

The Ecosystem-based Community-centered Sustainable Development  
Organization and Management (ECSOM) Framework:  
Uniting Communities in a Cosmic Embrace

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Reversing the trend of poverty and ecological degradation involves a revolution more profound and total than any we have had in the past with elements that go deep in the spirit, thought and consciousness of the Filipino individuals and their society and extend out to the very structure of the organizations and institutional practices through which individual and social lives are conducted in our country. Reversal will mean overcoming the pernicious psychological influences that propagate a Western consumerism towards a simpler, de-materialized lifestyle that can be met with the application of 21<sup>st</sup> century technology to our natural resources and of a vitalized and internalized spirituality and an elevated consciousness to the equitable sharing of the fruits of society's production.

After over half a century of working in different sectors of society, from the labor movement to different lines of large corporate business and finance including working with major transnational corporations, and in the different arms of government, banks, economic planning office, cabinet ministries Dr. Roxas concluded that the inappropriate philosophy, scientific paradigms, distorted values and destructive organization and management practices had been reified in a dominant form of organization: the profit-seeking *business enterprise*. The character and dominance of this organization-type, the philosophy and logic of its operation, the paradigmatic and "scientific" propositions that constitute its "moral" justification, and the accounting system that governs the operating logic of its day-to-day dispositions of the resources of the planet that fall within its domain, are the core and roots of the destructive effects on human colonies and their habitat.

This organization mode gives this era its character. The 19<sup>th</sup> century polemic and the twentieth century "Cold War" posed socialist planned economy and publicly owned enterprise against the free-market, Capitalist system and privately owned enterprise. What the polemic and the discourse overlooked was that both systems were centred on "enterprise" as the primary agent for moving the economy and society.

The historical forces that institutionalized the power of monarchs and emperors in the Nation State and the self-centred, individualist profit-seeking motivation of the "entrepreneur" in the Corporate Enterprise, polarized these two non-communal institutions as the dominant drivers of social evolution and development.

What fell by the wayside in this evolutionary stream was the Community both in the biological sense of a colony of the species *Homo Sapiens Sapiens* on its habitat, and in the spiritual sense of a conscious, communicating, worshipping *polis*, in the process of continuing evolution, learning to cohabitate symbiotically with other human communities and with nature. Seeking in other words a path of sustainable development.

This is the essence of his advocacy. A movement to make self-reliant, Local Communities, the primary units of organization and management in the Philippines, first, and if we can demonstrate enough successes, in Asia and the world.

*The ECSOM Unit: Community and Habitat*

He coined the acronym, ECSOM, for this system: Ecosystem-based, Community-centred, Sustainable development, Organization and Management. And in the particular archipelagic circumstances of the Philippines, he defines the Community as the organized *barangays* and *poblaciones* in an average of about five municipalities in some 225 watersheds in the country. Each is the size of what in the U.S. is called a *county*, somewhere between a municipality and a province with 50,000 households, in 100 *barangays* and five *poblaciones*, on 100,000 hectares of territory and perhaps 250,000 hectares of municipal fishing waters. Organized means formally interlinked so there is a systematic process of effecting what Habermas calls “Communicative Action” in all the areas affecting individual and community lives.

*Collective Bargaining Agents: Spokespersons of the Community*

Each cluster selects a cluster leader whose role is defined as “Collective Bargaining Agent” for the cluster—a system of “Collective Bargaining Agency” in place of either “manager” or “Political Leader” emphasizes the point that the “leader” is the agent of the people who are his principals and he represents their interest, not his own. That interest then is rigorously defined through two processes:

- a) A series of participatory community visioning and planning sessions that bring the household, cluster, *purok*, *barangay*, etc. visions and plans to the concrete articulation of physical housing, neighborhood, town plans, land and natural resource use over a fifteen year horizon staged in five three-year visions. Our target is sustainability in half a generation.
- b) A formal system of “Community Wealth and Welfare” accounts that represent consolidated household “estate plans” at each successive level from household, to cluster to *purok* and neighborhood to municipality etc. These in effect are simplified and popularly translated balance sheet and income statement accounts. They substitute as indicators of development and growth in place of the enterprise-centred GDP and GNP.

The leaders selected for every level serve as facilitators in the stakeholder deliberations, consensus building and decision-making for their group of stakeholders in discussions and negotiations with other leaders and with intervenors outside of the stakeholder groups. It will be noted in this sense that there is a differentiation of identity and personality between the stakeholders as civil society and the government and political leadership who are only virtual spokespersons of civil society and in fact are spokespersons for the entities they represent – the local government, the national government agencies, private business or even formal local and national NGOs which are

their own juridical personalities.

The leaders/collective-bargaining-agents are strictly *agents* of their *principals* composed of the stakeholders in their respective groups, and all together these agents constitute the body of representations for the stakeholders of the entire biodistrict.

Their role as collective bargaining agents defines a responsibility for negotiating on the basis of the sustainable development interests of the community and its habitat that is formulated through a visioning and planning process that is fully participatory and conducted in stages from the clusters up to the biodistrict level. The process is facilitated through the leaders and provided with technical resource persons specially trained to make their expertise available as consulting counsel “on tap” rather than as authoritative intervenors “on top”.

### *Intrernalizing Society and Ecology/ the Collective/ the Divine Milieu in Operating Organizations*

In the economic enterprise, the philosophy and technology are embodied in the accounting system that serves as the principal instrument that guides management in the use of its assets to achieve its objectives of maximizing profit and net worth of the owners.

This is the importance of the social accounting matrix for the management of what we would call the ECSOM unit. Two sets of monitoring systems are required. The most comprehensive is the Social Accounting Matrix (SAM). The sustainability considerations are reflected in the periodic calculation of both the Biological Capacity of the unit's natural capital and the Ecological Footprint imposed by the level and pattern of its consolidated production-consumption-trade-investment operations.

The potency of the economic enterprise lay in its focused single purpose character, the development of its rigorous operating technology, and the evolution of a class of dedicated highly professional and rigorously trained managers. Its problem lay in the values reflected in its “bottom line” objective: maximum profit for its owners. And in the profit calculus considerations of ecological preservation and restoration and social costs were *externalized*.

This unit of organization was the central growth engine of both capitalistic and socialistic regimes. The difference only lay in the ownership of those engines: being private in the one and state in the other. Although in both, the need was recognized to set ground rules to maintain a balance between the workings of the micro-organization unit and the macro-social perspective. The perspective went from the individual unit to the nation state. The intermediate or meso-perspective was generally sectoral in character – a taxonomic rather than a natural or systemic aggregation – industry groups rather than territorial systems.

Set loose on nature such a powerful engine of exploitation was capable as well of

wreaking serious havoc on nature. And, as it has turned out, that it has done. And no place more effectively than in the ecologically fragile islands of the Philippines.

The question then is not one of repudiating a system that has developed tools and technology of proven power, effectiveness and efficiency, but of exploring a way of harnessing the tools and technology in an organization designed to encompass everything essential to sustainability that the enterprise system left out, specifically, *symbiosis with nature and human society*.

The biodistrict, organized and managed under the ECSOM PROTOCOL can become, at the meso level, such a unit of organization and management for navigating social transformation and human settlement formation along a sustainable path. But it must be structured to make use of all the tools and technology that made the economic enterprise so powerful and effective. There must be designed for it an operating technology and an accounting system and there must develop a class of professional practitioners rigorously trained in the protocols of its management.

#### *The Social Accounting Matrix (SAM): a People's Tool*

It is important to understand that the Social Accounting Matrix is not a mere economist's or ecologist's or a municipal planning and development officer's research tool. It is a management accounting system and acquires its live character because its categories ("fields") and numbers come out of the live plans, decisions and performance of the ECSOM organization.

That organization is not an institutional unit operating within the community – like the local government's subunits at *barangay*, municipal, city, or province levels, nor the national government's departments and agencies. It *is* the *community* organized – civil society in the sense in which Lenin understood the term! It is the constituency, the stakeholders organized as an operating juridical entity (informal at the start but more and more formalized as the system matures).

The SAM embodies the economic and financial plans, while the human settlement plan embodies the social and physical plans. The sustainable development criteria ensure that the plans are ecologically, socially and economically sustainable, viable and feasible. This means that they provide for maximization of the biological capacity of the resources, maintain the overall footprint *within* the limits of the biological capacity, optimize the utilization of natural, artefact, material and financial capital, and ensure equitable distribution of benefits in the form of wealth and incomes.

Since these visions and plans are built up from ground-up consultations, their articulations are built up from the micro (household and clusters) to the meso (municipal, city, biodistrict, and regional for metropolitan centers), and eventually to the macro (National for primate capital city) levels.

It is important for the economic growth and development plans that the strategy be

centered on the enhancement of the lives and livelihood of the stakeholders. This is provided for in the structure of the Social Accounts where the bottom lines are the *income* and *net worth of the family*, the cluster, the village, township, municipality and biodistrict consolidated in stages at each level.

The staging area for design, installation, training, education, maintenance need to be centred in a combination of institutions organic to the area—the local academe, local government, local churches, and local civic, peoples and civil society groups including business establishments. But the ideal driving force would be the spiritual and academic institutions since the real thrust of the movement is transformation in the sense of *metanoia*, the inner formations expressing themselves outward into lifestyle, motivation, values and physical organizing and the building of the “City of God” in a physical sense as well.

The long-term integral development process will be culturally-rooted, contextual, experiential, and anchored on the participatory action engagement of all stakeholders of the bioregional community through the efforts of the local academe in educating a local corps of community professionals who would become change agents in their societies.

In and through a living Faith, it is hoped that the energy that will radiate from the process will cause the evolvement and organic growth of a community-based economics and a new urbanism. It is hoped that the human habitat or the new human settlement will be an externalization of a vision of the CITY OF GOD where all human beings may live a decent dignified life in symbiosis with nature.

We can all fulfil a significant role by which every activity pulsates with the divine energy from the heart of God alive in all creation.