

German Bishop's conference on "Religion and Development"

12 June, 2017

There are different models and understandings of development in the world today as to its impact on the developing world. For some people development means building institutions, organizations, and educational establishments. Religions have greatly contributed to these forms of development, providing the infrastructure where society can grow, people can learn new ideas and implement them to build prosperous society.

Others believe development means promoting change and improvement in economic and infrastructural expansion. This is very necessary and important. Multinational corporations and development banks engage in this kind of development model. However the trickle down from this kind of development is not very effective in alleviating dire poverty. Religious Institutional building for educational development has tended to create a richer ruling elite that ignore or oppress the poor.

In the context of the Mission and work that I am engaged with in the Preda Foundation I would like to state what is our perspective in a developing nation like the Philippines what "development" means to us.

Development for us takes its meaning from its context of a society in the Philippines where there is grave social injustice, oppression and human rights violations. Our focus therefore is on **Human Development** through **Community Development**. It is organizing for action to benefit the people at the bottom of the Pyramid of hoped for prosperity. It is starting with the poor.

It is a commitment to serving poor people motivated by convictions that are based on the awareness of what it means to be fully human, inspired by gospel values. By these values we view the individual person endowed with invaluable sacred human dignity and human rights. These are at the heart of human and community development work and are of the greatest priority and importance.

For us at the Preda Foundation **Human Development** is linked to **community** development where all our resources and efforts are focused on the needs of the poorest persons in a cultural community setting and those efforts are directed to empower them as individuals and as a group towards greater sustainable and self-supporting living. We do the work by the principles of inclusion, sustainability, empowerment, group organization, participation, education, respect for the basic values of universal human rights and personal dignity, freedom and health.

It is an activity among people where human interaction is embracing all persons irrespective of their ethnicity, religious or social background. We work in the slums, in the jails in the grass roots villages and town community.

We at the Preda Foundation started 43 years ago. We are motivated by commitment and compassion for the human suffering and plight of the exploited, the human suffering of the abused youth and children, women and poor rural people. We developed responses to organize people and services for suffering human rights violations and extrajudicial killings. Today these sad and challenging realities are with us.

- As in the past we continue work to reduce or alleviate hunger by sustainable development projects such as developmental Fair Trade, providing community organizing, training for hundreds of small farmers to participate in Fair Trading of their products and achieving Organic standards and status.

•
Also implementing with the participation of the people small infrastructure projects, water systems, and tree planting for environmental sustainability with the indigenous Aeta people for example.

* Community development needs educated youth and we provide direct help to poor students through educational scholarships is another way to provide teachers for the remote rural schools.

* We also have direct intervention to help child victims of human trafficking and sexual abuse. We provide residential care for the 43 child victims of human trafficking and sexual abuse over 110 a year

* There is direct social intervention to rescue children from dangerous jail cells and provide 38 of them (100 a year) with an alternative residential community home for a new life, change, and education.

* A **preventive education team** provides community education through seminars and training in awareness building on human rights and dignity of children. The seminars are engaging community leaders, parents, and teachers, agents of change through direct training in communities to combat human trafficking and sexual abuse of children.

Human and Community Development also addresses the wider community on a local and national level.

To help change the oppressive situation of human exploitation and social injustice that is ever-present we take a **prophetic role** to speak truth to the powers that rule the local communities and the nation. Speaking out through social and mainstream media and keeping before them the values of human dignity in a environment of violence and death.

We also lobby internationally by speaking to parliamentarians in the Bundestag, in the Irish parliament in the US Congress, to get their support for human development responses and action against sex tourism, the death penalty, the reduction of the age of criminal liability of children and positively for greater Philippine government action to implement anti-child pornography laws and promote new legislation in countries to pass laws to ban the overseas travel of convicted sex offenders.

Traditional religious institutions are not very active in widely implementing the social teaching of the church in the Philippines.

Motivation for our human development work is based on belief in Gospel values. We are guided by the values seen in the stories of the Good Samaritan. (Lk.10, vs 25-37) By the words of Jesus of Nazareth, Children are the most important of all and deserve justice when abused. (Matt.18. 1-8) We adopted the criteria of life as required by the final Judgment, (Matthew 25. vs 31 to 46). We adopted the gospel values of social equality Lk. 12 .16 -21, etc.

The other models and forms of development activities by religious institutions are of importance and ought to have close links to the grass roots of society where human needs is greatest and make that a priority of human and community development.

Shay Cullen

