

INSIGHT FROM A DBM YOUNG SENIOR OFFICIAL

From Fear to Trust: A Reflection

They said that public service is thankless—more so, if you work in a strategic and powerful agency as the DBM. You would nearly have a love-hate relationship with the public you serve: the agencies, with whom you need to be strict, like a parent as we set rules, monitor performance, and execute punishment when needed; and the general public, for whom you ought to be transparent and open, but opening yourself up for criticism and misinterpretation.

Six years of this kind of experience, nevertheless, strengthened my heart.

Despite international recognition for budget transparency and participation, unprecedented public investments in social and economic services, and institutionalizing frameworks and performance metrics for budgeting, the DBM sits alone, unrecognized for much of the work it has done here locally.

Historically, the DBM has been a silent worker that draws strength from its professional and diligent workforce. In its silence, however, there are cracks. My experience here involved sensing some fear, some distrust, and some silos. Gaps were perceptible: between the decision-makers and the implementers, the leaders and the staff, the “organic” staff and the so-called “outsiders,” the central and the regional offices, and among and within teams.

Perhaps these dynamics developed over the years—over changes in the leadership, the political climate and the people’s needs; over the lack of capacity building, or the lack of basic support systems for government employees. There was basic trust (or perhaps, courtesy), a modest platform.

But to move forward, we needed more than the technical competence our jobs required of us. We had to improve our relationships, work on these relationships with one another, with each office and team, with our client agencies, and with the public we serve—to do our work purposefully despite our limited time and circumstances.

The DBM embarked on the difficult task of rebuilding trust in government: from becoming part of the Open Government Partnership to publishing layman versions of

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the GAA; from welcoming CSOs to the budget process to handholding the government agencies for performance budgeting to creating a culture of empowerment for the people we serve and the people in government. We pursued capacity building and team building activities across units and locations. We strengthened the connection between the staff and the management. We opened access to information and scholarships. We organized town hall meetings and dialogues at various levels, and we established an internal communication system. The result was far from perfect, but it was a good start.

The DBM Tibay, the unfriendly deadlines of the reforms we have set, and the obligatory engagement of the DBM with our stakeholders forced us to know the people we work with and the people we serve. Despite the unsettling relationship-building, the results have shown that conversations, ideas, and the networks amongst us have been enriched: work is now easier to do.

Thus, we moved from fear to trust, from silence to empowerment, from merely working to rediscovering meaning in our work. The DBM emerged at the heart of governance reforms: vilified, but holding strong with integrity.

I have learned that the joy of experiencing life is about why you do what you do, your connection to the people you’re with, and who you become in the process, and not so much about what you have achieved. The DBM has strengthened my heart—to face crazier challenges, take greater risks, and be consistently sincere—making it even more formidable and ready for public service. I know I am not the only one.

Thank you, DBM.

The DBM—a team of genuine public servants—will keep building trust in government. From merely calling themselves “good soldiers,” they now form the stronger family of empowered Filipinos who will stand for good governance. And that is just the beginning.

¹ Amador served as Chief of Staff of the Office of Secretary Florencio B. Abad from June 2010 to June 2016. She spearheaded the DBM Tibay, which includes the Junior Leadership Development (JLD) program.