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In The Philippines**

By

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MEDIA COVERAGE OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS
AND POLICIES IN THE PHILIPPINES

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"It is late in the day and many changes have already been done. No one can pinpoint the precise moment when these damages become irreversible and the collapse of this living world become imminent. Even now there are signs of stress in every corner of our land.

"As we look at what is happening and think of the horrendous consequences for the land and the people, we would do well to remember that God, who created this beautiful land, will hold us responsible for plundering it and leaving it desolate."

- Excerpt from "What is Happening to Our Beautiful Land," a pastoral letter of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines circulated in January 1988

MEDIA COVERAGE OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS AND POLICIES IN THE PHILIPPINES*

Teresa H. Stuart and Rodolfo A. Fernandez**

INTRODUCTION

Half a century ago, Tandoc in Camarines Sur province situated in the southernmost region of Luzon Island in the Philippines was a dense virgin forest. To internationally known American botanist David Fairchild when he set foot on the place in 1939, the place seemed a fairyland. It was here where Fairchild collected some of the plant species that he had gathered from various parts of the world and introduced into America. He later chronicled his 1939 expedition in his book entitled "Garden Islands of the Great East - Collecting Seeds from the Philippines and Netherlands India in the Junk 'Cheng Ho'," which was published in 1945 by Charles Scribner's Sons, New York.

Fairchild described Tandoc as "a wonderful dipterocarp forest. . . Here we collected the beautiful *Orania palindan*... a fine fan palm *Livistona robinsoniana*. . . We got also a striking aroid with a very large white spathe. . . and a strikingly beautiful *Sararanga* whose flower clusters were two and a half feet long and looked like gigantic bunches of

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little yellow grapes. . . A tree of the *Nauclea orientalis* with beautiful white flowers borne in pin cushion-like heads and beautiful broad leaves with their striking stipules."

A quarter of a century after Fairchild's sojourn in Tandoc, the place was nothing but "a desolate cogonal land with a rotting pier where logs used to be shipped out for export."

Vicenta M. Escobar, who visited Tandoc in 1965, wrote in a nostalgic piece published in a Manila daily newspaper (Malaya, November 29, 1989):

"The fairyland description of the place in 1939, in contrast with my own desolate memory of the area in 1965, is to my mind the best argument to prove that logging operations can never restore the ecology of a forest and that reforestation in our country is a myth. It is a lie made more blatant by the fact that it is really never enforced even if in every logging contract it is stipulated that reforestation work will be undertaken by the concessioner - that for every tree that the logger cuts, the logger is obligated to plant an equivalent tree seedling.

"Can someone please point out a reforested virgin forest?"

Indeed, densely vegetated Tandoc, to those who had seen its pristine sylvan beauty, is now but a memory. Just like the vast natural resources that once characterized the Philippine countryside -- lush tropical growth that mantled mountains, sparkling waters of rivers and streams, verdant hills, green meadows, scenic valleys, serene lakes, and shimmering bays.

A broad-brush picture of the Philippines today shows a vast environmental wasteland -- baldish mountains, dead or dying rivers, brown treeless hills, desolate valleys and plains, heavily silted and polluted lakes and bays. And the tragic thing is that as these life support systems lie dead or dying following their wanton exploitation or destruction, the

country's population continues to grow at a fast rate. In the 1930s when Fairchild was here in his search for new plants to introduce into America, there were only about 17 million Filipinos. By the mid-1960s, the population had doubled (34 million). Today, there are about 62 million Filipinos.

With the continued degradation of the environment set against the grim backdrop of an exploding population, we wonder if the Philippines can fare well in its "race against time."

Encouragingly, there is a silver lining in the foreboding environmental horizon. The unabated despoliation of the country's natural resources, resulting at times in catastrophes exemplified by the flashflood in Ormoc City, central Philippines, on November 5, 1991 that sent about 8,000 people to their watery graves, has in recent years ignited an "explosion of awareness" among the people regarding environmental concerns. The media have been primarily instrumental in bringing about awareness of the "ecological time bomb" that threatens to explode right in the face of the nation.

PHILIPPINE ENVIRONMENT: THEN AND NOW

Forests

The Philippine forests of long ago were a sight to behold. This upland ecosystem harbored about 3,500 species of indigenous trees, 8,120 species of flowering plants, 950 species and subspecies of birds, 240-250 species and subspecies of reptiles, and 640 species of mosses. There were about 3,800 species of plant endemic to the Philippine archipelago and not found anywhere else in the world.

A good number of these flora and fauna have disappeared or are headed for extinction because of the continued destruction of mountains attributed to logging, swidden (slash-and-burn) farming, forest fires, pests and diseases, and mining operations, which usually hasten soil erosion and clog rivers with their mine tailings, killing living things in the process.

Historical records show that in 1575, at the early period of the Spanish colonization of the Philippines, forest covered 27.5 million hectares or 92 percent of the country's total land area of 30 million hectares. Fifty years ago, the country had only 17 million hectares of forest, with virgin forests covering 11 million hectares. What remains today are only 6.69 million hectares of forests, 1.79 million hectares of which are nonproductive and less than a million hectares of virgin forests.

At the height of the logging industry in the 1960s, the average annual deforestation rate was as high as 300,000 hectares per year. In the 1980s, the average went down to 150,000 hectares per year and further to 100,000 per year today.

Contributing to the massive destruction of forests during the past three decades have been the tremendous pressure from an increasing population in search of land to till and in need of wood, overexploitation of timber resources, and inadequate forest development and conservation efforts.

As of 1990, according to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), there were already about 18.8 million people in the Philippine uplands. Of these, 8.5 million were forest dwellers who belonged to the country's "poorest of the poor." The number of people occupying forest zones has been projected to swell to 27 million by the

year 2005, soaring to 43.5 million in 2025, when the density level will have reached a high of 339 persons per square kilometer.

A UP Los Baños environment expert, Dr. Ma. Concepcion J. Cruz, has pointed to two major consequences if these trends continued. First, to meet the migrants' food needs, more forestlands will be cleared for farming. Second, as upland agriculture accelerates, soil erosion, flooding, sedimentation, and siltation will occur and affect the lower floodplains. Upland migrants, possessing little cultural adaptation to mountain environments, will virtually transform the forests into degraded croplands.

The Philippine government has been adopting measures to regulate the logging business. For instance, the policy of selective logging and sustained yield was introduced in 1955. The move, however, was not successful. In 1981, timber concessions were required either to apply for industrial tree plantation lease or submit a seven-year plan for reforestation. Again, this effort failed.

In 1983, the Integrated Social Forestry Program (ISFP) was launched to uplift the socioeconomic conditions of upland dwellers and occupants to forestland prior to January 1, 1982. The program was designed to maximize land productivity and enhance ecological stability. Under the ISFP, a "kaingin" (swidden) family of five members is given a 25-year stewardship certificate contract for continued occupancy of present clearings, but not to exceed three to seven hectares with specific requirements such as protecting the forest ecosystem, provided further that areas within national parks or reservations and areas under leasehold agreements are not covered. These stewardship contracts can be renewed for another 25 years.

As of 1988, ISF projects monitored by the Forest Management Bureau of DENR numbered 803, with 152,528 beneficiary families.

In 1991, the government prepared the Master Plan for Forestry Development covering the period 1991-2015. The Plan spells out the goals and objectives of the country's forestry sector; the development programs designed to meet the objectives set; the resources required to implement the programs; and the scenarios and impacts envisaged as the results of program implementation.

The Plan consists of 15 programs grouped under three umbrella programs: Man and the Environment; Forest Management and Products Development; and Institutional Development. The programs' main focus is the provision of opportunities for people's participation in forestry development, management, and utilization so that they will firmly become agents of forest conservation, rather than of forest destruction.

Inland Waters

The inland waters of the Philippines comprise primarily of rivers and lakes. The country has 421 rivers with drainage areas ranging from 40 square kilometer to 25,000 sq km, 58 natural lakes, and more than 100,000 hectares of freshwater swamps. With an annual average precipitation of 2,269 millimeters and average annual run-off of 256,980 million cubic meters, the Philippines, theoretically, is assured of enough water supply to meet its domestic, industrial, and agricultural needs. More than two-thirds (70%) of available water is consumed by urban dwellers, by farmers for irrigation, and by industry.

Rivers

A few decades back, Philippine rivers served as sources of water for

domestic use, irrigation and sometimes navigation. These inland waters also used to teem with fish, crabs, and shellfish which were the sources of livelihood of rural people.

This is now a thing of the past. Fact is, most of the country's rivers are either dead or dying, victims of either pollution or siltation. The UP Marine Science Institute in Diliman, Quezon City, Metro Manila, reported last year that out of the 400 major rivers, 50 were heavily polluted and 10 were virtually dead.

Long proclaimed as "biologically dead" are the rivers in Metro Manila, particularly Pasig which slices the metropolis. Its waters crystal clear decades back, the 47-kilometer river now stinks. For how can it survive with the 17,000 industrial firms along its bank, with about 350 of them highly pollutive. Government officials concede that it would take at least 15 years to completely rehabilitate Pasig river.

Many rivers in the provinces have suffered the same fate as their counterparts in the cities. Consider the following leads of news reports compiled by these writers:

- * Many rivers in Central Luzon are either "dead or dying," victims of a modern scourge known the world over as pollution.

- * TARLAC, Tarlac - The 49-kilometer long and 37-meter wide O'Donnell and Tarlac rivers stretching from Capas to Moncada towns here were heavily silted due to mud, sand, volcanic ash and boulders measuring 12,875,000,000 cubic meters.

- * The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology has described a portion of the Agno River and the Colisao Creek in Bayambang town (Pangasinan) heavily polluted, causing fish to die and the fish catch eaten might be injurious to the health of the consumers.

* MALOLOS - Several thousands of small fishermen, farmers and fishpond owners have denounced recently the widespread water pollution in the rivers and farmlands in at least eight municipalities in this province.

* CAGAYAN DE ORO CITY (PNA) - City Mayor Pablo P. Magtajas has asked the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to take measures to protect the Bigaan River in this city in the wake of reports that small-time mines are dumping their wastes into the tributaries of the waterway.

Business establishments along river banks are required to install devices to treat their wastes before these are dumped into the waterways. But this government requirement is usually not complied with by most firms.

Lakes

Once upon a time, Philippine lakes exuded an aura of serenity and abundance. With their pristine beauty that can brighten the pages of nature books, these inland waters typified the healthy atmosphere that pervaded in the Philippine countryside.

Today, there is not much to be proud about Philippine lakes anymore. Some have become "cauldrons of conflicts," as exemplified by Laguna de Bay situated just at the southeastern rim of Metro Manila; others are now heavily silted and polluted.

Laguna de Bay is vaunted as the biggest freshwater lake in Southeast Asia, occupying 90,000 hectares. Over the years, business establishments have mushroomed along its banks. Latest figure shows that 986 factories now dump effluents into the lake. Pesticide and fertilizer residues from agricultural activities also find their way into it. Owing to siltation brought about by soil erosion from deforested areas around Laguna de Bay, it has become shallower -- from seven meters years back to 2.8 meters

today. The proliferation of fish cages in the lake during the past two decades has also spawned numerous social and political conflicts, with the rich (fish cage owners) pitted against the small fishermen over the use of the lake.

A phenomenon that has been recurring in the lake in recent years is the so-called algal bloom, which results in the death of fish in the lake. Algal bloom is believed caused by the rich nutrient in the water owing to the abundant supply of industrial wastes dumped into the lake. When algae proliferate, the oxygen supply in the water is reduced, adversely affecting the fish in the lake.

Other lakes in various parts of the country are crying to be saved. Example is Sampaloc Lake situated about 100 kilometers southeast of Manila. Over the past few years, tilapia fish cages have proliferated in this scenic lake in San Pablo City (the city has six other lakes, thus it is fondly called "City of Seven Lakes"). Feeding of tilapia in cages has been adding to the lake's pollution. As much as 90 tons of organic wastes are estimated to be added every year to the 104-hectare lake as a result of the feeding practice.

Bays/Gulfs

Manila Bay is known around the world for its beautiful sunset. Except for this, there is nothing to be proud about the bay anymore. Once also renowned for its diverse ecological base, it has become a cesspool from tons of toxic wastes, industrial effluents, sewage and sludge dumped into it every day. The heavy pollution of the bay is also adversely affecting the ecology of four adjacent provinces: Cavite, Bataan, Bulacan, and Pampanga.

Sen. Orlando Mercado, who founded the Green Coalition Inc., a national advocacy group for environmental preservation, once described Manila Bay as "in a sorry state of ecological abuse, and is near to extinction because of tons of sewage, industrial effluent, garbage, and domestic waste flushed into it annually."

Similarly situated is Calancan Bay off the island province of Marinduque (southern tip of Luzon). For years, the bay has been absorbing the effluents of a mining company. The wastes are said to cover about 70 hectares of former fishing grounds. One report has described the bay as "a desert of mine tailings."

The sad state of the country's bays and gulfs is also eloquently echoed by an order in 1991 of the Department of Agriculture closing 11 major fishing grounds to commercial fishing. The overfished bays, where catches have considerably dwindled, are Manila Bay, Calauag Bay, Tayabas Bay, Sorsogon Bay, San Miguel Bay, Bagay Gulf, all in Luzon; Carigara Bay, Ormoc Bay, Sogod Bay, and San Pedro Bay, all in central Philippines; and Panguil Bay in southern Philippines.

Aside from overfishing, destructive practices such as dynamite fishing, cyanide poisoning, and muro-ami fishing have been largely responsible for the rapid degradation of fishing grounds in the country.

There are statutes that protect inland waters and offshore areas from being made as dumping grounds of toxic wastes. But, sad to say, strict implementation of anti-pollution laws has been wanting.

Coral Reefs

Not very long ago, the Philippines boasted of having one of the most beautiful coral reefs in the world. Historically, coral reefs have been

considered as one of the country's natural treasures, being home to 488 species of corals, 971 species of benthic algae, and 200 species of fish.

Now the coral reefs of the country are almost gone. A decade ago, the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) reported that about 70 percent of the Philippines' coral reefs had been destroyed. Two years ago, a ranking official of the Philippine Council for Aquaculture and Marine Research and Development (PCAMRD) estimated that 80 percent of these beautiful coral homes in the sea floor had been wasted. Extensive exploitation and pollution have taken their toll on this ecosystem, which serves as shelter to fishes and shellfishes.

Blast fishing has been pinpointed as one of the main causes of direct damage to corals. The collection of corals for ornamentals, construction, and handicraft purposes, as well as siltation and pollution, have also contributed to the disappearance of these natural wealth.

Philippine laws prohibit fishing with the use of explosives, obnoxious or poisonous substances. Also prohibited are the sale and exportation of ordinary, precious, and semi-precious corals. But the destruction of coral reefs continues.

Mangrove

It has been known through the decades that the mangrove ecosystem serves as a nursery ground for fish, crustaceans, crabs, bivalves, and other invertebrates. At least 68 families of fish have been found to inhabit these areas. Mangroves are also a source of tannin, dyebark, firewood, and wood for charcoal. Moreover, they serve as buffer zones against violent waves and typhoons.

In the early part of this century, the Philippines' mangrove forests were estimated to cover about half a million hectares. By 1970, the area had shrunk to 288,000 hectares. Today, there are about 146,000 hectares of mangroves left. Most of these coastal areas have been converted into fishponds, saltbeds, wharves and docks, development and industrial projects, and business communities.

Mangroves are protected by Philippine laws but these continue to disappear from coastal areas.

Air

Air pollution continues to threaten the environment and health of people, particularly those in highly urbanized population centers such as Metro Manila. Motor vehicles and industries have remained the major sources of air pollutants such as carbon monoxide, lead, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, ozone, and other toxic emissions.

A government inventory done in 1987 showed that motor vehicles accounted for most of the carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxide. Both stationary (industrial plants) and mobile sources release large amounts of particulate matters (dust, metallic and mineral particle, smoke, mist, and acid fumes) with the motor vehicles releasing slightly lower amounts. Industries accounted for much of the sulfur dioxide.

Highly visible black smoke is usually emitted by diesel vehicles. Soot is the largest component of this smoke. Gasoline wastes also contain carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxide, and sulfur oxides.

Air pollution has likewise become a bane in some parts of the country where industrial companies have been established. For instance, families near cement plants usually eat under mosquito nets to minimize intake of

particulates coming from factories. Smoke emitted by factories also continue to threaten the health of people living near them.

Farmlands

Agriculture is still one of the biggest contributors to the Philippines' national economy. It contributes 28 percent to the Gross National Product (GNP) and generates 36 percent of the export earnings. About 70 percent of the people depend on agriculture for their livelihood.

Of the country's land area of 30 million hectares, 13.143 million hectares are croplands. Of this area, 7.086 million hectares are devoted to rice and corn (the country's main staple crops), and 4.72 million hectares are planted to other food crops (coconut, sugarcane, coffee, cacao, vegetables, fruits, and nuts). Non-food crops occupy 1.23 million hectares.

Over the years, the country's agricultural lands have been subjected to increasing pressures from various sectors. Erosion, misuse of chemicals, and salinization have combined to degrade some of the country's best soils. A big chunk of prime agricultural lands, particularly those near cities, have also been converted into non-agricultural uses such as industrial sites, housing subdivisions, and commercial areas. These developments have considerably affected the environment in these places.

CONSEQUENCES OF ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

The Philippines is now reaping the adverse consequences of the wanton destruction of its natural resources. Floods are now common occurrences in areas with denuded mountains. Soil erosion has become a serious problem in many provinces. Drought is hitting regions in increasing frequency. Red

tide, an unknown phenomenon more than a decade ago, now rears its ugly head in fishing grounds every year. Rare wildlife species and endemic plants are headed for extinction. Polluted waters continue to exact death toll among people living near them.

Flood

The catastrophe that hit Ormoc City in central Philippines last November 5, which claimed the lives of about 8,000 people, is an eloquent proof of how far the degradation of Philippine environment has gone. To recall, torrential rains brought by typhoon "Uring" cascaded from the baldish mountain down to Ormoc City below. A high tide reportedly coincided with the heavy downpour, hindering the outflow of floodwaters to the sea. Hence, the flood. Illegal loggers who have stripped mountains in the province of its forest cover, have been blamed for the tragedy.

Indeed, flashfloods now hang like the "Sword of Damocles" over communities ensconced at the foot of baldish mountains. To cite one, take the case of a farming town, Natividad, located at the easternmost part of the province of Pangasinan. Residents in villages near the badly denuded mountain now fear the coming of the rainy season.

Doom began to loom large over these communities after the killer earthquake that jolted northern Luzon on July 16, 1990. As if the sordid state of the mountain was not enough to worry the villagers, the temblor loosened the mountainsides. When the heavy rains came, rampaging floodwaters washed down tons upon tons of gravel and hundreds of uprooted trees, blanketing farmlands and Viray river. Fortunately, the torrent did not head toward the villages.

Soil Erosion

The Philippines continues to lose its soil at an alarming rate. Half a decade ago, official sources said about 9,000,000 hectares or disposable or alienable land were already severely eroded. This is about one-third of the country's total land area and 63 percent of the 12.8 million hectares of alienable land.

Studies show that the average annual erosion rate in the country's uplands ranges from 20 to 40 tons per hectare. However, as much as 100 tons of soil per hectare are lost in open land and grasslands.

A recent report of the DENR Environment and Management Bureau indicated that as of 1991, 22 of the country's 79 provinces already had lands with more than 50 degrees of soil erosion. Having the most serious degrees of erosion were Cebu in Central Philippines and Batangas just south of Manila -- 80-85 percent. Closely trailing the two is Marinduque (south of Luzon Island), with 75-80 percent. Ilocos Sur and La Union, both in northern Philippines, had 60-70 percent of their lands without topsoil. Other provinces in this situation are Bukidnon, Misamis Oriental, North Cotabato, South Cotabato, Davao del Sur, Zamboanga del Sur, and Zamboanga del Norte, all on Mindanao island, southern Philippines; Negros Oriental, Negros Occidental, Antique, Capiz, Iloilo, and Aklan, all in central Philippines.

Soil erosion results in loss of soil nutrient, the topsoil, or even the entire soil to river channels and the open sea. It also results in the sedimentation of rivers, lakes, irrigation canals, and other waterways. As a result of siltation farms in the lowlands suffer low crop yields or destruction of crops.

Drought

Drought is generally described as the deficiency of moisture in an area, the extent and duration of which severely affects agricultural or water supply sources. It occurs when the normal cycle bringing about the rainy season and a relatively sufficient amount of rainfall during the rest of the year are disrupted.

Long droughts that hit the country in recent years, particularly the past decade, have considerably damaged the country's agriculture. Two major droughts occurred in the 1980s -- in 1982-83 and 1986-87. A third started in the first quarter of 1989.

At present, the country, particularly the Mindanao region, is reeling from the impact of a severe drought. Damages to agriculture and industry have been mind-boggling. Reports have it that big and small-scale firms in Mindanao are losing ₱2 billion (US\$1 = 26.5) a month owing to power interruptions (usually 12 hours a day).

Major droughts have been recorded in the country since 1935 have been attributed to a global phenomenon called "El Niño." This climatic abnormality has been described as a spectacular oceanographic-meteorological phenomenon that develops in the Pacific, mostly off Peru, and is associated with extreme climatic variability, specifically torrential winds and rainfall in the Eastern Tropical Zone (off the coast of South America) and a corresponding lack of rainfall on the opposite side of the Pacific Ocean (including Australia, Indonesia, and the Philippines). During a severe El Niño, sea surface temperatures are measurably higher than normal over a large expanse of the equatorial Pacific which can prevail for more than a year.

Red Tide

Until 1983, red tide was an obscure natural phenomenon in the Philippines. It was during the June-September 1983 period that the country experienced the first toxic red tides, when 20 deaths and about 250 notified illnesses were reported, mostly of persons eating mussel during *Pyrodinium* blooms in the Samar area in the eastern part of central Philippines. In the succeeding years, red tide occurrences increased at an alarming rate.

Red tide is actually the name given to blooms or population explosions of certain tiny planktonic organisms, usually in coastal waters. The organisms become so dense that the water becomes discolored, taking on a red, brown, yellow, or green hue.

On the occurrence of red tide, a fishery expert, Dr. Inocencio Ronquillo (now deceased), had explained that the abrupt fertilization of Samar Sea triggered the profuse growth of brownish-red dinoflagellates (tiny organisms of plant-life origin). He stressed: "Deforestation, soil erosion, heavy rains, use of chemical fertilizer beyond normal levels, and other destructive man-made activities all add up to the red tide phenomenon."

Red tides that occurred in the country during the past five years swept the Manila Bay area (particularly off the province of Bataan), Bataan and Masinloc Bays in Zambales, all in Luzon; the coastal waters of Negros Occidental, central Philippines; and as far as Guinsiliban in Camiguin Island near Misamis Oriental, southern Philippines. The following areas have also been reported as prone to red tide: Maqueda Bay and Carigara Bay in the Samar-Leyte area; Tinagong Dagat and Sapián Bay in Panay; and Camiguin Bay.

Threat to Wildlife's Survival

The survival of endangered plant and animals species continues to be threatened by the unabated destruction of the country's forests, including protected areas such as national parks, game refuge, wildlife sanctuaries, and nature reserves.

As of 1989, the DENR Environment and Management Bureau listed 60 national parks with a total area of 467,648 hectares; eight game refuge and bird sanctuaries with 958,687 hectares; 10 wilderness areas with 18,856 hectares; 62 municipal forest parks with 391.95 hectares; and village forest parks with 232.38 hectares.

Of utmost concern by wildlife conservationists these days is the monkey-eating eagle, the world's largest eagle and found only in the Philippines. Over the years, the eagle's population has been reduced to some 100 to 300 in number by the destruction of its forest habitat and by collection and hunting. Last Jan. 15, the first monkey-eating eagle to be bred through artificial insemination and hatched in captivity was born in Davao City, southern Philippines. But what worries the Philippine Eagle Conservation Program Foundation (PECPF) is that there is not much area anymore to ensure the survival of the bird. As pointed out by conservationists, the Philippine eagle requires a minimum of 15 to 25 square kilometers of primary rainforests as nesting territory. The eagle is now seen only in the Davao area in Mindanao, Samar Island, and Isabela province in northeastern Philippines.

Other wildlife species in the country are similarly situated.

Global warming

Though not yet fully industrialized, the Philippines has been

contributing its share in the degradation of the atmosphere. Based on an index developed by a researcher of the East-West Center in Hawaii, the country's "natural debt" in the form of a greenhouse gas emitted to the atmosphere since 1950 has been computed at 4.4 tons of carbon per capita. The EWC researcher, Dr. Kirk R. Smith, has developed an index of the accumulated amount of greenhouse gas that each country has put into the atmosphere.

On top of the "natural debt" list is the United States, with 186 tons per capita. It is followed by Germany, 140 t/capita; Canada, 134 t/capita; Czechoslovakia, 132 t/capita; United Kingdom, 125 tons; Australia, 102 t/capita; USSR, 94 t/capita; and Japan, 69 t/capita.

Death

The ultimate consequence of the destruction of the environment has been death. A case that can be cited is a river in Barangay (village) San Diego, Lian, Batangas, south of Manila. A group of investigative journalists from Manila visited the place sometime in mid-1991 and found that 50 children had died from ailments attributed to the pollution of the "once-pristine Bagbag River, which for centuries was the lifeblood of the barangay that depended on its erstwhile rich and abundant marine life." The stream, one of the journalists reported, "is now a vast depository of toxic wastes coming from several alcohol distilleries that have sprouted in that part of the province since 1977."

The indiscriminate and improper use of pesticides and other agricultural chemicals has also been exacting a toll on the lives of people in farming communities. A UP Los Baños study, for instance, noted chronic effects of pesticides, including those already banned, on health of

farmers. Clinical cases also indicated acute pesticide poisoning of some farmers and members of their families, particularly children and women.

ENVIRONMENTAL AWAKENING AND MEDIA

On October 5, 1991, thousands of students, Catholic Church leaders, and residents marched down the streets of Santiago town in Isabela province to dramatize their concern for the plunder of the Sierra Madre mountain in northeastern Philippines. They also launched the Save the Sierra Madre Mountain (SSMM) movement. During the rally, the students released balloons with symbolic letters to God, asking Him to stop logging in the Sierra Madre or else no forests would be left for future generations.

In September last year, 43 children asked the Philippine Supreme Court to stop the DENR from further issuing and renewing timber license agreements (TLAs). The children, represented by their parents and the Philippine Ecological Network, Inc., stressed in a 27-page petition that the government, through the DENR, has violated their rights to environmental protection by its act of granting more areas for logging than what is available. They said that "if this generation of Filipinos completely and totally denuded its forests," there will be nothing left for them and for the succeeding generations they seek to represent.

These two events eloquently exemplify the awakening of the Filipino people to the wanton destruction of the country's natural resources and the adverse consequences they will suffer if they do not act to stop these depredations now.

Sentiments now run high that "the government has failed to curb the exploitation of Philippine resources because of political pressure from

business commercial interest, a widespread practice during the Marcos administration and carried over to the Aquino government."

A special publication of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), entitled "Our Environment Needs Media: The Philippine Case," asserted that although the country has adopted some of the strictest environmental standards in the world, enforcement has encountered difficulties for three reasons:

- * The laws meant to govern environment management activities may run counter to the economic interest not only of private decision-makers but of society in general. For example, too much concern for the environmental amenities may be socially uneconomic.

- * In some instances, the laws or regulations are non-implementable. For example, how can the government effectively patrol 15 million hectares of land? or the country's rugged coastline of 7,100 islands?

- * Some rules were never meant to be implemented. For example, the rules for sustainable exploitation of forests were meant to allow gross underpricing of forest resources, thereby creating the basis for excessive earnings for a favored few allocated these resources.

Print

Encouragingly, hand in hand with this "explosion" of public awareness of the "doomsday" message of ecological destruction is the emergence of what is now called "Environmental Journalism." This development becomes more appreciated when one considers that until a few years ago, the Philippine media had shown lacklustre interest in environmental issues when compared to its all-out coverage of politics as well as sex and violence in the movies and in real life. Another thing is that there are now 27 daily

newspapers, more than a dozen magazines, and more than 50 community newspapers (a handful of them coming out daily) in the country today.

In the past, as noted by FES, there was no consistent efforts by any newspaper establishment or media organization to adopt and pursue an environmental campaign. The report also pointed out that environment reporters lacked the necessary training and background to write more responsible and informative stories. Primary reason was, they were not given a chance to hone their craft, mainly because their assignment to the environment beat was only transitory and they would be assigned after some time to another beat. Owing to a lack of fully trained environmental journalists, most of the stories that came to print were lacking in substance.

Unfortunately, the report further observed, most environmental problems in the Philippines were offshoots of industrial and other commercial operations. Textile plants, for example, spewed chemical waste such as dyes which degraded river systems. Alcohol refineries dumped tons of effluents into rivers that poisoned streams and turned agricultural tracts into fallowed lands. Beverage and food^{*} processing factories, battery makers, tanneries, and loggers, all contributed to environmental deterioration. These entities happened to be giant advertisers that could afford to buy print space, hold lavish press conferences, and give lavish gifts. If they were not influential advertisers, they had influential connections.

Would media establishments dare wage meaningful environmental crusades against these establishments? the report asked.

Notwithstanding these and related problems, it is encouraging to note that Environmental Journalism has taken shape in the Philippines.

Now giving it a big push are several organizations dedicated to promoting environmental awareness in the country. Among these are the Philippine Environmental Journalists, Inc. (PEJI) and the Communicators League for Environmental Action and Restoration (CLEAR).

PEJI was organized in November 1987 during a training workshop on environmental reporting jointly organized by the Philippine Press Institute (PPI), United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP), and the Asia Foundation. Its members come from the newspapers, radio, and television. PEJI aims primarily to increase awareness of the environment through effective communication.

CLEAR was organized on January 2, 1990. Its membership is open to individuals as well as groups. Its current members are the National Union of Journalists in the Philippines, People's Movement for Press Freedom, Center for Advocacy Communications Services and Earth Station, and Pambansang Koalisyon ng Musikerong Pilipino. Its current activities include a monthly press forum focusing on environment. Like PEJI, CLEAR has also been conducting workshops to train media practitioners in environmental reporting.

Among those that have also been training budding reporters in development journalism including environmental reporting, is the Press Foundation of Asia (PFA), now a byword in Asia insofar as development communication is concerned.

Likewise a big plus factor to the cause of environment is the emergence of specialized reporting agencies such as the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, Associated Editors, Philippine News and Features, Asian News and Features, and Technology Dispatch. These agencies

regularly turn out development reports, including those on environment, and feed these to the national dailies.

Indeed, that environment has become a bright spot in the media coverage in recent years can be buttressed by the fact that most of the data cited in the previous discussions of this paper were taken from newspaper reports published during the past decade. And the media's invigorated interest in this area, to our opinion, has been touched off by the Ormoc City tragedy, which can be considered as the "Mother of all Environmental Disasters" the country has ever suffered.

As a columnist of the Manila times (a national daily), Danilo-Luis M. Mariano, stressed following the tragedy: "Environmentalism has become the great issue of the day, not only for Filipinos but for all humankind, as it should be. What is at stake is not whether or not people would learn to treat each other more fairly, or whether or not economies would be able to produce all the creature comforts that advanced technology now makes possible. What is at stake is the survival of the human race as we know it."

The Philippine Daily Inquirer, another daily that is now crusading against illegal logging (it names names, including cabinet officials linked to this nefarious trade, congressmen, military and police officers, officials and personnel of government forestry agencies, and provincial and municipal officials), also stated in an editorial: "The forests are dying, and unless the most drastic steps are taken to revive them -- a total log ban may even be too little too late -- they will be dead in a few years... What is good for business is not always good for the country. Often, it is good only for congressmen and senators."

Newspaper readers' concerns are also given space in Letter to the Editor pages. Consider the following sarcastic letter sent by a reader to one newspaper: "We laud the administration's futile effort towards managing our resources and we wish them: may you perish into obscurity before we all do."

Aside from the editorial, column, and letter to the editor pages, front pages and special pages (Science, Agriculture, Features, Home and Culture, etc.) have increasingly been featuring environment reports. Editorial cartoonists also contribute their share in promoting environmental awareness in the country.

Environment reports now form part of entries in annual journalism contests being sponsored by various sectors of the mass media (especially the Science and Agriculture journalism awards).

Radio

Radio is still the predominant medium of information in the Philippines. Statistics compiled by the Philippine Social Research Center (Media Factbook 1989) showed that 91 percent of households in Metro Manila owned radios. For the whole country, 82 percent of the total households owned radios.

There are about 250 radio stations strewn across the length and breadth of the archipelago. Many radio stations and broadcasters in the country are involved in environmental issues, as found in a study conducted by the Philippine Foundation of Rural Broadcasters and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in September 1990. The survey aimed to know whether and to assess how far media people had been involved in such topics as well as which kind

of radio programs went on air in 1990, their duration, methods used, and related information.

Out of 180 questionnaires sent throughout the Philippines (12 regions and the National Capital Region or Metro Manila), 104 media people (station managers, commentators, news reporters, anchormen, announcers) answered.

The priority concerns of the respondents were reforestation, which received 65 answers; agriculture, 34 answers; marine ecology, 33; water pollution, 26; health care, 25; waste management, 22; industry pollution, 17; upland development, 18; and air pollution, 12.

The topics covered by media campaigns were deforestation, 84 answers; agriculture, 69; health care, 68; marine ecology, 64; water pollution, 62; air pollution, 53; upland development, 52; industry pollution, 48; and waste management, 45.

On the whole, the study concluded, there is a growing number of broadcasters concerned about their environment.

Television

The FES report also noted that among the television stations, ABS-CBN Channel 2 seems to be the only one that has produced its own plugs on the environment, aired late at night when there are few paying advertisers. Its more memorable segments include the effects of irresponsible garbage-throwing and the layman's definition of non-biodegradable materials.

The Philippine Children's Foundation, producer of Batibot, an hour-long children's show aired on Channels 9 and 4, has introduced a mascot called Pilimon which serves as the carrier of environmental messages. Pilimon is the lifesize environmental muppet based on the near-extinct species of the Philippine pelican. The segments are sponsored by DENR.

A number of night TV talk shows such as Magandang Gabi Bayan, Pep Talk, and Probe Team have discussed and debated issues on environmental problems and conditions in Metro Manila, Pasig River, flooding in the metropolis, illegal fishing methods, destruction of coral reefs, and the log ban.

The DENR and Environment Management Bureau have also produced documentaries ranging from 10 to 30 minutes which are aired on Channel 4, whenever possible. They also have plugs on reforestation, water pollution, air pollution, toxic and hazardous materials, and garbage. Tips on how to solve these problems are likewise plugged.

CONCLUSION

A new Filipino Environmentalism (NFE) is taking shape. This phenomenon is emerging out of the sordid environmental mess that now stares the nation right in its face. NFE has been described as "a by-philosophy, an ideology or a political platform; a consistent and coherent set of principles/guidelines for our day-to-day management*of natural resources; a set of principles that could win the commitment of the people, bureaucrats and managers of natural resources consistent with Filipino values and our limitations, traditions, and beliefs."

Hand in hand with the emergence of an environmentalism philosophy is the sprouting of a fresh branch of Philippine Journalism. Now in its infant stage, Environmental Journalism promises to be a potent instrument that can harness the energies of the people in stopping the country's march toward "ecological doomsday."

The task ahead is formidable. But the important thing is that there is a rallying point that can bring together the nation into unity and lock the problem by its horn. As in critical times of the country's history, the media is expected to rise to the challenge and assert its role as one of the strong pillars of society. With the survival of the nation at stake, the media should do no less.

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