined to a 27 hectore property, the commercial district. There was no room or area for additional investments.

So we passed a local law relocating all the bus terminals outside that commercial district. If I recall it right I had 18 court cases, people opposing it. But to my mind it will equalize land values, open new areas for development, create additional pedestrian traffic outside the commercial area and bring about more reinvestments.

SCHARFF: Can I just ask, I think this is fascinating. When you first came to office though, in terms of setting your priorities, you mentioned before one of the greatest challenges was the lack of money, lack of finances there. So how did you, your first thing on the job, how do you ascertain what the priorities are going to be and then to follow on to that question, how do you determine what you do first?

ROBREDO: *The first thing that I did really was try to figure out where I'll get the resources, whether it be technical, whether it be financial. So financial, I remember, all the processing of licenses went through my people. We negotiated with the businessmen in the city. I told them, I do come from a family of businessmen. I do know what the approximate gross revenues are. We are seeking your cooperation now. There was a lot of under-declaration of gross receipts. Immediately I said this will not happen under my term. In the same manner that we are seeking cooperation, we will not accept applications which we believe are—where the gross receipts are under-declared.*

So one track was raising more money for the city and inasmuch as I come from the city, I know how they operate. I can compare. I had ascendancy to tell them this will not work anymore under this administration.

Now together with that, you know we look at the problems—we prioritize the problems of the city in terms of what is do-able that will inspire confidence as far as the bureaucracy and the city is concerned. Let's say for instance, the problem of informal settlers. They organized a federation of seven organizations during that time. They were asking the mayor to work with them, the help them. The mayor who was mayor I think for fifteen, sixteen years, was not able to help them. So this was one area where we can demonstrate that under this new

administration we can make our arrangements that they were looking for and in fact we did.

So of course by word of mouth they say that the things that happened in the last five, ten, whatever, suddenly there is this guy, after one year he has done it.

SCHARFF: That's a—I mean you're seen as a revolutionary figure in large part because of the patronage politics that had characterized the city before. I wonder how you navigated that difficult first step of after you set your priorities how do you build a team, both in your office, your executive office and also these 15-30 employees as they used to call them and others? How do you—do you purge the bureaucracy? Do you keep the people on who were there before you came and try to work with them? How do you—?

ROBREDO: *Ever since my policy has been, my principle has been, I tried to work with the people that I have. I probably bring in some new guy that I can trust who will make sure that everybody will toe the line, but basically I must subscribe to the idea that by nature, if you provide good leadership you will be able to institute some changes. I always say that it is the 20/20/60 rule. Twenty percent of those who are in that organization will always get on board with whoever is in charge. Twenty percent will oppose—the remaining sixty will just watch who wins. They'll go with the winner. So certainly if my twenty will win, I'll get the sixty. That worked with me in city hall, instead of bringing in new guys.*

In fact, if I recall it right, I only took in one person, he is now the vice mayor and he has been with me ever since I worked with city hall. Just to tell everyone that instead of looking back and finding fault, I'd rather work with you and move on.

SCHARFF: How did you know the vice mayor, was he a friend?

ROBREDO: *The vice mayor was with me, before he was my speechwriter, he wrote for me. He became vice mayor later on. He was city administrator. Then he, I worked in another government agency before I became mayor and he was the guy that I took in. So aside from him, no one else.*

SCHARFF: When you're setting these priorities, you mentioned before, you've got less than three years now, you're coming up for reelection again, are there certain quick fixes so to speak to win the support of the constituents? To show the trust? I mean can you divide your priorities into the quick fixes and the long-term priorities that may stretch three, six, perhaps all nine years?

ROBREDO: *You know at the local level you tend to manage symbols. I think it is important that they do see the symbols of good governance. For instance, in that city where I was during that time I know almost everyone, when you do something right everyone knows; when you do something wrong everyone knows it. When you manage the symbols—let me be just very, very specific.*

SCHARFF: Please.

ROBREDO: *You know I reported to work very early. I was the last person to leave city hall initially. Just to impress everyone that I will not ask of you what I am not willing to do myself. Of course we were very frugal. I think I built that reputation in the city. We don't waste government money. So it is important that you impart the right values because the programs will not be implemented well if they're not*

supported by the right values. So we emphasize to everyone that we will do what we say.

I said that we will promote from within, we'll build the party from within. So as far as the bureaucracy was concerned I think after six months in office they felt that I had the technical and academic preparation to be mayor. But more than that they felt that I can be that organization.

Now of course outside the city hall you need to demonstrate are outcomes. As I said we looked at the difficult that were do-able so that relocation of the bus terminals, working with the informal settlers, coming up with an emergency rescue system. You know during that time there were no cell phones yet. Landlines were inefficient so we built an emergency rescue system using the VHF radios and we networked with all the hospitals, fire department and the like. So it was a localized 911 using the available equipment that we had because as I said, the challenge was making do with what we had.

So during the first term it was really making sure that the organization know where we were going. I think I had monthly meetings with the employees, weekly meetings with the management committee. We do say, choosing the right battles to fight we fought a legal gamble, we closed down all the nightclubs in the city.

SCHARFF: That was one of your early on initiatives, cleaning up—.

ROBREDO: *As I said, sometimes you have to work with symbols. You don't have a lot of money but these were the symbols of bad governance.*

SCHARFF: But how do you win the political support for those early initiatives. I mean you're sort of an untested figure, right?

ROBREDO: Yes.

SCHARFF: As you come in there are a lot of people in the camp who are opposed to your mayorship.

ROBREDO: *I think it was clear to me that I cannot rely on the traditional political support. Because I just won with 23% of the vote. All the village leaders were with me when I ran for office, almost all of them, more than half of them. Still I got only 23%. So if I don't go beyond the traditional then very likely I'll get the other – probably an increment of what, 5, 6, 7, 8%? So I decided to take the risk. I told myself that support will come from people who believe the city deserves something better, When they say something better, not only in terms of accomplishment but in terms of the values that you show, the values that you advocate. In fact I think during my first term it was more—aside from the symbols of what government can do it is making them believe we can have a government that is honest. We can have a got that plays by the rules.*

So I think they were not looking for quick fix solutions. They were looking for a sign that this is an opportunity that if you cultivate this opportunity, then we can do better.

SCHARFF: So I want to ask you on the operational detail side about these sort of three priority areas but before we get to that just on this initial kind of closing down the various vices in the city like the pornography shops and other aspects. How does one actually go about cleaning those areas up?

ROBREDO: *You know, from experience, you cannot fully trust the Philippine National Police at the local level. I recall I organized my own anti-vice squad in city hall. So they operated for me. In fact, I remember very well, I had a fight with my chief of police because he belonged to the opposing political camp. I had to go to the archbishop so that I can get my own chief of police.*

SCHARFF: How early on in your term was this fight?

ROBREDO: *I think a year and a half within my term.*

SCHARFF: What was the reason behind the scuffle?

ROBREDO: *He wasn't following orders when we asked them to run after illegal gambling. He was just playing games. So I told myself, if we cannot rely on him there are two things that I can do. One is get him replaced; the other one is form my own group.*

SCHARFF: So you formed what you called an anti-vice squad.

ROBREDO: *Yes, I formed an anti-vice squad.*

SCHARFF: How do you select the members for this anti-vice squad?

ROBREDO: *This came from the security personnel that they became to me. You know we had the makings of a public safety office already in city hall. So we set up that unit. They ran after all the vices. Despite the fact that we were not that many, when you're doing something legal and something right nobody will oppose you even if they want to. The police cannot even say that we're stepping beyond our authority because if they do I will tell them that that is your job I'm doing for you.*

SCHARFF: How big was this team or how big was the squad?

ROBREDO: *I recall it was six police officials and eight civilians.*

SCHARFF: And how does one actually go about shutting down? What does it mean to—?

ROBREDO: *They just go there.*

SCHARFF: If someone else is trying to replicate the strategy, what does it—?

ROBREDO: *It is just—you need good intel information. At that time that they are committing it, somebody must be there to witness it and you just apprehend them. In fact, one of the joints that we apprehended, I recall it was just at the back of the police station. So they just raided it and when they had the shows they just apprehended everyone.*

SCHARFF: It was a brothel, is that what it was?

ROBREDO: *It wasn't a brothel, these were lewd shows, nude ladies, nude girls. The following day we cancelled the permit so they don't have a permit to operate anymore.*

SCHARFF: Interesting.

ROBREDO: *We had the evidence. You know it sounds easier than when it was done.*

SCHARFF: But what you did when you had this run-in with the chief of police was to go to the archbishop?

ROBREDO: *Yes, the archbishop was very close to the President.*

SCHARFF: To help you mediate the conflict? Why did you go to the archbishop?

ROBREDO: *The archbishop—I said, “Monsignor I think you see what we’re doing. This is the difficulty if I don’t have the chief of police with me.” I knew that the archbishop was close to the President and the President’s colleague. So I asked him if it was possible for him to intercede in my behalf and get my chief of police replaced.*

I think he talked with the President. A month later they gave me a new chief of police who now understands that the boss there is city hall. It is not another politician who doesn’t have jurisdiction over us.

SCHARFF: Can I just move because I recognize your time is limited. Just to talk about the operational details of these three sort of areas. The first is this urban rights program. For someone who is not familiar with the program, can you describe in detail how that actually—the process of the government going and buying up property, what the situation looked like so you had people that were essentially living on land that they didn’t own but private land owners did own that land. The government came in and essentially convinced the private landowners to sell.

ROBREDO: Yes.

SCHARFF: How does that work?

ROBREDO: *First of all as I have said when I took over there were seven organizations that formed an urban confederation. Basically what they wanted was tenure, meaning security of tenure. So I asked them what the situation was, how can it be best managed. They answered that we’re willing to organize, you can only talk to one person, meaning that we will be represented by our officers; they can assume obligations for us, or they can accept obligations.*

We started inventory. Which of these properties can easily be negotiated because once we have demonstrated that we have the capacity and the willingness to pay then the—I think most of them were willing to sell their properties but the problem was that government was not credible in the sense that they don’t pay, it takes too long for them to pay.

Anyway we choose, I think if I recall right, three or four areas. One property was owned by the church and we negotiated—the only condition given by the church was that we pay cash. They will only talk to one person and we need to settle it soon. The concession was that all the open spaces will be given to us for free. They will sell it at lower than market values and they will immediately transfer ownership after we pay. So it was a fair deal. So I borrowed money from the bank, paid the church, took over the property.

Again, of course, that’s easier said than done. It took a while before we were able to convince everyone that this is the price, this is the amortization schedule. These are the obligations. But then, I recall it took us almost a year.

SCHARFF: So you borrowed money from—?

ROBREDO: *From the bank.*

SCHARFF: So that the government borrows—

ROBREDO: *We borrowed money from the bank, we bought the property. Now the informal settlers now owe us. So we need to arrange the amortization schedules. The other thing that we did, we did land sharing. A property owner felt that his property, in as much as part of it was occupied by informal settlers, he was not getting value for his property.*

So I said if he is willing to share the land we will pay for part of it, we'll vacate the prime side of it, and we are interested, it is really housing; we are not interested in using it for commercial purposes. So he agreed to share the land. So we relocated, we paid him, we settled, the same. We did also a land swap. The city owned the property—again this is the church. The church owned a property where they had informal settlers and they were about to be ejected because the court decided that this was really the property of the church.

So we went to the archbishop and we told the archbishop that Monsignor you might be willing to consider a vacant property owned by the city in exchange for your property. So he did some computations. We agreed that this is equivalent area that we'd give him in exchange for his property.

SCHARFF: Do you know what year that was?

ROBREDO: *It this it was 1990; the first one was 1988.*

SCHARFF: Okay.

ROBREDO: *Now of course there were occasions wherein we used the authority of government to—we call it eminent domain. For property owners who were not willing to negotiate, we compelled them to sell the land to the government and we filed cases.*

SCHARFF: But it was there—what was the case made in terms of why the government should have ownership of the land?

ROBREDO: *First of all housing, as far as Philippine laws are concerned, housing is public use, it is defined as public use. So if it is for public housing you can acquire property by force.*

SCHARFF: So to an audience who is new to this subject, listening to this, some would suggest that perhaps, how does the government—are they strong-arming people into giving up their land?

ROBREDO: *First of all, if your property is—if you own a property, this is occupied by informal settlers, you would like to eject them. I'll pay you a visit. I'll say, probably you're interested to sell the property to the informal settlers. Very likely. If he says yes then we negotiate how much. If my auditor tells me that the price is okay, we'll just pay.*

Now he'll say, "No, I'm not willing to sell the property," or, if the demands are unreasonable, we'll say, "So we'll use the authority of government to compel you to sell the property and we'll just pay you based on what the court will tell us is

the fair market value of your property.” Now of course you only do that when you have informal settlers on your property. We don’t do that if it is vacant land, no reason to go to court.

SCHARFF: So if I am a property owner and I agree—you come to me and I agree to sell it, who determines how much—?

ROBREDO: *There is an assessment.*

SCHARFF: Is there a vote within the city council itself?

ROBREDO: *No, there is an appraisal committee that appraises the property composed of both government and non-government. And if you’re not satisfied you can go to court. The court will appoint an appraisal committee that will determine the value of the property. So for the informal settlers basically it was just a land issue. You know it was much, much later during my term that we started providing houses. In the province, just give them a home lot. On an incremental basis they’ll be able to provide housing.*

SCHARFF: Do you have any idea how much money the government spent in total on—?

ROBREDO: *More than a hundred million I guess. Two things. One is that I consider it as a priority.*

SCHARFF: Why is that?

ROBREDO: *My sense was that first of all by just providing tenure to a lot of people they’ll invest in housing. When you invest in housing the economic multiplier of the house, housing construction is relatively high.*

Second, by providing them tenure you know it gives them peace of mind and they can focus on the other important concerns of improving their luck. And of course we have always maintained that the government is for the poor and we should demonstrate this by way of programs that they will address the needs of the poor. If you try to connect all of these initiatives, even if you go to the school board program that we had, you move to education, it was really our bias for the poorer sector.

The reason why we wanted to improve public education, this is because we felt it was an equalizer. Children of poor families must have the same opportunities as children of well-off families as least as far as education is concerned.

SCHARFF: So let’s move to that, if I may, just to talk about the issue of how you empowered the school boards.

ROBREDO: *Okay.*

SCHARFF: This is now your second term. You’ve come back. You’ve been abroad.

ROBREDO: *Actually my fourth term.*

SCHARFF: Okay.

ROBREDO: *I’ve always considered our public school system in the city is more superior to the other divisions in the region. But when we examined the results of the*

achievement tests it seems that we were not doing well. Thirty-nine percent average. Meaning that for a hundred questions that were asked, only 39 were answered correctly.

SCHARFF: This is in a particular grade?

ROBREDO: *Actually that is average for grade one to grade six, math, science, English. I told myself that probably we were the best in the region but 39 is not good enough. We tried to do an assessment. Two things. One is there was a lack of awareness on the part of not only the school but also the parents that so far as the progress of our public school system is concerned. You know when they are not really that aware, you cannot expect them to act on it.*

So I proposed that from here on let's make public education a joint responsibility between the parents and the school and let's come up with mechanisms that will enforce it. So at the top of that of course is the school board. So we agreed that everything that the school board decides should be the result of consultation with those who are involved from parents, to educators, to supervisors to teachers. So we agreed that we will expand the membership of the school board. We will actively consult with the stakeholders. We will redefine the mandate. We are now the performance officer of the division.

SCHARFF: But you must have faced some opposition to this.

ROBREDO: *Of course.*

SCHARFF: The school board is a special body set up under the 1991 local ordinance, local government code. So people must be saying, well the code of '91 doesn't say that you as a school board can do what you're doing. How did you navigate that?

ROBREDO: *First of all the school board really is controlled by the local government, not by that—if you take a look at the membership. So if you call a vote usually the mayor will get his way. But as they say, you cannot argue with a good idea. In fact, when we said we would reinvent the school board, we're giving you more authority but we'll be measuring you. So in fact we were saying that from here on the principal, the supervisors, the superintendent is now part of the process of deciding as to how we'll spend the money. Whereas before it was just the mayor who decides and the superintendent.*

So between a setup where authority was limited to two people. Now we are saying we will spread around the authority and now get all of you involved. But then the precondition is we'll measure. I guess by and large measurement was just to make sure that we're on track.

SCHARFF: Did you have to hire any special staff from the outside to come in to do this measurement?

ROBREDO: *No. In fact, we pioneered the reinvention in the Philippines. It was just a—I guess in all of this it was really more of responding to the challenges given the resources that you have. Let's say for instance, urban poor. It was responding to a, what you call it, a demand or a request, coming from the sector. You'd better take care of us; we've been waiting for a long-term. You know, we're willing to do our share as long as you help us.*

In like manner, in public education as I've said, if I can assure that the parents, we've impressed the achievement tables of your children. If you just go on board and actively participate, there will be some rewards in case you do. They cannot argue with that.

SCHARFF: What was the greatest challenge you faced as mayor in empowering the school board?

ROBREDO: *The national government. In three instances where I had problems, it was when they replaced my division superintendent by someone who did not believe in what we were doing. This was more political than anything else.*

SCHARFF: With someone who is not familiar with the term divisional superintendent---

ROBREDO: *The superintendent is my counterpart. He or she co-chairs. He is the highest public school—the highest official in the city.*

SCHARFF: Appointed from the national level.

ROBREDO: *Appointed by national government. Let me just give you the political dimension.*

SCHARFF: I think this is interesting for others who are trying to replicate.

ROBREDO: *The superintendent is one of the three members of the board who come before the elections. So it is an important personality in the political dynamics of the area. The congressman was my opponent. So he was more influential. I belonged to the opposition. So he was able to get my superintendent replaced by somebody who was loyal to him and not necessarily somebody who had the best interests of the schoolchildren in mind.*

But then you know, you just have to pound it, no matter even if you know they will not fully cooperate.

SCHARFF: So when he is appointed, what do you do? How do you—are you able to get him out or does he stay?

ROBREDO: *We just have to work with him.*

SCHARFF: What does that mean?

ROBREDO: *As I've said, there would be no debates, no discussions when the ideas are sound. You only will have problems when the things that you would like to do run contrary to rules or run contrary to generally accepted rules. But when they are consistent with all the rules, then she cannot argue.*

SCHARFF: So what might have—if you can provide maybe a specific example of something that you were trying to do but the national level didn't want to see happen and there was some tension there.

ROBREDO: *Not really the national level, it is actually just the superintendent. Let's say for instance I wanted to do quarterly achievement tests. Probably she felt lazy, probably she didn't see the sense of it. She only wanted a pre-test and a post-test. But you know I said the only way for us to intervene is when we know at the middle of the game that we're not performing well. It's not that we'll know that we did not perform at the end of the game—that's a post test.*

So there was a running discussion on that. Inasmuch as they controlled the teachers and the principals we only had a pre-test and a post-test.

SCHARFF: So you had to essentially give in to her demands.

ROBREDO: *Yes. It is really a give and take thing.*

SCHARFF: In terms of the program overall, how did you measure the success—?

ROBREDO: *Which one?*

SCHARFF: Of the empowering of the school board. What were the measures for success, how did you?

ROBREDO: *The achievement levels of the children, that's basic. They do an achievement test. If the score goes up—you have a division, you have a national, you have a regional. So you triangulate. Have my numbers improved? If they did then the ultimate measurable outcome is clear. You take a look at completion rates and participation rates. If the numbers have gone up then I think the outcome is clear. All of the activities that you're doing, are just really activities. At the end of the day the basic outcomes are making sure that they're done, they're finished, making sure that the achievement levels are up.*

SCHARFF: I just want to move to the last sort of area of discussion which was the Naga City People's Council which preceded the empowerment ordinance. Can you tell me where did that idea come from and why did you decide to make this a priority?

ROBREDO: *The political dimension in that organ was we need to—we always do say that you know, the basic principle, if there is anyone who can do it better than government let them do it. That has been the overriding principle in everything that we did in the city. We felt that if there was an NGO (nongovernment organization) to do what government needs to do and government does not have the capacity to do then that can do it, so we started with that.*

Let's say for instance, the school for the mentally handicapped children in the city is really run by parents of handicapped children for the simple reason that we don't have any expertise in the area. So for things that the private sector can do better than us—so operationally that people participation ordinance, it revolves into two aspects.

One is that getting private sector to participate in the service delivery system in the city. The other dimension is getting them involved in policy. Now as I said I only won with 23% of the vote. My lesson there was that if people will get on board on most of the things that we do, I'll get my numbers. In fact, again, if you take a look at the numbers I think it was a very fair assessment since from my first re-election up to the last election, what 80%, 70% of the mandate.

So we took off from believing that if we can get everyone on board we'd be better off.

SCHARFF: So in terms of actually passing the Empowerment Ordinance, was that a vote by the city council?

ROBREDO: *That was a vote by the city council.*

SCHARFF: Were you, when you first tried to propose the idea did you think you were going to be able to get it passed easily or was there opposition?

ROBREDO: *Since 1992, up to now, we don't have any opposition councilor in the city. We have been voted straight into office. My mayor, vice mayor, all the city governments just belong to one political group.*

SCHARFF: The Liberal Party?

ROBREDO: *Right. Or at least my party, whenever that was. So the challenge really was not only asking them to vote for it, but making them part of it because initially people, at least two councilors were saying, why do we need to get NGO representatives when we were given the full mandate. My answer then if I recall it right was, you know, local officials come and go. If there is anything permanent here it is a constituency.*

SCHARFF: Interesting.

ROBREDO: *Probably at this point in time we might say we're good local officials. But we're not sure whether the succeeding local officials will be good. At least just to console them. So it is a small perspective than anything else. But to my mind it was important that we begin to learn to listen from people who might not have the chance to be elected in as much as you know. We have an imperfect political and election system in the Philippines. It doesn't follow the two—whoever is voted into office deserves it. The only way to make sure that people are represented is that if we pass that local law, that we require government to have people representatives.*

So initially we had some resistance but then they realized later on that politically it was beneficial to them as well. Very simple.

SCHARFF: That resistance came from members of your own party, councilors.

ROBREDO: *I think that the basic premise is simple. If you're a voter, I'll ask you to vote for me and tell you that after you vote for me I'm in charge. There is this other fellow and you say, after you vote for me we will govern this together.*

SCHARFF: It's interesting you say that because I wonder as your popularity increased over your terms as mayor, I wonder if councilors were more inclined to go along with what you as mayor were proposing and if there was less resistance as your time went on. In the first term, nine years, and in the second.

Because they knew what you were saying. People really bought into it and believed in. So was it easier to navigate the political—?

ROBREDO: *Immediately after that, you know that after that first election I got 80% of the vote. So from 23% I went to 80%. Of course, probably some of them were looking at it as a fluke initially. But you know when after 80 you get 76. I think not 76, I think after 80 I got I think 91, then again I got 76, then 71, then 77. In fact some of them, I do think now—that some of them thought that they owed their election to me. But then, I guess, I guess we didn't agree all the time. I never imposed that, I never imposed anything on them. It is always you'd better be convinced that this is the way to go. In as much as you belong to my—no matter where we agree, you'll go with me.*

SCHARFF: Do you think that opposition from some of your members, the opposition to the idea of a Naga City People's Council was because it would actually make the dealings of these special bodies and committees actually more transparent? Now they couldn't perhaps bargain amongst themselves. Now we have to let the civil society guys into hear what we're trying to do. So they were—.

ROBREDO: *I think partly. They were not comfortable. These are now outsiders, they do not belong to our political group. Now they are part of the deliberation process. They might not understand where we're coming from. It was not really—it was more of a discomfort rather than a threat.*

In that ordinance while it allows private sector participation, they're a minority. In a committee of five there is only one representative. So it is more just making everyone know what it is happening. It is not dictating as to what will happen. But I think later on they realized that it was good for our politics. After the first reelection in 1992, I think everyone realized that this is good for us. It was good for us both in the political and the developmental dimension meaning they can use the People's Council against what I want. In like manner I can use the People's Council against what they want. It is not all the time that we agree.

We need to get people on board. So I suppose they understood in general it would benefit everyone.

SCHARFF: As we work our way to a conclusion I just wanted to ask, when you look back over eighteen years as mayor is there anything that you were not able to do that you wish you had been able to?

ROBREDO: *Many things.*

SCHARFF: Maybe the top one or two areas where you ran into resistance or you just simply—the political situation or the fiscal situation wouldn't allow for it.

ROBREDO: *I think we should have been less conservative in terms of generating resources. Let's say for instance World Bank did a study and they were saying we under borrowed. Probably they were right. But to my mind it was more political than anything else. They piloted Naga in a Standard and Poor's rating system project and I think we fared fairly well as compared to all the Philippines in rating.*

So maybe you have a fast track of development if you're more aggressive. Now, of course, the other thing we should look at was, of course it is more parochial. I was not very concerned with history, arts and culture. But you know sometimes these things, when you pass on the opportunity it is gone. So in terms of work I think that was one area we should focus some resources and some attention. In so far as specifics as to what we should have done, I think we should have focused more on—not more focus, put some emphasis on it. Probably we should have been tougher. You know we have—I guess that people empowerment ordinance really put a soft dimension on how we govern. Sometimes there are times when I guess the process becomes tedious although of course we do say that looking back that process improved the outcomes.

Let's say for instance, at this point in time we have not decided where to locate the landfill because that process is always inclusive. You know when, I doubt if you'll get full consensus on where to locate it. So these are tricky issues. I think that government must just decide it of course after listening to everyone but this

cannot be done by consensus of everyone. But other than that I guess we were okay.

SCHARFF: Finally I wonder if there are other cities that have adapted any of the techniques.

ROBREDO: *Many cities.*

SCHARFF: Because there is quite a bit—.

ROBREDO: *Quezon city has a Quezon City People's Council. It is not as powerful as we do, as what we have in the city but they have one. They have Candelaria City Council, it is the same as ours in Quezon province. They have an Infanta People's Council in Infanta, Quezon. They have a South Upi, Maguindanao People's Council. I think they learned this from CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency). But I think the direction is towards that. Right now we are working with the Senate to in fact make the budgeting process of LGUs more inclusive to NGOs. And we're proposing a law that will compel that. Now the recent Congress passed—you know what we call the General Appropriations Act, the budget in the Philippines where in full disclosure is now compulsory for local government units. Actually that comes from the Naga City experience.*

So my sense is that we are moving towards more participation and more empowerment on the part of non-government. Give us until year 2016, we will make sure that all of these are translated into laws.

SCHARFF: Secretary Robredo, thank you very much for your time, we appreciate it.

ROBREDO: *You're welcome.*