

# THE MAYOR IS ALWAYS IN

*Koronadal City's chief executive,  
Eliordo "Bebot" Ogena, tells us about  
his first 100 days in office and what he  
hopes to fulfill during his term*

**BY MARIDOL RANO-A-BISMAR**  
**PHOTOGRAPHY BY DANIEL SORIANO**



Listening to Koronadal City Mayor Eliordo Ogena's story is like sitting on your grandmother's lap, wide-eyed, while taking in anecdotes that restore your faith in mankind. The city chief admits that he's not a moneyed politician like his opponent in the last elections, who comes from a well-entrenched local political clan. But he won the race, hands-down.

"After the end of my last term as Vice Governor of South Cotabato last 2010, some people said I should have run as governor, but I can't, I don't have the money," he admits.

The governorship was the next logical step after Ogena ran unopposed during his last term and won by a landslide in the last elections. He also served as a board member for two terms (1995-2001).



Since he didn't have campaign money to run for governor, Ogena tried—and succeeded—to secure the vice-mayoral post for three terms (from year xxxx to xxxx).

It turns out the people were observing him all along. They saw Ogena roaming the streets of Koronadal, condoling with a family whose loved one passed away. They saw him mingle with them during special occasions like weddings. They didn't hesitate

to approach him when they needed something for their families. In short, he was always there for them.

Ogena says it's because he swears by people empowerment. After all, it is the people who put him in a position to serve. It is also they who have the power to remove him from office.

“We have to liberate our people from the bondage of poverty. And the best for you to do it is through education, creating job opportunities

for them, providing basic services, and using my power for good,” says the new mayor.

### **FIRST 100 DAYS**

The human rights lawyer says he can only use his power for good if he has the funds to bankroll projects. So one of the things he did during his first 100 days as mayor was to create a technical working group for special projects. Its job is to solicit funds from government officials and agencies.

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Ogena explains that his budget of Php1 billion is “not much” to meet the people’s needs. He needs five times more than that. It’s because this mayor aims high.

First on his to-do list is to make the city clean and beautiful, to make his job of promoting his city for local and foreign tourists a lot easier.

While waiting for necessary funds, the mayor has tapped the city employees to make the town plaza—the city’s version of Manila’s Rizal Park—more attractive.

He also wants bustling areas in the city, like Marbel, to be fully landscaped.

He likewise took action to make city’s China Town look more inviting. To encourage the people to do their part, he’s offering a prize to anyone who can come up with the most attractive garden in the area.

Ogena also wants a tree-lined national highway so his constituents and visitors can



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breathe fresh air and admire the beauty of Mother Nature more. So he plans to plant more trees at the urban center, where more people gather.

“This way, I can monitor tree growth. Trees planted in the forest and rice fields die due to fire. It’s such a waste,” he explains.

Road clearing is also part of Ogena’s efforts to make his city more pleasing to the eyes. He left no stone unturned in ridding ten major road networks of illegal structures. He also cleared the marketplace of illegal vendors who used to crowd this center of activity.

Ogena’s cleanliness drive aimed to rid the city of disease-carrying flies. He asked the public market supervisor to direct vendors not to wrap fish intestines in cellophane. Doing so only succeeds in making the dumpsite smell bad and multiplies the number of disease-carrying flies. “Seeing a cleaner marketplace made me feel good. The whole place lit up before my eyes,” he says the mayor.

Ogena took the health advocacy even further by launching a campaign to clean major water sources, thus making the basic





commodity safe to drink. After all, prevention is better than cure. “We don’t wait for an epidemic to come before we act. Our doctors are proactive. The curative approach is expensive,” Ogena points out. This is why he also headed campaigns on nutrition, polio vaccination, tuberculosis, and diabetes prevention.

### **WORKING AS ONE**

Ogena knows he has to address a deeper concern—the people’s divisive attitude. “You have to unite your people, including those at the other side of the fence,” he says. Ending political in-fighting, he goes on, will strengthen the city.

He dreams of ending political dynasties, thereby opening windows of opportunity for the common man in Koronadal. “What will you do if you have no properties, if you’re not educated? Will democracy be possible?” he wonders aloud. Imposing your will on someone with a decent job and a means of livelihood is difficult. So he wants to give power where power is due—to the ordinary people.



He wants to give subsidies to farmers in the form of fertilizers and chemicals. Ogena is also bent on buying rice and corn farmers’ produce. He’s all for small businessmen to grow because he welcomes investors.

Ogena also dreams of a Koronadal that is the center of education in South-Central Mindanao. Along the way, his plans keep on growing bigger and bigger.

The father of Koronadal refuses to rest on his laurels. |

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