

DISCUSSION PAPER ON: Managing Our Urban Ecosystem for Survival

Gelia T. Castillo

College of Agriculture

University of the Philippines Los Baños

College, Laguna

Dr. Dayrit has defined for us the problems of an urban ecosystem exemplified by Metro Manila. Needless to say the picture is a grim and depressing one. The challenge to all of us lies in the last three pages which say: "Managing the urban ecosystem: Where to begin? "There is no magic management strategy which provides us the winning formula. At best we can identify a set of solutions which have differing degrees of implementability and doability, some of which have been outlined by the author:

- (1) As the saying goes: Let it begin with me; with my family; and household.
- (2) Some of us still think that if squatters and slum dwellers would participate in a **Balik-Probinsiya** program, it will minimize the population pressure in Metro Manila. Studies have shown that very few of them have land to go home to. There may be land, land, everywhere but none for them to keep. A few families own them all. Residential landlessness is as much a rural as well as an urban phenomenon although not as obvious. What about rural residential land reform? They can put up their own houses somehow.
- (3) If the country were to invest in the upgrading of the urban infrastructure for basic services in order to make Metro Manila pleasant for all of us, the amount involved as per ADB estimate is ₱16,640 million. The irony of this investment is that the more we make the city liveable, the more we attract rural-urban migrants and the less money we have for the rural areas. If we set our minds to it, Metro Manila can absorb most of our resources.
- (4) Despite the general environmental degradation in the Metropolis, there is no equality of suffering. The rich "**air- condition**" out the garbage, the air pollution, the

heat and the poor; high-rise condos' tinted windows and draperies do the trick. One of the most interesting dilemmas in urban ecosystem management is the reality that the rich man's garbage is the poor man's livelihood. Can we apply science and technology to make this livelihood more liveable? At the moment, slums and squatters make up a third of the population in the Metropolis. Perhaps when they become 60%, change will take place because the rich will move out of the city and property values in the inner city will drop.

- (5) There is one avenue for change that is going to be available pretty soon. We should use the 1992 elections to choose more accountable public officials. If we cannot even do that wisely, we deserve all the pollution we get. Incidentally, because of the systemic nature of urban problems, electing good Metro Manila officials is not enough. We need environmentally-friendly leaders throughout the country. This is one sphere of Filipino life where "recycling of garbage" is not recommended.
- (6) The paper mentions that 60% of the population growth in Metro Manila is attributed to natural increase and 40% to in-migration. It seems to me that we might be able to do more about the natural increase than about in-migration. With Cardinal Sin willing, why couldn't we have 3,500 natural family planning clinics all over the Metropolis? Provided we cut down ST movies that fuel the imagination, we will either succeed or have a generation of city-born rhythm babies.
- (7) Finally, if we define ecology as sharing, and live our lives on that basis, Metro Manila may still be polluted but perhaps those who share will sleep better and live longer.