



VIRGILIO F. BASA
 Director II
 National Mapping and Resource Information Authority
 Fort Bonifacio, Taguig City
Dangal ng Bayan Awardee, 2008

This civil servant has devoted his life to plotting grids and neatlines — his 44 years of service brimming with achievements. His map to success? Perseverance, dedication to duty, integrity and love for his country.

When asked whether government service was his first choice, Basa answered without hesitation: “I have always wanted a career in government. I always had lofty ideals. I dreamt that I start small and end big.” Indeed, his dream was realized when he bagged the *Dangal ng Bayan Award* in 2008, one of the most prestigious awards given to exemplary civil servants.

Starting out as a Forester at the then Department of Natural Resources’ Bureau of Forest Development in 1965, Basa rose from the ranks to become a Director at the National Mapping and Resource Information Authority (NAMRIA). He heads a team of land surveyors that determines how to put land to its best use based on a set of criteria. In technical parlance, it’s called land classification.

The Philippines has a total land area of 30 million hectares. Lands of public domain can be classified into Forestland, which can be further classified into forest reserves, timberland, national parks, military and naval reservations, civil reservations, and fishpond; and Alienable

and Disposable (A & D) or those not needed for forest purposes. Land can also be classified according to use: agriculture, forestry, settlement, mining and quarrying, inland fisheries, and open land.

In a nutshell, Basa's team makes sure that land to be used for residential purposes is suited for building houses, that agricultural land is conducive to growing plants, and that national parks are not transformed as such where the natural ecological setting would be disturbed.

Basa cited the Ormoc incident in November 1991 where a raging flashflood killed thousands of people and left them homeless. "The affected land, which had a 50% slope, had been declared inhabitable and the soil was already loose with deforestation. In spite of these risks, squatting persisted which eventually led to disaster," he said.

Indeed, Basa is credited for playing a key role in sculpting the landscape of the country. One of Basa's major accomplishments was writing the procedural manual on Land Classification and Sub-classification for Integrated Land Use Planning. He personally trained his staff based on the manual, and as a result, his office was able to classify .88 million hectares of public domain as A & D and

3.8 million hectares as Forestlands. This was a record achievement in the government's land classification program.

Basa also issues permits for land use petitions, a task which sometimes earns him the ire of illegal occupants as well as claimants and big time developers with interest in public lands. Basa recalls the Boracay Island row when his office had to face tremendous pressure into releasing more lands for private ownership. The government has classified Boracay into 400 hectares of reserved forest land for "protection purposes", and 629 hectares of A & D agricultural land. "We stuck to the criteria. In the end, the Supreme Court sustained our findings," Basa said.

Despite the rigors of his work, he continues to serve at the pleasure of the public, and his heart remains firmly for his country despite more lucrative offers abroad. As an advice to his fellow public servants, Basa stressed the real meaning of public service being a public trust.

"We are here to serve our countrymen, and we remain in our positions because of them. If we want to be first, we must put ourselves last - *Sila muna bago ako*", he said, stressing, "Let us be exemplars of what a true public servant should be - honest, dedicated, humble and ethical." •

