

CITIZEN REFORM AGENDA 2010

Agenda on Environment and Sustainable Development

For Candidates and Political Parties of the Upcoming 2010 Elections

*As we continue building our nation,
we need to rethink how we achieve prosperity.*

*Our efforts towards growth and development must not compromise
the environment and the future. We need to respond decisively to
environment issues and climate change.*

Citizen Reform Agenda 2010 or CReforms 2010 is a consultation process initiated by the Ateneo School of Government (ASoG) through its PODER program that aims to bring together the broadest possible representation of citizen organizations in the country to identify key reform agenda or issues that candidates and political parties must address come 2010 elections.

PODER is ASoG's transforming politics program that focuses on reforming and strengthening key democratic institutions such as the Constitution, elections and political parties. PODER provides spaces and produces action-oriented knowledge products that aim to facilitate the engagement of key political players in dialogues that facilitate their common understanding and consensus points on key institutional reform issues.

Executive Summary

Since environmental issues represent a myriad list of cross-cutting concerns ranging from economic, political, social to cultural, within no less than five major ecosystems, narrowing these priority reform agenda was a big challenge. Nevertheless, four reform agenda or issues were agreed upon.

The present leadership's lack of an environmental agenda continues to pose a serious threat to the Philippines' dwindling natural resources. The present situation is further aggravated with economic policies (such as fiscal and tax regimes) that are largely biased towards the extractive industries, leaving government coffers shortchanged and ecosystems degraded.

A major paradigm shift on development models is found urgent at this point. This realization calls into focus the revisiting of Philippine Agenda 21 as the framework for sustainable development. The participants of the roundtable discussion have agreed to use the PA 21 framework in identifying the reform agenda/issues on environment and sustainable development.

The first reform agenda identified is the adoption of the Philippine Agenda 21. The questions formulated under this issue are: a) Are you willing to embrace the sustainable development framework? b) Will you support enabling economic policies for the implementation of PA 21?

The second reform agenda pertains to the structural reforms necessary to achieve the following: a) DENR separation of protection and utilization functions; b) additional appropriation for environmental protection and its prudent use; and c) regionalization or devolution of environmental management functions to local government units (LGUs).

The third reform agenda tackles sustainable ecological management of the country's natural resources. Questions developed are: a) will you support a watershed continuum approach as a basic management mechanism?, and b) how will you restore our forests and biodiversity?

The fourth reform agenda is about climate change adaptation. Participants crafted this question: What is your adaptation plan to address the impact of climate change?

In arguing for a new development paradigm, a closer look at the Arroyo government's economic policies show that the continued presence of an open-access system in resource extraction and the absence of a tenure and regulatory system in the country has now become unsustainable. However, reforms should not be limited to economic directives alone. Policy makers need to consider instituting structural changes as well. It is recommended by the participants that DENR should separate its conservation and utilization functions. Additional allocation for conservation programs, including its wise use should be pursued.

The devolution of natural resources management functions to LGUs is also advocated for greater transparency and accountability.

Moreover, the adoption of sustainable policies and a responsive institution must be based on a constituency that lives on a healthy ecology. No amount of jobs can sustain communities if they don't have clean water and clean air. The participants likewise recommended that climate change adaptation mechanisms be a principal component of the reforms.

The last part of the paper discusses the different approaches to be employed in convincing the policy makers to adopt the reform agenda. In engaging them, participants have suggested to incorporate economics in the reform agenda questions. Other approaches are proposing solutions along with the issues, and taking the reform agenda not just to the candidates, but to the electorate as well.

Background

Philippine forest cover at 2003 estimate is now down to 7.168 million hectares or 23.89%ⁱ from the 1900's 70%ⁱⁱ forest cover. To effectively maintain basic ecological functions, we must have at least 54% forest coverⁱⁱⁱ.

With the country's total land area of 300,780 square kilometers, we have an estimated 52,177 described fauna and flora species, half of which is endemic making us one of the megadiverse countries in the world, or one of the richest in terms of biological resources. Unfortunately, we rank third in the world in the number of globally threatened species^{iv}.

Now, only 5% of our country's coral reef system remains in excellent condition, 72% of our mangroves are gone and 30%-50% of our sea grass beds have been decimated^v.

Forty one rivers monitored by the Environment and Management Bureau of the DENR in 1996-2001 were found to have low dissolved oxygen (5mg/l), which can adversely affect fish, while high levels of BOD (biological oxygen demand) were detected in 94% of the rivers surveyed, according to the Philippine Environment Monitor 2003 in the Haribon- publication "Philippine Biodiversity: Principles and

Practice", authored by Corazon Catibog-Sinha and Lawrence R. Heaney, 2006.

About 45% of arable land and 70% of non-agricultural land in the Philippines are moderately to severely eroded^{vi}.

Measurements taken in 2003-04 on suspended particulates in Metro Manila indicate that all stations exceed DENR standards, with the average concentration of 175 pg/m³, almost twice that of the standard 90 pg/m³). The high concentration of particulate matter in outdoor air maybe correlated with the 5,000 premature deaths per year in Metro Manila due to respiratory and cardiovascular diseases from exposure to poor air quality^{vii}.

With this alarming state of the Philippine environment, even cyclical natural disasters such as flash floods and landslides now occur during non-rainy season^{viii}. Notwithstanding numerous trailblazing environmental laws enacted since the Earth Summit in 1992, our country's natural resources continue to be degraded, exploited and unprotected.

The present administration's lack of an environmental agenda despite eight long years of governance calls into focus the relevance of Philippine Agenda 21 (PA 21).

Recognizing that PA 21 is the country's only existing blueprint for sustainable development, participants in the RTD agreed on using PA 21's framework in identifying the key environmental and sustainable development reform agenda.

PA 21 follows a two-pronged strategy for its operationalization. These are:

- 1) creating the enabling conditions which would assist various stakeholders to integrate sustainable development in their decision-making processes; and
- 2) directing efforts at conserving, managing, protecting and rehabilitating ecosystems through an approach that harmonizes economic, ecological and social goals.

PA 21 takes root from Agenda 21, the comprehensive plan of action to be taken globally, nationally and locally by organizations of the United Nations system, governments, and major groups in every area with human impact on the environment. Adopted by more than 178 states during the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on June 1992, it was sponsored by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED).

In essence, it is "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

The following are the interventions for managing the transition to SD as identified in PA 21:

- 1) integrating SD in governance;
- 2) providing enabling policies;
- 3) investing in human development;
- 4) mapping out a legislative agenda; and
- 5) addressing critical and strategic concerns including population management,

human health, food security, human settlements and land use.

An Environment and Sustainable Development Agenda

The reform agenda/ issues put forward herein are:

- 1) The need for a new alternative development paradigm/ or the adoption of Philippine Agenda 21;
- 2) Structural reforms which include the following:
 - a) Separation of protection and utilization functions of the DENR,
 - b) Additional appropriation for environmental protection and its prudent use,
 - c) Regionalization or devolution of environmental management functions to LGUs;
- 3) Sustainable ecological management; and
- 4) Climate change adaptation.

Alternative Development Paradigm/ PA 21

"In the realm of the economy, the main decision structure is the market system through its pricing mechanisms. Moreover, economic decisions are also guided by rules and policies established by the government."

Economies at early stages of development rely heavily on their raw materials such as labor and natural resources for production of its basic goods, as well as investment goods such as knowledge, physical capital, technology and the financial and legal institutions that support trade.

With the pursuit for growth, policies that govern the use of natural resources are most often just an afterthought, secondary to industrial and trade opportunities.

Yet, "nearly every form of economic activity is associated in some way with pollution or the depletion of natural resources. In production and trade, fossil fuel, minerals and timber are consumed in the production and transport of goods and services using processes that include waste emissions along with the desired output.

The fact that the full social cost of pollution and resource depletion is seldom internalized in private economic decisions lies at the core of virtually all economic analysis of environmental and resource problems" ^{ix}

A century of logging and mining in the country have failed to alleviate the impoverished conditions of upland dwellers and migrants. Large-scale extraction of natural resources has resulted in the drastic reduction of our ecosystems' capacities to sustain life. Even with numerous policy directives issued and adopted ranging from the environmental impact system, establishment of protected areas, pollution abatement and management, wildlife conservation to the recognition of ancestral domain and rights, a steady decline of quality and quantity of our natural resources permeates.

The continued presence of an open-access system in resource extraction and the absence of tenure and regulatory system in the country has now become unsustainable^x. Preferential rights such as logging and mineral concessions, commercial fishing permits accorded officially to the powerful elite in uplands down to coastal and marine ecosystems have deprived generations of marginalized communities access and benefits from these free resources.

Though forestry and fishery resources are renewable, large scale extraction activities have never slowed down to give way for natural regeneration. The government and logging and mining companies have not re-invested in restoring what they have depleted, save for a failed reforestation attempt heavily funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and

Japan's Overseas Economic Cooperation Fund (OECE) in the late 80's to early 90's^{xi}.

Perhaps what is imperative at this point is a major paradigm shift, as Dr. Delfin Ganapin asserts, "we should deviate from treating forests as merely source of timber and start regarding them as repository of economic, ecological, social and cultural capital."^{xiii} Policy makers need to focus not only on the economy as the driver of growth, but likewise consider human development concerns such as distributive equity, community-based management of resources, cultural integrity, innovative financing and social investment funds, environmental sustainability and most importantly, good governance.

Economic decisions must be guided by these principles which are enshrined in PA21.

Here are some of the current economic policies that need rethinking, based on PA21:

1) Fiscal and tax regimes of extractive industries

Income tax, custom duties and fees, value-added tax, tax on interest on foreign loans, tax on foreign stockholders dividends, documentary stamp tax and capital gains tax are all included in the five/seven year tax holiday accorded to mining companies by the government. Government share from the mining industry is a paltry 2% excise tax, from which deductible expenses such as environmental expenses of the contractor, expenses for the development of host and neighboring communities and development of geosciences and mining technology, royalty payments to claim owners or surface owners, general and administrative expenses actually incurred by the contractor, continuing mine operating development expenses within the contract area after pre-operating period, interest expenses charged on loans, or such other financing related expenses incurred by

the contractor, and mining, milling, transport and handling expenses plus smelting and refining costs other than paid to third parties, are chargeable against the 2% excise tax.

The timber concession areas pay only PhP 1.00 per hectare per year. Incentives granted to the wood industry such as generous annual allowable cuts, zero export charges, low and declining forest charges, and high protective tariffs on imported wood products should be reviewed. DENR should enforce penalties against damage from logging activities, failure to replant species taken from concession areas, failure to rehabilitate areas destroyed and toleration of illegal logging activities.

2) Non-inclusion of resource valuation in economic planning

Negative externalities generated by extraction and other economic activities are not included in the computing for the financial returns of such industries. Negative externalities such as pollution, habitat destruction, soil and nutrient erosion, water depletion affect all sectors. Thus, there is a need to consider the different functions of natural resources or its indirect values, not just the assigned monetary values to a timber, mineral or fish. Recognizing the different functions of the natural environment, such as its carrier, production, information and regulation functions will help policy makers understand that assigning monetary values only to direct uses of natural resources will be cheating the state and the people of their immense contribution in sustaining lives and livelihood.

The resource valuation is a tool that takes into account all these ecological functions. Resource valuation looks at not only the direct values but also indirect values of natural resources such as maintenance of oxygen, climate regulation, decomposition of organic wastes and pesticides, recreational, aesthetic, socio-cultural, scientific,

educational, spiritual and historical values of natural environments.

3) Promotion of mining industry

EO 270 or the Mineral Action Plan outlined a policy agenda to guide the industry and address the identified issues and concerns. The current administration's prioritization of the mining industry as a driver of economic growth is weakly premised on the projection of millions of dollars worth of investments that will be generated by the industry. Three years into the roadshow, the mining industry's contribution to the GNP remains at a low 1.0% (PhP 75,557,000^{xiii}). The government and industry leaders admit to adjusting investment targets annually, as they fail to realize these targets.

As illustrated earlier, the government's final take from mineral proceeds is a mere 2% excise tax. Big mining companies that operated earlier such as the Marcopper left millions of pesos of unpaid local taxes and billions of pesos worth of damaged community assets, including loss of lives.

Moreover, mining operations pose serious threat to the environment. Two years ago, 56% of all exploratory and mining concessions overlap with areas of high ecological vulnerability^{xiv}. With the onslaught of new mining applications, this threat has invariably increased.

4) Licensing and permitting system for resource utilization

A review and assessment on the present licensing and permitting system for resource utilization is urgent. Planners, regulators and managers should seriously consider the carrying capacity of ecosystems, undertake resource stock inventory and monitor impacts of all ongoing resource extraction activities.

Technical regulators should undergo an evaluation of their present skills. If needed, training and knowledge advancement should commence. Recent efforts at streamlining the issuance of permits should be recalled because this type of policy incursions in environmental management waters down safeguard measures initially established by conservationists and well-intentioned bureaucrats. Transparency and access to information must be provided to the public in order to lessen incidence of graft and corruption.

A temporary ban on the issuance of new extraction permits should be imposed at this point for everyone to take adequate stock our country's remaining resources. Unless this is done, endemic species extinction, loss of lives and livelihood will all be inevitable.

5) Absence/lack of public and private investments in natural resource restoration, conservation and protection

Because of the very limited efforts to protect and rehabilitate waterways, downstream areas, mangroves and other coastal habitats from deforestation, siltation, surface water pollution, and other external damage, the quality of land, water and other resources have deteriorated, impinging on the productive capacity of the downstream sectors of agriculture and fisheries. There is now a significant segment of the growing number of poor people coming from those who had been affected by depleted resources and habitat damages^{xv}.

Without adequate financial intervention directed towards the conservation of the remaining natural resources, the cycle of poverty and environmental degradation will continue. Poverty alleviation programs that fail to incorporate environmental rehabilitation will not make communities sustainable and independent. Even with jobs, families cannot survive without clean air and water.

6) Lack of tenurial security for basic sectors

There are approximately 20 million upland dwellers in the country, 12 million of whom are indigenous people. The Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act provides for a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title (CADT) for indigenous communities. As of October 2008, 1,986,917.8 hectares of CADT were approved covering 391,224 beneficiaries^{xvi}. This leaves a very high percentage of forest settlers without any security to their land and resources. The situation is complicated by overlapping land uses with permits on mining, logging, reforestation, management agreements, plantations, grazing, agriculture and tourism.

The Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program under RA 6657 has a scope of 8.2 million hectares to be distributed to farmers. The Department of Agrarian Reform has a target of 5.2 million hectares of private agricultural lands and government-owned lands to distribute to 3 million farmers, while the DENR is tasked to distribute 3.2 million hectares of public agricultural lands and ISF/CBFM lands to 2 million farmers. Upon the expiration of CARP last year, only 76% of the target was reported accomplished by DAR^{xvii}.

The fisherfolks' settlement areas under the Fisheries Code RA 8550 remain to be designated rather than established. The Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) along with the DA, DILG, DENR and the HUDCC have failed to come up with the Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) on the fisherfolk settlements to this date, thus effectively hampering their establishment. Municipal waters in many areas around the country likewise have yet to be designated using the archipelagic principles.

7) Energy supply mix (dependence on fossil fuels and partiality towards mega-infrastructure projects)

Philippine energy consumption mix illustrates a major dependence on fossil fuels (53% oil and 19% coal), tapping only 15% of renewable sources, 6% hydro electricity and 7% natural gas^{xviii}. Presently, the country has eight coal fired power plants in operation, with nine more in the pipeline. Coal plants are the single highest sources of carbon emissions globally. Current sources of energy such as big hydroelectric dams along with these coal fired thermal plants are likewise funded with foreign loans that bleed our economy dry.

However, with the passage of the Renewable Energy Act, the government aims to make the Philippines 60% energy self-sufficient by 2010. Renewable energy sources such as solar, biomass, geothermal, hydropower, wind and ocean energy technologies will be tapped under the new policy. Hopefully, this can lead the government in pursuing more sustainable sources of energy for the country.

Questions formulated on an alternative development paradigm/ PA21:

Are you willing to embrace the sustainable development framework?

Will you support enabling economic policies for the implementation of PA 21?

Structural Reforms (Laws/ Government Agencies)

Under this reform agenda, three main issues were identified. These are a) on the separation of protection and utilization functions of the DENR; b) appropriations or budget; c) regionalization or devolution of environmental management functions to LGUs. A fourth one was also formulated on mining, but this issue is already tackled under the first reform agenda on alternative development framework.

"In the realm of polity, government decision-making is manifested in the development planning, policy formulation and implementation process which is carried out through the government machinery for development administration and various institutions for governance."

Limitations of the country's legal policy framework on natural resources and the environment has led to the progressive loss of natural forests and biodiversity, along with watershed degradation, depletion of water resources and fishery.

The country's forestlands which comprise half of the country's total land area are governed by an outdated presidential decree formulated in 1975 (P.D. 705 or the Forestry Code). It is revised by occasional policy directives to suit whatever management approach is favored at the moment. P.D. 705 glaringly lacks a forest conservation provision, reflective of the utilization bias of our forest managers. Eighty percent (80%) of the remaining watersheds have no special protection status, thus headwater forests are not regulated to improve water yields. They are even subjected to clearance with policies in place that allow for extraction in natural stands.

The National Integrated Protected Areas System or NIPAS law falls short of expectations since it is inadequately funded and is riddled with loopholes. The DENR will just exercise its forest mandate to find excuses to excise portions of a protected area for mining.

The Mining Act of 1995 allows for 100% foreign ownership of mining tenements, posing serious questions on its validity given constitutional limits on foreign ownership of certain industries. The Solid Waste Management Act and Clean Air Act have poor monitoring provisions, thus lessening their impact on pollution mitigation.

The Land Use Bill has been filed and re-filed for in every Congress for almost two decades. Without a legislated national land use policy, conflict on use and access to land will exacerbate poverty and pose challenge to national security. The Plant Variety Protection Act which seeks to protect our plant genetic resources from biopiracy has been undermined by the lobby interest of transnationals in agribusiness and the pharmaceutical industry.

These are just some of the policy reforms we need to pursue. A number of legislation have tried to address inequity and resource degradation such as the IPRA, Small Scale Mining Act, and the Fisheries Code. However, these laws are not perfect, and with weak state monitoring capacity tainted with corrupt elements of the bureaucracy, structural reforms are also exigent.

a. DENR Question

The DENR has the mandate to protect and conserve natural resources, while at the same time issue permits for resource utilization. This duality of conflicting functions presents enormous opportunity for abuse and inefficiency.

As the sole authority on forestlands, it is the agency that determines forests, minerals and other natural resources' use, boundaries, access, and also acts as its own police.

The protection mandate of the DENR has to be separated from its utilization function. In the RTD, Ms. Marciano of Mother Earth believes that the DENR's functions should be divided into two: environmental protection and the management of natural resources. The current structure entails that one department is responsible for two broad issues, and may not be able to handle both efficiently.

Questions for the candidates on structural reforms (the DENR Question):

Are you going to support the separation and conservation functions from the utilization functions of DENR through the establishment of the Department of Environmental Protection or an agency that will cater to these concerns?

b. Appropriation

Inadequate budgetary allocations for the environment sector, as well as misappropriation of funds generated for and from the sector. An example given by Mr. San Juan of PRRM are funds originally allotted for environmental protection under the Clean Air Act, going to the Land Transportation Organization (LTO). Another example is given by Ms. dela Paz wherein 70% of funds raised from protected areas that should go to communities are channeled back directly to the National Treasury, where they remain held for such a time.

A forest guard employed by the DENR has an average patrol area of 2,000-3,000 hectares. He receives around PhP8,000-9,000 a month, but quite often, receives his salary delayed up to three months. This is enough motivation to connive with illegal loggers and poachers.

Only 4% (PhP240,027,000) was allotted for the Protected Area and Wildlife Management from DENR's PhP 6.14 billion 2008 budget. There are 203 initial components of the NIPAS, but only 68 have been proclaimed so far following the procedure provided in law^{xix}. The Mt. Apo National Park for instance has an annual budget of less than a million pesos, while some parks don't even receive any financial support from the DENR. In most cases, only the park superintendent and forest guard receive salary, but the costs of operating, maintaining and protecting the parks have to be generated independently.

Whatever is generated is funneled back to the national government as earlier mentioned.

Leading the civil society advocating for budget reforms is the Alternative Budget Initiative (ABI), a coalition of various NGOs. ABI's alternative budget proposals for the 2009 national budget, realigns more allocations for social development. The proposals were crafted by civil society groups with partner Congressmen and Senators.

In the alternative budget proposal, the group proposed an additional P34 billion allocation for social development which includes P18 billion for basic education; P537 million for higher education; P3.4 million for health; P9.6 billion for agriculture; and P2.6 billion for environment.

Meanwhile, the additional allocations for environment will cover crucial programs on community-based forest management, coastal resource management, solid waste management, land-water-air pollution monitoring intervention, legal fund against environmental violators, human resource development for the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, localizing sustainable development (Philippine Agenda 21), and enhancing agency-civil society partnerships on policy and organizational development.

c. Regionalization/ Devolution

There is a need to go regional, because there is too much power and responsibilities on the central government, which makes work inefficient.

At present, while the Local Government Code gives the LGU the duty to preserve the environment, the methods by which it can do so are severely limited by existing laws. For instance, Sections 26 and 27 of the Local Government Code merely give LGUs the right to be consulted on, and for the local legislative

bodies to approve, projects and programs proposed by the national government that may cause pollution, climatic change, loss of forest cover, and extinction of plant and animal species, among other detrimental effects.

Since the LGUs are closest to the community, they are more aware of, and more responsive to, the needs of the people. They should be expressly given the power to make decisions regarding the use, conservation and management of the forest resources in its territorial jurisdiction—from the very start.

It would not be farfetched to claim that in most instances, the national government has decided to approve projects with obvious detrimental effects on a community and merely consults the LGU as an afterthought. This should be changed. It is the community that stands to suffer most if its natural resources are destroyed. From the beginning, the people should be given the right to decide the use, conservation and management of their natural resources.

Thus, consistent with the policy of devolution and the reality that in certain places in the Philippines, the local government unit is the only representative of the government, it is imperative to expand the role of the LGUs and provide them with more powers under the law. This could be done by providing for a representative from the LGU in the monitoring of compliance with terms and agreements in co-production agreements, the information and rewards system, the Environmental Impact Assessment System, and the proposed forestland management council.

While there are concerns that there may be LGUs that are not up to the task, it is more important to focus on awareness, training, education, and building their capacity to get the job done rather than on their weaknesses.

Studies have shown that community-based resource management approaches work best in environmental conservation.

As a means to facilitate LGU involvement, it is suggested under the SFM bill to require the LGUs to review and revise their local development plans to integrate local forest management plans.

For the LGU to be able to perform these additional roles and perform these functions, it is also necessary to provide them with additional resources and support. LGUs should also be given a share in the income from co-management agreements to supplement IRA.

Questions for the candidates on structural reform (regionalization/ devolution):

To what extent are you willing to turn over to regional bodies the management of ecological wealth of the regions?

Ecological management

a. Watershed continuum as the basic forestland management unit

Forestlands shall be conserved, developed, and managed utilizing watershed continuum as the basic management unit and under the concepts of sustainable and multiple-use management, including the conservation of bio-diversity.

The watershed continuum shall refer to an area consisting of the watershed and its divide including its connection from headwaters to the reef. Haribon advocates under a new Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) bill that the watershed should be emphasized as a continuum. We need to recognize that watersheds are transitional and composed of various ecosystems, namely: the mountain environment, the lowland environment, and the coastal or sea environment. Everything is interconnected. It follows that whatever is done

in one part of the watershed continuum affects the other parts.

Watersheds serve as vital sources of water supply for domestic irrigation and industrial purposes including hydroelectric and geothermal power generation. They also provide the socio-economic base to a growing population through the utilization of watershed resources.

On the environmental aspect, watersheds, if properly managed, help maintain ecological balance, minimize the occurrence of floods and drought, and could mitigate the effects of adverse climactic changes.

b. Forest and Biodiversity restoration

Haribon proposes under the SFM bill that the law should provide a management scheme for the remaining open and denuded forests for the purpose of restoration. This is to ensure the expansion of protection forestlands in order to achieve the ideal forest cover of 54% of the total land area of the Philippines.

Restoration of forests by “rainforestation”, which refers to the use of native trees, should be a primary objective of the government given the poor state of our forests and biodiversity. Further degradation or destruction of our forests will lessen our capacity to adapt and mitigate the effects of global warming. Decreasing forest cover compromises our ability to optimize ecological benefits derived from natural forests.

Studies have shown that forest restoration is more likely to improve the long-term sustainability of land use because it improves biodiversity and ecosystem functioning. Forest restoration also provides a wider range of ecological services such as watershed management, carbon sequestration, and economic gains to rural communities that

could benefit from sustainable harvesting of non-timber forest products.

Questions for the candidates on ecological management:

Will you support a watershed continuum approach as a basic management mechanism?

How will you restore our forests and biodiversity?

Climate Change Adaptation

Climate change takes center stage in every environmental discourse today.

Why is climate change a very serious matter to Filipinos? The Philippines ranks fourth in the Global Climate Risk Index. This means the country has been identified as one of the countries most affected by extreme weather events in specific time periods based on four indicators: total number and deaths per 100,000 inhabitants, absolute losses in million US\$ purchasing power parities and losses per unit Gross Domestic Product in percentage^{xx}

The country is highly vulnerable to one-meter rise in sea level that is projected to affect 64 out of 81 provinces, covering 703 out of 1,610 municipalities, inundating almost 700 million square meters of land and potentially displacing at least 1.5 million Filipinos^{xxi}.

The Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement says "both rich and poor communities will not be spared by impacts of climate change. There is a need to enhance the capacity of rural communities in the planning, advocacy and implementation of sustainable development through an integrated program of education, livelihood, health, habitat, environment and self-governance –these are vital for enhancing adaptive capacity of communities to possible worst impacts of climate change."

The Tanggol Kalikasan further asserts that "climate proofing should be mainstreamed to community level designed in a way that there is community participation in all the project or program cycles well understood and socially acceptable to the community."

Questions for the candidates on Climate Change Adaptation:

What is your adaptation plan to address the impact of climate change?

On the approach in engaging the national candidates on the reform agenda

Identifying the reform agenda issues may seem the easier part given the propensity of civil society organizations of drawing up wish lists. Now comes the hard part –how do we sell the issues?

The group needs to have something general that is of national concern, but also specific in order to challenge the politicians if ever they win. It's also part of making politicians take seriously what they say, because there has been a failure of media to focus on what the real issues are.

There are three things the average Filipino can identify with: jobs, income, prices. This should be the framework in engaging the candidates. An example of using this framework is: "On economy and environment: How will you create more jobs in the countryside and environmentally sensitive areas?"

It is also possible to talk about an alternative development paradigm by looking at the concept of the wealth of the Filipino family. Environmental mismanagement produces repercussions on Filipino families. The question to be asked is: Are you willing to prioritize Philippine household wealth over GNP? This is made in the assumption that

government programs when implemented, will either sacrifice the household wealth to increase GNP, or vice versa. An example is the coal-fired power plants, which are good in increasing the GNP, but will sacrifice the increase in household wealth.

It is also interesting to take note of the suggestion to bring the reform agenda issues not just to the candidates, but also to the electorate. With an informed voting public, candidates will have lesser options not to consider the issues.

What is common in these suggestions is the underlying economic significance of natural resources in whatever context, be it political, social or cultural. The state of the ecosystems along with all the living organisms that thrive in it is inexplicably linked to a country's survival and growth.

Without sound policies governing the use of natural resources, policy makers cannot move forward with pollution, degraded soil, depleted water supply, declining food sources and extreme weather disturbances.

Environmental problems must be dealt with, and this should be a priority agenda of people or party seeking public office.

Foremost on the reform agenda is an alternative development paradigm anchored on a sustainable economic policy. Reforms on fiscal and tax regimes, reforms on the basic sectors' asset profile, adoption of resource valuation as a planning tool, review of economic programs that promote extractive industries, and implementation of the renewable energy act are some concrete policy reforms that a candidate can adopt in his platform.

However, these economic reforms cannot be implemented without structural reforms within the present bureaucracy. DENR needs to take apart its conflicting mandate of protection and

utilization. More funds have to be allocated for the conservation of our resources, as well as judicious spending must be observed. More environmental management functions must be devolved to local government units for efficiency and accountability.

Without the restoration of our damaged ecosystems, development will be constrained and compromised. Finally, we must all be mindful of how we can adopt to the rapidly changing climate in order to achieve our goals for a better future for the coming generations.

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