

ROLE OF ISLAND UNIVERSITIES FOR THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ISLANDS IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC REGION

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I am deeply honored to be invited as one of the participants to the Jeju National University session at the Jeju Forum. I come from the Philippines, particularly from Palawan, which is distinguished as the “World’s Most Beautiful Island” and “The Last Ecological Frontier of the Philippines”. For the continual existence of a unique ecological system, Republic Act 7611 or the “Strategic Environmental Plan (SEP) for Palawan Act” was enacted to spell out how sustainable living in Palawan Island can be done. Despite the natural beauty of the island and the protection accorded by RA 7611, it is deeply scarred by super typhoons, marred by environmental pollution in many places, threatened by population expansion, and overwhelmed by rapid urbanization in guise of development.

The Western Philippines University, a recipient of regional and national recognitions as one of the “Most Sustainable and Eco-friendly Schools” from 2013 to 2017, commits itself to global environmental action as we work towards our Vision of becoming a leading knowledge center for sustainable development of West Philippines and beyond. We are facing the challenge of fighting for and standing up for the environment. There were many instances when we stood against the so-called giants who are taking advantage of their positions to destroy our island and its ecological richness. Their taking advantage took many forms: an aggressive campaign to put up of a coal-fired power plant right beside our campus and near a marine protected area; the exclusion of a number of protected areas in a new legislation; both large- and small-scale illegal mining; and many others. Probably we share the same experience with some of you here.

What then is our role for the sustainable development of Palawan Island to respond to these dramatic environmental conversions?

I. Enhance university’s initiatives

A. Streamlining the University's RDE Agenda in relation to sustainable development of small island ecosystems.

- a. The island's sustainable development shall be a priority in the University's research, development and extension agenda. We shall intensify our efforts towards sustainable use of both terrestrial and water environments.
- b. We shall look more on developing environment-friendly RDE programs that will not only favor big industries but also enhance the well-being of the community.
- c. We shall do more research on domesticating and propagating endangered and threatened species as a means of assisting their regeneration rather than restricting their use.

B. Developing environmentally-enhanced Curriculum

- a. We will promote the integration of environmental science courses in our curricular offerings. All curricular programs shall require a subject or topic on environmental management and sustainable development, discussing case studies from island provinces.
- b. Curricula on sciences, i.e., environmental science, fisheries science, marine science, shall be extended to include the application of knowledge generated from science to management, leading to sustainable development.

C. Establishment of a Center for Sustainable Island Living. The University will set up a Center for Sustainable Island Living to serve as the implementing unit of the sustainable island plan of the University. The priority components for the center will be geared towards management of environment, natural resources, and sustainable urbanization including ecosystem-friendly enterprises, food security, renewable energy, and eco-tourism for the well-being of the islanders.

II. Link the University. We hope to become part of an Asia Pacific-wide organization of island universities to unify our actions towards the promotion

of sustainable island development. Some of the activities which we envision to participate in are the following:

1. Asia Pacific Island University Planning. Organize an Asia Pacific-wide (Universities) strategic planning directed towards sustainable islands among member universities or creating “Centers” per university.
2. Asia Pacific Island University Research Forum. Organize forum for sharing and presentation of research results and experiences in sustainable development of an island. Exchange students and teachers among universities members.
3. Publication of Asia Pacific Island Universities Newsletter. Develop an annual newsletter/magazine/journal on Island Sustainable Development among Asia Pacific Regions to update all members on what is going on in other islands and island universities. This will mitigate engineers, architect etc. to under mind the value of the environment in implementing their projects.

III. Involve our Stakeholders. The fight is not ours alone. We can stand better against the threats to our islands if we are working hand-in-hand with our stakeholders.

1. Government agencies. The university shall forge agreements with government agencies to assist them in planning, policy-making, and decision-making using our research findings through extension services.
2. Civil Society Organizations. The university shall partner with civil society groups being strong advocates of environmental protection and conservation.
3. Business Sector. The university shall conduct research on environment-friendly technologies that could be adopted by the business sector.

4. University alumni organization. The university shall tap its alumni to promote the principles of sustainable island development wherever they are located.
5. Student Organizations. The university shall organize environmental youth fora and science organizations to prepare the young generations on the challenges of sustainable island development. We shall be in partnerships with high schools in promoting environmental initiatives that will enhance the students' understanding and appreciation of the environment.

I strongly believe that universities, such as the Western Philippines University, should be proactive when it comes to addressing threats to the ecological and urban environment of the islands of the Asia Pacific Region, in our case, of Palawan Island. As lifetime island dwellers, our lives are anchored on the health of our island.

We welcome development that is not destructive. We want to feed the future without penalizing today's population. We have the knowledge; thus we have the power to achieve sustainable development of our islands.

Thank you and God bless.