

Richie Gomez, MSC

Sustainable Living and Agriculture For Indigenous People of Mindanao, the Philippines

At this SEDOS Seminar, I shall be presenting to you the locus scenarios but with undeniable global implications due to the way we live our modern lifestyle. To present it in a simpler way, I shall use the “See – Discern – Act” methodology for a better hermeneutical understanding and a more balanced interpretation.

OUR SITUATION (SEE)

We are all on the One Boat of Globalization. Is it good to be on this boat? We have no choice but to continue our journey as we are on this boat of the Capitalistic, Consumeristic, Commercialistic, Materialistic, Profit-Driven Community. As a result, we have an excessive lifestyle and live the throw-away culture, rich and poor alike. The adverse impact of climate change on farmers has already penetrated their day to day suffering. Natural calamities such as El Niño, La Niña, Typhoons, Flashfloods, have devastated their farmlands. The unpredictable weather conditions affect the cycle of crops. To work in the fields from 10:00 a.m. onwards in the sun is already very difficult (global warming) and Livestock raising (hybrid) does not adapt to climate.

For more than three decades, the method of modern farming (*Green Revolution*) based on chemical products, has been in use. This has become common for mass production, worldwide. Surplus products from First World countries under the International Free Trade Agreement resulted in the Philippines becoming the dumping ground for surplus food and non-food products. Our local production is not valued and given importance. Furthermore, when the Rice Tarrification Law was enacted, there was an influx of imported goods.

The November 2020 Rice Cropping situation is quite remarkable. The Selling Price of the Palay harvest to National Food Authority (NFA) was P17.00/kg., strictly dry. Traders could buy it at P13.00 to 15.00 dry and P10.00 to 12.00 for low quality that may be wet and spotted. On the farmers’ side the easier option is to sell their Palay to the Traders because they are already at work in other fields after the harvest. Thus, they avoid other post-harvest expenses (winnowing, trucking, drying, re-sacking, winnowing again, and trucking again) they would incur if they considered selling to NFA. The expenses will be higher if the weather is bad with no drying facilities. No matter how much you think about it, our Farmers cannot get a just and compensating reward for their hard work, in view of their family profile of 4-8 children, no educational qualification, with loans at 5/6 interest, and the fact they do not own the land. The Pandemic Situation has imposed all kinds of restrictions that limit our farmers’ efforts to make some extra income. Even worse were they to be infected by the Covid-19 virus. Finally, we are seeing the destruction of rainforests, the pollution of the oceans with enormous amounts of plastic, diminishing biodiversity, soil erosion and the depletion of the soil from which all life derives its food, all happening at an accelerated pace.¹



*Sustainable living and Agriculture for
Indigenous People*

¹ Satish Kumar; editor emeritus of *Resurgence &*

Ecologist magazine and author of *Soil, Soul, Society*.

OUR REFLECTION (*DISCERN*)

Food Sovereignty is our fight for sustainable living. In order to ensure healthy food production, we need to establish farms that are not dependent on chemical products since we know the environmental/health hazards linked to this conventional way of farming. The *Farmers' Community Organizations* will play a significant role in continuous formation, non-formal learning, uplifting the morale of the farmers, as we, at the Center for the Poor, share with them our Core Values and Principles, such as:

- Love- Shared- Blessing Academy
- *Sapat na* (Enough) Principle
- Care for the Environment (*Laudato Si'*)
- Zero Waste or Best Green Practices and 9R's
- Back to Basic, Simple Life-Style
- Natural Sustainable Farming

To share the plight of the Poor challenges our very identity as Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. Our option for the Poor has shaken our own lifestyle. We have become one of them, smell like them, muddled and bruised like them. As we listen to their stories, visit their homes, eat at the same table, we learn so much from them. Some of them come from Rehab Centers, some are ex-Rebels while others have bad Records in the community. Those we are serving are the people who need to be Recognized by society, for they literally come from the fringes of society. They are “the Least, the Lost, and the Last” (3L).

By continuing our modern Life-Style with every “ism” of our time (Capitalism, Consumerism, Materialism, Individualism...) this humanity will soon collapse. As we are called to re-direct and shift our way of living from Ego-system (*awareness that cares about the well-being of oneself*) to Eco-system (*awareness that cares about the well-being of all, including oneself*).² Endless production, consumption and the pursuit of

² Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer: *Leading from emerging future – from Ego-System to Eco-System Economics*. Copyright @ 2013, Berrett-Koehler

profit in the name of economic growth, progress and development have become the most cherished goals of the modern economy. According to an ecological worldview, production and consumption as well as money and profit should be the means to an end. The end goal should be the well-being of people and the integrity of the Planet Earth. If production and consumption, money and economic growth damage nature and exploit people then such economic activities must be stopped at once.

In the economy of nature there is no waste. It is an ecological imperative that the production and consumption of goods and services produce no waste. Waste does violence to the ecological integrity of our Earth Home. Whatever we take from nature must go back to nature. What cannot be absorbed by nature should not be produced.



Pandemic Food Assistance

Linear versus Cyclical Economy:

Linear – we take from nature, use it and then throw it away with the consequence that it ends up in landfills, in rivers, the oceans and the atmosphere.

Cyclical – all goods and products must be recycled and returned to nature without damage or waste. *With ecological sensitivity we should know that if we pollute the air, we have to breathe it, if we pollute the water, we have to drink it and if we pollute the soil, we have to eat the food grown on all that polluted soil.*³

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³ Satish Kumar; editor emeritus of *Resurgence & Ecologist* magazine and author of *Soil, Soul, Society*.

Can we still say that Mindanao is the food basket of the country? I don't think so. Let me take you to our Banana Plantation run by the Trans National Corporations (NTC's) in the country. Each part of the banana plant is infused with chemicals to maintain its "flawless export quality" otherwise the importing country may reject/return the bananas. In unsafe and Hazardous Working Conditions, workers complained of headaches, dizziness, tightening of chest, sore throat and stomach pains due to chemical exposure. The chemicals utilized vary from week to week so that insects do not develop immunity to them. Workers are exposed to highly toxic chemicals on a daily basis, yet they are not provided with proper, adequate Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs). Now, after 38 years of poisoning the soil and the waters, the *Panama Disease* of the bananas broke out. No matter how much the farmers tried to apply the strongest stronger chemicals, the more resistant the virus became, leaving hundreds of thousands of hectares barren.⁴

Anthropocentric Attitude: Human beings consider themselves to be separate from nature and even superior and above nature. We value nature only in terms of its usefulness to human beings. This arrogant attitude is the root cause of the present ecological crisis.⁵

OUR SOLIDARITY (ACT)

Post-Harvest Intervention

We used to help the farmers or organizations financially during the planting period. But now, we focus our intervention program on the Post-Harvest Period. The Center for the Poor is working closely with the Department of Agriculture (D.A.), other NGO's, individual farmers, fisher-folk, and Indigenous People, tribes/communities, for the following reasons:

- To preserve organic seeds not dependent on chemicals
- To organize Centers/Organizations for the Poor that focus on Agriculture Cooperatives and Sustainable Farming.
- To buy the Palay Products based on the NFA Price Standard, plus P2.00 for non-organic, and P3.00 for organic products
- To create more farms to grow the Raw Materials needed for organic fertilizers and food products like (*azolla/chinese water spinach/cohol*, and *maggots'* culture)

Promote Farm to Table Principle, not Farm to Market Road, to by-pass the traders and businessmen. The Center will serve as a bridge between the Farmers and the Consumers that maintains the original price of the products as we are a Non-Profit Organization. To think how to make a profit, Return of Investments (ROI), is everybody's mindset. This mentality permeates the system which Jesus radically opposed in the Gospel Stories of the hired workers in the vineyard (*Mt 20:1-16*) *Are you questioning my generosity?* (SELFISHNESS). Parable of the Talents (*Mt 25:14-30*). *You knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I scattered no seed?* (GREED)

For very many years we failed to establish organic farmers for the following reasons:

- Farmers and Traders focused on a high price (*lahat gusto mag ganansia*) to the point that it was no longer affordable to the ordinary consumer. (*basta organic mahal dapat*)
- Organic growers do not receive support/subsidies in the post-harvest period.
- Farmers can supply the products, but the marketing is difficult because marketing is controlled by the business sector (traders).

The Intervention strategy of the Center for the Poor in the Post-Harvest Period is to: - buy

⁴ Imperialist Plunder of the Philippine Agriculture: *A research on the Expansion of Plantations through Agribusiness Venture Arrangement (AVAs) in Mindanao*. Copyright @ 2019, Unyon ng mga Manggagawa sa Agricultura (UMA).

⁵ Satish Kumar; editor emeritus of *Resurgence & Ecologist* magazine and author of *Soil, Soul, Society*.

their products at a higher price than the NFA Price. Can we be sure that this will motivate Farmers to plant using Organic Methods?

On Dispersal Programs:

This time the program is planning to double the number of the 1st cycle, in the 2nd cycle. This program is well-supported by the Talacogon Municipal Veterinary Office and Department of Agriculture (D.A) Province.

Demo Farms will apply our Organic Fertilizers on Trial, if successful, at the next cropping:

-Del Monte Living Museum, -San Vicente Demo Farm 1 (1.2 ha.), -San Vicente Demo Farm 2 (3/4 ha.), -Zillovia Demo Farm 3 (.09 ha.), -La Suerte William Farm (1.8 ha), -Lingling Las Nieves Farm (10 ha.), -George Del Monte Farm (3 ha.)

Our Target is to produce Red Rice, Pink Rice, Black Rice and Adlay Rice.

One Stop Shop, Post-Harvest, Zero Waste Facilities

(We need Php 3.5 million to realize this project). The Post-Harvest Facilities are the following:

- Building Construction with Truck Service for howling farm products
- Solar Drier
- Mechanical Drier – Prototype model patterned on our Brick Cookstove using rice hull waste from the rice mill.
- Rice Mill — The D.A. will transport the machine from Tumuliktik to Del Monte.
- Feed Mill — using by-products from the rice mill (rice bran, corn bran, copra mill) and farm roughage
- Agri-Machine Shop for Farming Equipment.

Once this has been realized, it will answer the Post-Harvest Problem of the Farmers. This will address the scarcity of Agri-machinery like: mud-boat, turtle, and thresher. This One-Stop Shop Facility could become a buying station between farmers and traders, even NFA.

Food Processing Livelihood for women:

The Center is developing a capacity to train women as professional green chefs who respect the ingredients, and ensure zero-waste kitchen management. In the midst of the Pandemic, a livelihood was created for them such as, making sausages (*Longganisa*) and meat rolls (*Lumpia*) with 30% herbs and 70% meat. These are all by-products from our Pig Dispersal Project. We collect the fruit and vegetables from the farm and process them naturally and organically (Food Preservation) through fermentation, pickling and sweetening.

Enrolled UMAHANTA (our farm)

Training Program: We are using the 70-20-10 Learning Process for Sustainable Farming. 70% Actual – 20% Exposure – 10% Lecture/ Input and Processing, with a Values Program for personal growth, development and skills training. This is a 1-Year Program at Php1.5M budget for the daily wages of Ten Farmers. After the Program, we hope that the candidates will have a higher level of awareness in taking care of the environment, sustainable agriculture and acquired skills on Farm Management with the right attitude. This is an on-going program and we hope to have a 2nd batch after May 2021, if our budget permits.



The Nursery House prepares 100 seedling trees every month

Values Formation Program every Saturday at Del Monte Living Museum Farm:

This is open to all — Lay MSC Partners, Exposurists, Center for the Poor Program Proponents, Youth Scholars, UMAHANTA Members, Pig dispersal members, and Walk-in learners. We set a specific Topic, – Sharing of best green practices – Processing the experience – Planning and Evaluation of our Research and Development (R&D) at the Living Museum – on a weekly basis. We invite experts such as Agriculturists, Ecologists, Permaculturists, Garbologists, Veterinary Doctors, Environmentalists, to speak, and this program was strongly supported by D.A. and ATI who sometimes allocate a food budget for the participants.

BIOFEEDS PRODUCTION for (pigs, chickens, fish) 1 ton/day @ P20.00/kg., which the farmers could afford? After establishing the source of organic raw materials, we could produce a greater volume to supply other organic growers outside the Del Monte Living Museum Farm and with this:

- We could offer more pig-dispersal proponents a livelihood
- Establish our own livestock farm with native/organic chickens, ducks (*itikan*), egg-production and thus generate employment
- Create a livelihood for fisher-folk (Britania Surigao Sur) who could breed valued fish species such as: Pompano, Lapu-lapu, Tanigue, Blue Marlin, Hito, Tilapia, etc.
- Azolla Farm, Chinese water-spinach (*Kangkong*) Farm, Cohol Culture, Maggots Culture and other raw materials can be grown in the vast marshlands of Talacogon by empowering local communities to work on these projects.
- Producing heavy-duty machinery at the Center (meat grinder, hummer mill, shredder, pelletizer, dehydrators, proper handling and packaging).

- Continue our R and D for the Biofeeds by using farm roughage and market waste like fruit and vegetables.

In addition, our dream is that one day the Center for the Poor could supply farmers with Organic Fertilizers such as: Bokashi Juice, Foliar growth enhancer with insect repellent, Omega Greens, Lucky Japanese Soil Enhancer (antimolds and bacterium pathogens) and Bokashi Soil), soil treatment application. Going back to nature would literally heal our land by bringing back the abundance of microorganisms.

Pandemic Food Assistance Program:

Because of the Pandemic's negative effects, many in the rural areas are now jobless. If we do not intervene and address the basic needs of the people like food, our community will soon face more problems. On 15 March 2021, we launched the P10.00 worth of "Viands" (*P10.00 lang Ayos na! Sud-an na*). The Youth of Del Monte (*Sanguniang kabataan*, Parish Youth, Singles for Christ, Out of School Youth) were put in charge of the daily cooking of "viands" assisted by MSC Lay Partners. In this program we promote:

ZERO WASTE – Bring your own container
ZERO PACKAGING – No disposable plastic
ZERO PROFIT – Just sharing

By localizing our Daily Menu, gathering our raw materials from the local farmers, we gave special attention to "4P's" or poorest of the poor members, besides which the Center for the Poor allocates funds to this program instead of just handing out food packs to people.

Contact information

*Missionaries of the Sacred Heart
Center for the Poor – Philippines
(richforever55@gmail.com)*