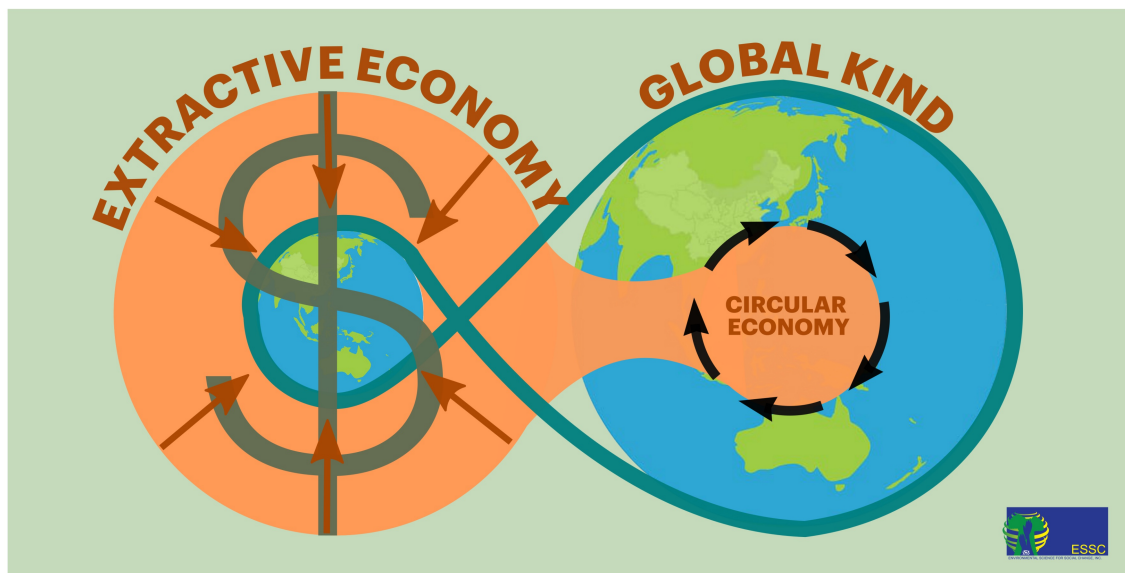


The river above and the mercy needed for its land, oceans, and peoples: Asia Pacific context

ecojesuit.com/the-river-above-and-the-mercy-needed-for-its-land-oceans-and-peoples-asia-pacific-

THE INNER AND OUTER STRUGGLE OF OIKOS: ECONOMY & ECOLOGY



**Transformation needed to live in the same local and global household:
Right-connecting, reconciling, kindness, compassion and mercy to all**

Pedro Walpole SJ

Asia and the Pacific comprise diverse geographical biomes, from Himalaya, the Ganges on through the Indian sub-continent, the Mekong basin and connected lands, on to the tropical forests and waters of archipelagos, islands, and atolls that are all intricately woven into the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

The Pacific, one third of the planet's surface, is the largest climate determinant on Earth. Asia and the Pacific share a common image in the 'River Above'– the Pacific Ocean is the life, the river of Asia feeding all rivers, seasons and lives. The surface area and ocean currents absorb energy and generate thermals and other air flows forming the weather patterns and events while sustaining their movement westward. This rich diversity is gravely threatened.

Recent and growing changes in the ocean due to climate change are driving the extreme weather events and sea level rise, increasing the vulnerability of the people and lands. In this context a right to a stable climate is being defined.

Peoples, forests and oceans are intricately linked

Over 451 million Asians live in or around tropical forests and savannahs, and of them 84 million live in extreme poverty.

The Church is a minority

In the vastly diversified cultural world of Asia Pacific, the Church faces multiple challenges. Given Catholics are a minority faith, being 3% of the population, communicating is a further challenge, yet in being of the local culture, this gives an opportunity for accompanying and responding to those in need.

Global finance

Economics, businesses, advertising and markets have to promote and learn to live within the ecology of this planet. This is the key principle behind the five following proposals. There is no balance possible until the *oikos* of economics and ecology are balanced as one household. Whether it is the Communist model of capitalism or the Western model that is espoused, the model has to change energy sources and halt land use change. These are 2 of the 9 planetary boundaries where humans need to get a better balance and we can only do this together in a de-polarized techno-society where trust and the common good share in the one fragile reality.

Five proposals from Asia Pacific

1. Transforming business education

We seek a new kind of education for business leaders – one that enables students to take a deeper look at the current state of our society and incorporate needed change into our business purpose. We need to provide opportunities for students to understand how marginalization is sustained by market strategies and that those marginalized have a rightful participation in forming a balanced world. We have to redefine the purpose of commerce or of a development project where it is locally extractive and exploitative and lacks accountability to society.

Moving towards a systems change means making time to engage communities in a meaningful dialogue where everyone is equal. It requires space to reflect on what are the objectives of society and what it means to be in solidarity with the people and planet. This involves a deepening process of understanding one's self: Who am I? It is a fundamental step in unlearning some business practices, in order to relearn purpose.

Business ethics today is sustainability. Guidelines such as the UN Guidelines in Response to Climate Change need to become global policies for corporate accountability.

In an upland community in Mindanao, Philippines, we have a field course called *Seeking a new business paradigm: Engaging marginalized communities and youth in agriculture*, where graduate students of business management visit indigenous communities to dialogue and understand the challenges they face and to listen to their hope and vision for a more just future.

2. Engaging Indigenous Peoples in search of integrity

Indigenous territories shelter 80% of the remaining biodiversity in the world. Their integral relationship to the land is important in securing our collective future. The rest of the world can learn from their wisdom and way of life that respects the dignity of all life. Giving voice to Indigenous Peoples can deepen global youth-led solidarity for climate action that is on a dramatic rise.

An estimated 210 to 260 million people who live in Asia Pacific self-identify as indigenous or tribal, that is 70% of the world's indigenous population. There is a great need for interfaith dialogue and for growing trust across societies.

An ecclesial network that will facilitate collaboration among Indigenous Peoples, and with the Catholic Church could share in this needed solidarity. During the *Integral Ecology International Conference* in March 2019 in Georgetown University, the Asia Pacific working group agreed that the "River Above" is a unifying image for forest and coastal peoples in Asia Pacific.

3. Engaging the youth in moving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The challenge of adopting the SDGs as a framework for action needs to be taken to a deeper level. SDGs teach us that the problems we face are interconnected and thus will also require greater partnership and collaboration. A third of the 169 targets highlight the role of youth and in the region 60% of the 15-24-age group (700million) are in AP with 12% living in extreme poverty. We also see a greater effort in defining how specific SDGs relate to our context; SDG16++ is where peace building is the foundation for greater engagement and sustainability.

The global school strike for climate is gaining traction. Establishing networks with much care for local realities and vulnerabilities is key. Mindanao, where I am, indigenous youth lead in forest regeneration focusing efforts on SDG 15++ (Life on Land) and other goals and connected targets. SDG 4 (Quality Education) is where they seek a type of education that is grounded in their cultural values and knowledge.

4. Reducing social vulnerabilities and disaster risks

Much vulnerability is reduced when there is socio-economic inclusion of the margins; this allows people take basic action for their own safety and resilience. Safer land must be made available, stronger housing and special awareness of single parent families are vital responses. Poverty is not just financial but basically defines what it is to be socially and climatically vulnerable; most of the poor when exposed to fluctuations in market or climate are vulnerable, as they have no financial or physical buffer, so what might be normal events for others are already disastrous for the poor.

Many may not be poor today but can become poor tomorrow. We see where wars drive migration and also where economic and environment vulnerability increase the imbalances that result in increased migration.

5. Addressing polarization

We are challenged to make deep transitions in our society. The world is radically shifting as contrasting opinions become the basis for conflicting polarized views and the call for action is diffused.

We are caught in today's world where the dynamic is polarization and politicization of words and what powerful people want others to follow. Polarization all the more divides the energy to make human progress. Polarization feeds the negative and much of the energy and empathy needed in the daily response to those in the margins is lost.

Genuine and uniting action at the local level, though minimal in its initial impact, is critical in gaining awareness, in maintaining the social fabric, and in preparing the ground support for active participation and acceptance of policy development and broader social accountability.

Professionalization has taken over the general sense of community. I no longer ask a youth what she or he wants to become. Instead, I ask where they want to rear their children. We have been increasingly "professionalized" to keep moving with the economic opportunity, and therefore losing our sense of belonging in community, of civic action and objective. While many accept the facts of the way things are and say 'what can we do?' we need to shift to ask 'what must we do?' Thankfully some youth are beginning to ask the latter. Greta Thunberg and social action remind us that it is great to have people out there engaged in the interconnectivity of society and life.

We need carbon pricing and must address the specifics of species extinction and loss of ecosystems; the injustices are grave and unbearable. The problems are much more integral to the human condition and life as social beings. We need personal transformation that calls forth societal transformation. Can we shift the argument from ideological contradictions, and focus instead on the contrasting experiences of reality?

The mercy needed

The effort is to get society to better act together for the greater good while seeking to reduce the losses and vulnerabilities that younger generations are going to face. Can there be reconciliation for their sake and for the sake of the environment? Can we have mercy on the environment and not exploit it for all its immediate worth until nothing is left?

This does not mean we do not speak out or become passive. This means we need to create other spaces that consider with calm urgency how the other can be included so together the change is made.

In getting caught up the other day in arguments of justice and recompense in the face of outrageous violence, and massive vulnerability in the face of typhoons, while lives and resources were draining away, I found myself just asking for mercy; and the lines from my high school days that I had not heard since, came to me:

The quality of mercy is not strained. It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven...

That in the course of justice none of us should see salvation, we do pray for mercy...

We are crossing a threshold in time we cannot avoid. I see politicised conflict as reinforcing the differences and opposing resolution. While irrational forces can be overwhelming, rational calculations may prove faulty and exploiting the change by one side or the other can have unintended consequences. Again and again lucidity and humility and not mastery of events are the better human options. Along every step of the way, policy has to be developed with recognition of the contrasting stances and ensuring inclusiveness as much as possible. We need to be deeply aware that in the present human context, we are all part of the problem. So as we cross the threshold, change must come from a self-criticism and not from blame of the other.

The ultimate human response is to seek change through mercy, and with all. Mercy is what we need to survive, while continuing to seek answers. The paradigm of change is thus about greater unity in human action, reconciliation with creation, and the recognition that what is needed is mercy.