

A REVISIT ON CURRENT RELEVANT DEVELOPMENT POLICIES: taking responsibility, assuming accountability for the uplands in Southern Mindanao

INTRODUCTION:

The recent environmental disasters have more than emphasized our accountabilities to Mother Nature. Pro-environment policies have been formulated, passed and implemented but one wonders how and to what extent have these environment-related policies have been genuinely given flesh and blood in the uplands, the most vulnerable areas in the countryside. What political will, what sincerity, what commitment can we talk about among our local government officials on their accountabilities for human and ecological security in the uplands?

The Local Government Code of 1991 (RA 7160) provides *that municipal LGUs are to provide fruit tree and other kinds of seedling nurseries; implement water and soil resources utilization and conservation projects; implement community-based forestry projects; manage and control communal forests with areas not exceeding fifty square kilometers; establish tree parks, greenbelts and similar forest development projects. The provincial LGUs on the other hand are to enforce forestry laws limited to community-based forestry projects, pollution control, small-scale mining law, and other laws on the protection of environment...* (RA 7160, Section 17).

Furthermore, the LGC of 1991 provides in Sections 26-27 that *it shall be the duty of every national agency or government-owned or controlled corporation... involved in the planning and implementation of any project or program that may cause pollution, climatic change, depletion of non-renewable resources, loss of cropland, rangeland, or forest cover, and extinction of animal and plant species, to consult with the local government units, non-government organizations, and other sectors concerned and explain the goals and objectives of the project or program, its impact upon the people and the community in terms of environmental or ecological balance and the measures that will be undertaken to prevent or minimize the adverse effects thereof.*

The Local Chief Executive of every municipal local government unit has the following accountability in relation to human and ecological security (RA 7160, Sec. 444 (a) (3) (vii): *Adopt adequate measures to safeguard and conserve land, mineral, forest and other resources of the municipality* while the Sangguniang Bayan's accountability is defined in Section 447 (a) (5) (i): *Provide for the establishment, maintenance, protection and conservation of communal forests and watersheds, tree parks, greenbelts, mangroves, and other similar forest development projects.*

The Provincial Governor's accountability for human and ecological security within his province is highlighted in Section 465 (a) (3) (v) of RA 7160: *Adopt adequate measures to safeguard and conserve land, mineral, marine, forest and other resources of the province in coordination with the mayors of component cities and municipalities* while the Sangguniang Panlalawigan is expected under Section 468 (a) (1) (iv) *to adopt resources to protect the inhabitants of the province from the harmful effects of man-made or natural disasters and calamities...* and in Section 468 (a) (1) (vi) *to protect the environment and impose penalties for acts which endanger the environment... or of ecological balance.*

SUCH IS THE NOBLE INTENTION OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT CODE OF 1991 to ensure environmental protection and ecological balance.

Local government units that have taken seriously environmental concerns have found lukewarm support from the national government. At the operational level, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources continues to maintain its field offices to provide LGUs the required technical assistance on environmental protection and management BUT with very limited resources to put into action environmental protection. The DENR instituted the co-management schemes (DILG-DENR-LGU) joint memo-circular 2003-1) in sustaining environmental protection and management efforts in collaboration with other national line agencies and the local government units. BUT the impact of such a co-management scheme is yet to be realized.

At the agriculture and fisheries sector, we have the Republic Act 8345 (Agriculture and Fisheries Modernization Act of 1997). The AFMA (section 89) called for the formulation of a National Extension System for Agriculture and Fisheries. The NEAP is aimed

- to address the needs and requirements of the agriculture and fisheries sector;
- to set a unified system in the delivery of quality extension services through “one system, one program” approach; and
- to avoid duplication of efforts and save resources

The NEAP focus:

- Capability Development of the Extension System at all levels;
- Capability Building of the farmer/fisherman as manager/entrepreneur;
- Development of functional extension management model;
- Enrichment/Improvement of extension policies, mechanism and approaches;
- M & E of outcomes and impact of extension activities, messages and processes; and
- Sourcing and generating resources for effective extension.

The CALL is for an integrated regional research, development and extension agenda and program that would use the agro-ecological approach (DA AO No. 1, series of 1990).

A quick revisit of the pro-environment policies would tell us that WE DO NOT LACK THE NECESSARY POLICY ENVIRONMENT that would enable local government units to pursue human and ecological security. Local governments taking responsibility and assuming their accountability for the uplands today, have the RA 7160 and RA 8345, these pro-environment policies to enable them to pursue human ecological security. Moreover, barangays and civil society organizations initiatives are there for LGUs to tap and reckon with for popular support.

TODAY, let us listen to UDP’s experience and its tested development schemes for the uplands. After this day, the initiative rests on the LGUs and its functionaries to replicate and sustain these development schemes for the most vulnerable ecological zones we have, the uplands.