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Recommended Citation

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Cebu's Basic Christian Community Movement's Alternative Plan for Sustainable Development

KATHY NADEAU

Based on selected indicators, Cebu has recently become one of the most booming growth centers of the Philippines. However, these indicators are more gauges of economic growth, not development. Development pertains to a social and structural process for achieving ecological sustainability and human well being within a community as a whole. In Cebu, there may have been an economic boom which favors selected few businessmen but, for most Cebuños, there was none to speak of. Studies show that the so-called "Ceboom" masks widespread environmental destruction caused by real estate developers. The Medium-Term Cebu Development Plan (MTCDP) has neglected to develop basic social services and agriculture in order to alleviate poverty in the province. An alternative to this is the broader vision for sustainable development of the Basic Christian Community called Basic Ecclesiastical Community (BEC) movement. Involving a paradigm shift, BEC aims to develop a post-capitalist society which is based on ecologically sustainable modes of production through the gradual reorganization of communities on the peripheries. Through their training programs and community organizing, the BEC movement in Cebu seeks to establish a self-sustaining economy based on local agriculture and supported by local industry. The author concluded that, although Cebu is in the forefront of development, true sustainable development can be attained by adopting the BEC's model.

Beginning with the Aquino administration in 1987 up to the present Ramos administration in 1994, Cebu has become one of the leading growth centers in the Philippines.

In 1991, there was an avalanche of fresh capital in Cebu worth US \$118 million dollars, up by 300 percent from 1989. Fifty-five businesses registered a total project cost of \$128.6 million dollars with the Board of Investments (BOI). In a sense, then, there was a boom in Cebu. There are selected indicators of a burst of economic growth activities. However, these are only selected indicators related to export and economic growth (gross national product, balance-of-payments, number of tourists, construction, electricity consumption, and improvements in transportation and communication). These indicators are a measure of economic growth, not development. It is well known today, at least in social science discourse, that economic growth alone is not equivalent to development. Considerable evidence in fact suggests that the so-called 'Ceboom'

masks widespread environmental destruction caused by developers, and leads to unsustainable economic growth. (Juarico, Enrique, Avila, and Lastimosa 1992; Mercado 1992, 1993; Ballescas 1993; Farmers Development Center 1993)

Historically, the operationalization of the word "development" in Western discourse began shortly after World War II. At that time, there was a widespread interest in modernization, which led to numerous development projects in the Third World. However, these development projects typically failed because they were often based on models of modernization derived from neoclassical economic theories which are static (functionalist) and not applicable to the Third World. Also, they were often implemented without consulting an interdisciplinary team of specialists (anthropologists included) or the local people, themselves. These shortcomings led to the emergence of more indigenous approaches to the study of economy, culture and society, which culminated in the late 1980s in the conceptualization of a non-essentialist mode of production bound to social relations and their historical, cultural, religious, political, ethnic, gender, ecological and environmental orientation in social formations. (Nadeau 1994)

Barrameda (1993), who reviewed the theoretical explications of *sustainable development*, said that development is a process that cannot be understood outside of an already existing (mind-body-society-nature) totality (or, interchangeably, non-essentialist modes of production usually with one mode being dominant in a social formation as defined by Althusser, 1970) because everything is interconnected. According to her, development refers to a social and structural process for achieving ecological sustainability and human well being within a community as a whole. It refers to the qualitative improvement of all groups and individuals in a society.

In contrast, *unsustainable development* refers to a process of underdevelopment wherein developed countries in the First World are "condemning the rest of the world's countries to revolve around their [so-called] superior economy, whether this be from the point of view of investment capital, equipment, technicians or through the consumer-market with which the underdeveloped countries are inundated from the outside." (Laurentin 1972, 44) The International Monetary Fund policy of insisting that the Philippines open further its market to Western imports

in order to reschedule its debts is an example of this situation, in which riches tend to become concentrated in First World centers, while areas on the peripheries, specifically the Third World countries become impoverished because the local people are not allowed to use their resources to meet their needs first. Or to take another well-known example, most small farmers in Cebu are raising chickens, pigs, goats and other livestock (which are typically not their own) for sale through a middleman in the market but not for home consumption because they need money to buy salted fish which, though less nutritious, lasts longer than, let us say, a chicken which a family consumes in one sitting. (Dorr 1991; Putzel 1992; Broad and Cavangh 1993; Magno 1993)

Unsustainable development is produced by a process of disintegration of modes of production in a social formation in its totality. For example, the Spanish colonizers in Cebu, caused the disintegration and destruction of pre-Hispanic Cebuano society in terms of its social, economical, cultural, religious, political, and ecological relationships regionally, and abroad in the maritime trade economy of South and Southeast Asia. (Van Leur 1955; Hutterer 1973; Reid 1983; Cosmao 1985; Mojares 1986; Warren 1987) The present polarization between countries in the First World and Third World that results from the organization and expansion of the world capitalist system encourages unsustainable development. Economic growth in Cebu's business sectors, in this instance, transforms modes of production and the organization of economic activities in the rural uplands resulting in the disorganization, and quite often dislocation, of social relationships manifested in injustices and poverty.

In Cebu, there may have been an economic boom which favors a selected few exporters and industries in the business sector but, for the majority of people living in Cebu, there was no boom. In this sense, Cebu's so-called economic boom is analogous to the regime of truth as defined by Foucault (1979) because it has no reference to, and screens from view, the reality of the majority. Cebu's regime of truth is manipulated by Medium-Term Cebu Development Plan (MTCDP) technocrats and ideologues to promote, or sell Cebu to outside investors. It is also manipulated by them to screen from view the role of Cebu's leading families in reclassifying national forest, park and agricultural lands into industrial areas, which, in effect, means no land reform and higher prices for their land.

■ The development strategy of the BEC movement entails a slow and long process of social and structural transformation which aims to transform the world capitalist system by starting with changing communities on the peripheries. It aims to develop a post-capitalist society which is based on ecologically sustainable modes of production in connection with new forms of political and social relationships.

The government's plan has neglected to develop basic social services to improve the conditions of life for the poor. It has also neglected the development of agriculture to improve the basic conditions of life for farmers. Hence, the local economy can be said to be unsustainable. Another broader vision for sustainable development is that of the Basic Christian Community, also referred to as Basic Ecclesiastical Community (BEC) movement in Cebu.

The development strategy of the BEC movement entails a slow and long process of social and structural transformation which aims to transform the world capitalist system by starting with changing communities on the peripheries. It aims to develop a post-capitalist society which is based on ecologically sustainable modes of production in connection with new forms of political and social relationships. In order to achieve this aim, the BEC strategy in the Philippines involves whistle-blowing and the gradual work of reorganizing local communities from their centers starting with communities on the peripheries. De la Torre (1993) refers to this development process as a process of re-membering dis-membered societies by re-membering their communal identity and memory to pave the way for wider change, or the revolution of Philippine society in all of its (social, cultural, religious, political, economical, and environmental) aspects. (*Re: the BEC movement's basis in the Citizens' movement for ecological sustainability in the Philippines, see Agbayani 1993; Barrameda 1993; Broad and Cavangh 1993, especially 146-148; Magno 1993; Perlas 1993; Ragragio 1993*)

The plan of the BEC movement for sustainable development finds its referents in neo-Marxist theories of the environment and ecology, as well as liberation theologies (which are dialectically-dynamically derived from biblical hermeneutics, world system, dependency, and mode of production theories), not capitalist modernization and development theories, which conversely provide a basis for *Philippines 2000*. The BEC movement in the Philippines brings together concerns of red and green movements as

defined by Raskin and Bernow. Hence, it involves a paradigm shift from one where economic development and the environment were viewed as separate to a paradigm based on sustainable development, which includes concerns of class, development, empowerment, culture, and ecological sustainability. (Lovett 1986; Gaspar 1990; Agbayani 1993; Barrameda 1993; Magno 1993; Perlas 1993; Ragraggio 1993; Raskin and Bernow 1991, 18)

It is for the above reason that the Basic Ecclesiastical Community movement, specifically in Cebu, is also concentrating its non-government organization workers, partners, and training programs, on transforming by recreating Cebu's large agricultural sector into an ecology sector (see Versola 1993, 12). More particularly, the local BEC-NGO coalition movement's alternative development plan is to transform Cebu's economy into a self-sustaining economy based on local agriculture and supported by local industry (Balisalisa and Amihan 1993; Magno 1993; Perlas 1993; Royandoyan 1993; Versola 1993).

For example, during 1993, the author regularly visited one Basic Ecclesiastical Community in a rural mountain community outside Cebu City. Members of this BEC are involved with an NGO agricultural team. Team members take an interdisciplinary approach to develop sustainable agriculture within the community. They work together with BEC members who are tenant farmers in *alayons* (teams) resurrected by the BEC organizers as a means to work cooperatively within their community. One of the projects that they are involved in is organic farming.

Most BEC workers are familiar with the problems of development, or development aggression, to use the more recent colloquial expression, as a result of their ongoing organizing work in peasant and urban poor communities. Most of them are working in communities which have been disoriented, disorganized, and environmentally damaged as a result of

■ At least since the mid-1960s in the Philippines, many Christian social action workers have moved away from an orientation of the institutional Church based on donations of goods and services to the poor (which is equivalent to the mere transfer of technology and ideas from the First World to the Third World), toward an orientation based on changing social structures democratically and indigenously through multi-disciplinary team work.

being further integrated into the capitalist market economy (e.g., vis-a-vis the Green Revolution in the 1970s and 1980s and the MTCDP in the 1990s). Militarized and placed under surveillance by their local governments, many of them are also working in communities in pursuit of the so-called development goals.

At least since the mid-1960s in the Philippines, many Christian social action workers have moved away from an orientation of the institutional Church based on donations of goods and services to the poor (which is equivalent to the mere transfer of technology and ideas from the First World to the Third World), toward an orientation based on changing social structures democratically and indigenously through multi-disciplinary team work. The early social action workers pioneered the way for the emergence of today's BEC-Community Organizing teams whose organizing work is contextualized in the praxis of Basic Ecclesiastical Communities, which are grounded locally and indigenously in the political struggle of the poor. (Cosmao 1985; De la Torre 1986; Lovett 1986, 1988; Abellana and McAndrew 1987; Gaspar 1990; Magno 1993)

Taking a sustainable approach to development, BEC workers in the Philippines today aim to liberate people from untenable and non-life-sustaining situations in which total integral human development becomes impossible. Many of them are engaged in a gradual process of experimentation, learning, and discovery.

According to Cosmao (1985), they seek to establish some preconditions for sustainable development. Preconditions for sustainable development are: first, the active participation and conscientization of people, specifically in rural and urban poor communities; second, the restructuring of a society in its totality (as suggested by Althusser 1970), which includes Churches and the world capitalist system; and third, the need to conscientize people in the center (including better-off farmers in small rural communities, students, professionals, civil servants, local and international hegemonic bourgeoisie as defined by Gramsci) of society because, at present, they have access and control over local resources which gives them the economic and political power to make sustainable development possible. (Cosmao 1985, 11; Lovett 1986; Pieris 1988; Guareschi 1989; Gaspar 1990; Dorr 1991; Magno 1993)

Finally, although the predominant economic model and viewpoint is that Cebu is crossing the threshold of development, in another view, true development will occur only if the broader model of the BEC is adopted. ♦

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