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# The health of humans, environment, and the economy

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**"We must all change for the better."**

Economic experts and the International Monetary Fund predict the onset of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression. It will push hundreds of millions into poverty.

Here in the Philippines, the Department of Labor disclosed during the recent Senate hearing on the government's coronavirus response that an estimated 4 to 5 million Filipinos will lose jobs while legislators in the House of Representatives see more than 10 million will be unemployed as the community quarantine restrictions are extended. The extent and complexity of the fallout from the crisis is unprecedented but so is the global response awakened by this existential threat. Inter-sectoral collaboration is no longer a conceptual aspiration but has emerged as a powerful spirit thought to be lost in the post-Baby Boomer, post-Generation X culture.

This awakening is evident in the ongoing interventions from the private sector and civil society to complement the gaping limitations of government resources and agility. Unfairly sullied by the populist posturing of the current administration, the pandemic has somewhat caused a repivoted attitude open to partnerships with private business groups to fight the COVID-19 war with urgency, efficiency and transparency.

Businesses will not survive without sustainability. The disruptions caused by this pandemic has shaken this basic requisite and has caused the closure of half of the country's Micro Small and Medium Enterprises which, according to Department of Trade and Industry data, accounts for 99.5% of the businesses in the country.

To move forward, the leaderships of government and industry must work together on building the country's resiliency to sustain the interlinking dynamics between the health of the population, the environment, and the economy. Regaining the lost momentum of our economy will need the mobilization of the country's best human and natural resources in an environmentally sustainable ecosystem that will result in inclusive economic prosperity for the current and future generations. Each sector will need to rethink its role and re-engineer a new path from the lessons of the pandemic.

The amazingly clean air in Metro-Manila during these lockdowns, perhaps unseen since the 60s, shows the magnitude of the pollution emitted from our daily activities. This should punctuate the urgency for an efficient low emission mass transportation infrastructure that would make private vehicles more of a luxury than a necessity and put an end to the chaotic reign of jeepneys to obsolescence.

Strengthening our public health systems to fully implement a truly universal healthcare system will obviously be on top of the priority. This will need the cooperation of the pharmaceutical industry and its allied linkages to contribute innovative approaches to ensure accessible and quality healthcare services and products ready to be deployed in crisis and non-crisis scenarios.

The big drop in electricity demand during the quarantine months because of the suspended business operations of the manufacturing and service sectors saved us from looming brownouts during the summer months, but the long-term supply outlook will still need more base load power plants as more business operations transition to new normal conditions. Pressured by environmentalists to ban fossil fueled generation plants, consumer subsidized and expensive renewables cannot beat the reliability and cost of coal. The best option for now is to build new and efficient power plants that comply with emission standards or, nuclear power.

Responsible stewardship of our natural resources will address our food security problems by using technology to develop productive marine and agricultural ecosystems. Our potential as one of the most mineralized countries is a low hanging fruit that just needs a stable policy regime to jumpstart a long dormant industry that can become a major economic pillar that will support long-term developed in the remote, unserved areas of the country.

Probably the biggest lesson that hit us all is how technology has become an indispensable tool for interaction in a social distancing world. Imagine how much worse the world would be if we had no digital technologies to connect us outside of our quarantine quarters. Our digital infrastructure must be a top priority in the government's Build, Build, Build program that will need the right private sector partners to build thousands of telco towers and fiber cable networks to deliver fast and reliable broadband services to unserved areas. This is a proven stimulus for investments and new business opportunities.

Warnings of face masks and Personal Protection Equipment adding to the garbage pollution in our oceans is another side effect of the pandemic that reprises a complex waste management problem that needs a whole of society approach.

The timeline of this pandemic will depend on the cooperation of every inhabitant of the planet. When we finally defeat this virus, we cannot afford to revert to the old ways. We must all change for the better.

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