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Future-proofing the Philippines

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A picture making the rounds in the internet shows a diver about to be devoured from below by a shark, jaws wide open, labeled “COVID-19.” Directly under it is a bigger shark labeled “The Upcoming Economic Crisis,” poised to eat the first shark and its prey. Underneath them all is a huge shark, similarly with jaws wide open, poised to take them all in. That giant shark is labeled “Climate Change.”

That picture aptly captures the warning made by the Brain Trust Inc. (BTI) white paper that I featured last week (“People and planet in peril,” 7/3/20), where I focused on the five challenges its writers identified to be underlying today’s problems: Carbon, Celsius, Contagion, Congestion, and Consumption. Its authors show that the contagion currently gripping the world is intricately linked to the other four Cs that cause and aggravate climate change—now widely seen to be the single biggest existential threat to humanity. Hence, we must find our way out of this contagion fully cognizant of the larger threat that we all confront over the long term.

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The group offers a three-fold strategy for moving forward: systematize, scale, and shift. To systematize means that the Recovery Plan to chart our way out of this crisis must be deliberately designed as a foundation for long-term sustainability, and not just a patchwork of quick fixes that could lead us to a state worse than prior to the pandemic. Reduction of climate change vulnerability must be systematically integrated in the recovery agenda and in overall governance. For example, the infrastructure program

must prioritize public investments that create employment in agriculture, fisheries, and ecosystem services, thereby enhancing our food and environmental security.

To systematize also means sustainable development planning based on ecosystems, rather than administrative boundaries. Local government units (LGUs) must thus set up mechanisms for inter-LGU collaboration, already done by progressive municipalities in Mindanao. Target initiatives could include investing in environmental formations like coral reefs, sea grass meadows, watersheds, mangroves, and others that provide critical ecosystem services supporting primary production activities.

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