



## Mapping and Sharing Information for Disaster Risk Reduction and Management

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In the past two years or so, the need for our products and services has intensified, what with the focus on climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction and management (DRRM). Although we do not directly participate in DRRM, we are deemed a vital support group because of our maps.

Our most important product is the topographic base map. With today's geographic information systems (GIS), it is easy to superimpose information to come up with thematic or specialised maps. We have the basic information layers—vegetation, contours, elevation, drainage patterns, rivers, buildings and other manmade structures, and so on—and different users or agencies can just concentrate on their own thematic information. They can gather data specific to their needs such as the location of hospitals, and plot this using our base map as the first layer.

This is necessary for climate change adaptation and national DRRM. We need as much information as we can get when dealing with disasters, and maps can help provide the data. Let us say, for instance, that we need to select an evacuation area. By default, schools are used as evacuation centres, but some schools are located in areas that may not really be safe. In situations when we need to find the nearest hospital, an accurate map will give us reliable information.

Aside from producing the base maps, we also have to provide the infrastructure for the further development and sharing of geospatial information. Last year, we launched the Philippine Geoportal Project, a web-based infrastructure for the sharing of this information. Different government agencies can upload different thematic maps for downloading by the public.

I have been with NAMRIA from the very beginning, as I was part of one of those agencies which merged to form what is now known as NAMRIA. I have seen how NAMRIA had operated before and had recognised that the agency was not functioning as a whole. But that is only natural because we were a new agency then. We were a mix of different cultures.

NAMRIA is now more than 25 years old. We have had a lot of achievements that we are proud of but at the same time, there have been weaknesses and gaps.

The Strategic Planning Workshop sessions, although tiring and demanding, were exciting and very refreshing. It was akin to having a great conversation between the management and the next leaders of NAMRIA. We had frank discussions, which I think were necessary in order to arrive at the right strategic direction.

With the PAHRODF intervention, we were able to holistically see what the strategic directions of NAMRIA should really be, and which programs we had to prioritise to attain these objectives. More importantly, everybody had a levelling-off of sorts to situate what we do in NAMRIA within the greater context of the government's overall development plan.

All NAMRIA employees should now have an idea of the context in which they work. As I would like to put it, whereas we thought of ourselves as mere bricklayers before, now we are very much aware that we are building a church.

Our Strategic Planning enabled us to formulate a new vision for NAMRIA: "By 2020, NAMRIA will be a centre of excellence, building a geospatially empowered Philippines." This basically captures our role as an agency. Geospatial information is very enabling, and its role will intensify further. So we envision that the Philippines and our people will utilise this tool to fully take advantage of all opportunities that will be made available to them.

I understand that this is a very powerful statement, and our vision might have been considered ambitious in the past because government agencies were very conservative. But with the intervention, with the formulation of the NAMRIA 2014-2020 Strategic Plan, we realised that this lofty target is exactly what our goal should be.

We also realised that we cannot do it alone. The demand for maps has grown and it is impossible for NAMRIA to produce them all in a short time. We cannot provide all the required geospatial information, so we identified partnership development as one of our strategic initiatives. We need to intensify our partnership efforts with the industry—geodetic engineers, GIS users, map users. We have to expand our projects with the private sector.

The objective is to develop not just NAMRIA's capability, but also the GIS capability of other government agencies that may have fallen behind. We realise that we are not the only ones that should upgrade—our partners should, too. In this way, we can all take advantage of the power of geospatial information and accelerate its production. GIS is a tool and a very powerful one at that, but it is not exclusive to NAMRIA.

Through the intervention, the role of the Policy and Planning Division has become clearer. Our primary responsibility is performance management. That has become the reason for the existence of our division. So we are now conscious that we must shepherd the improvement of agency performance, in partnership with management.

The intervention also helped me see what is really important. You have to identify what is important to you and to your family—and your energy and time should accordingly lead you towards achieving that which you believe to be essential. That, to me, is the essence of strategic thinking. I believe we should also strategise in our own lives.

The role of NAMRIA and its different units is much clearer now. So in our discussions on how we can improve our systems, things are easier. Before, everyone had his own idea. Things were a mess. Now, there is a unifying thread. It is helpful because there are still many things to be discussed. There is still a lot that remains to be done.