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**Media Responses to Urbanization Problems
From the Philippine Perspective**

By

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Media Responses to Urbanization Problems (From the Philippine Perspective)

Rapid urbanization in the Philippines has spawned expanded media concerns to deal with the economic growth's impact on the sustainability of fragile ecosystems in the country's 7,100 islands.

While Philippine media used to center its reports largely on development issues that try to push economic growth, in recent years, the growth of cities and towns have created new and specific issues that tell on the quality of life of both urban and rural residents.

As the Philippine government launched a "crash program" to transform the country into a newly-industrialized economy (nic) by the year 2000, more investors are being lured to set up factories not only in the urban areas but even in the countrysides.

In addition, more urban infrastructures such as roads, power systems, communication, transportation, and other facilities are being expanded toward rural communities, mostly farming areas that depend on the land for their survival. Also being swept by such thrust are coastal communities which source their food and livelihood on the mangroves and wetland and nearshore areas. Even upland rural communities are not spared by the stampede encouraged by government to industrialize the country.

While such goal to push the country toward industrialization is most welcome, fears have been expressed both by media and environmentalists on the damage this may cause the ecosystem ~~ix~~ if such growth is not properly managed.

In urban centers like Metro Manila and Cebu, the problem of rapid urbanization is already getting more coverage by Philippine media. The problem of how to manage solid, toxic, hazardous, liquid wastes is now being seriously being investigated by media. Even if Metro Manila had set up a sanitary landfill in Carmona, Cavite in what is known as the Calabarzone, the problem of how to dispose uncollected garbage properly continues to bug the metropolis.

In Metro Cebu where potable water is sourced from the aquifer, pollution coming from waste disposal of factories has endangered the water supply. As a matter of fact, in March this year, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) had ordered the closure of two water wells of the Metro Cebu Water District (MCWD) in Mandaue City because of contamination from the discharge of chemicals and other wastes of an electroplating plant.

Metro Cebu media did an extensive coverage on the pollution. This prompted the city legislators of Mandaue City to recommend for the closure of the electroplating plant if proper pollution control devices are not installed by the firm to stop the water degradation.

Philippine media has also taken note of rapid population growth which has posed serious constraints on the ability of the environment to sustain life, deliver basic services, and eliminate mass poverty.

In areas which have become so overcrowded, media observed that critical problems of pollution, garbage, flooding, slums and traffic congestion have arisen. The incidence of environment-health related problems has also been observed showing an alarming site of scavenging, open dumping, insect and rodent breeding and pollution.

With the rise in population, media also noted the demand for shelter and related amenities.

million, 26 percent higher than the 1980 population level of 48.09 million. In a matter of five years, the population went up to 66 million.

Although the country has maintained an average growth rate of 2.4 percent, it has become the 14th most populated country in the world and 8th in Asia. It also has one of the highest population densities in Asia at 196 persons per square kilometer, even higher than the population densities of Indonesia and Malaysia combined, which are 89.87 and 49.32 persons per square kilometer respectively.

For the past decades, Philippine media noted how the population continued to aggregate in the country's urban centers in three regions: the National Capital Region, Region IV and Region III. In 1988, 7.692 million lived in Region IV, 7.561 million in the NCR and 5.80 million in Region III.

Media identified the country's most populous cities as Manila, 1.83 million; and Quezon City, 1.5 million. Together with the other cities and towns comprising the NCR, total population of Metro Manila reached 7.561 million in 1988 making it one of the megacities of the world.

Manila's urban economy had apparently lured many people to gravitate in this metropolis. Such also aggravated the squatter problems. In 1980, an estimated 0.857 million persons were considered part of Metro Manila's squatter population. By 1987, this rose to 2.5 million or approximately one third of the total population. Urban peer populations were also noted in other regional centers of the country.

Metro Manila's population growth has driven residents ~~xxx~~ to reside in nearby provinces and towns forcing the conversion of once valuable agricultural lands into subdivisions. This also created the problem of having to source more power and ~~xxx~~ water to sustain the population and provide a share to industry.

Health has also become a major problem in the country's urban areas. Vehicle population has spawned respiratory ailments. Congested communities have caused problems of environmental sanitation and resulted in the outbreak of diseases.

In many industrial zones including those newly-established in rural areas, the impact on the environment has been so great that problems unknown to rural communities are now becoming a part of their lives. Many communities now have to contend with the problem of pollution and other health hazards spawned by industry. Many have to virtually compete with industry for the land they have to use for agriculture, the water they have to drink, and the energy they have to use for their own households.

What is alarming is that while many rural areas are urbanizing and many urban areas are developing, the poverty situation has remained a great problem. Philippine media has considered in many reports the importance of addressing the poverty problem and giving it top priority than merely pushing the country towards industrialization.

The quality of life under a sustainable ecosystem has been considered of utmost importance and must be protected by proper resource management in the country's stride to push for mere development.

Such concern can only be given its proper focus if media is able to participate in decision-making. While it is being consulted by Philippine planners, its voice is often left unheard and its position left out in the final decision.

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But through organized media groups such as the Philippine Environmental Journalists Inc. (PEJI) which has networked with other media organizations and non-governmental (NGO) and people's organizations action groups, policy-makers are being kept on their toes on urbanization and environmental issues.

Many concerned media groups in the Philippines today feel that media should not remain a bystander. It should begin to participate in the development process so that it would be able to help provide transparency to projects and programs and prevent miscarriages.

In the urbanization issue, media has no choice but to become a participant in the development process. For after all, media is also a part of the Philippine society which seeks to survive under the strains of growth. #

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