

The CODE-NGO Covenant on Philippine Development

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Preamble

Bearing in mind that the right to development is an inherent, inalienable, and universal human right granted by the Creator and upheld by the community of nations in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the UN Declaration on the Right to Development;

Aware that the Philippine Government is a signatory to these laws and international instruments and that consistent with these, the Philippine Constitution and the Civil Code recognize the need to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms without distinction as to age, race, color, gender, language, religion, political belief, class or social status;

Mindful that by virtue of the Philippine Government's vote for the UN Declaration on the Right to Development, the ratification of the 1987 Constitution and the trust reposed in it by the people, the State has the primary responsibility for providing the conditions favorable to national development;

Concerned that the nation still finds itself confronted with serious obstacles to development;

Aware of the broad people's initiatives, through organizations, to respond to the challenges of development and change;

We, the Philippine Development Non-Governmental Organizations therefore proclaim this Covenant on Philippine Development, hereinafter referred to as the Covenant, to unite us in a common effort to promote, protect and assert the right to development of the people.

Part I

Development Principles

We stand by the following fundamental principles of development:

1. The primary goal of development is the empowerment of the people, the satisfaction of their basic needs, and the fulfillment of their human rights.
2. Development should be integrated, holistic, resilient, and regenerative, taking into account both the material and non-material needs of individuals and communities, ecological sustainability, and the improvement of capacities of the natural ecosystems.
3. The people are the primary force of development. Development should lead to the inclusion and full participation of women, youth and all other vulnerable and most marginalized sectors in all facets of national life. Development should leave no one behind.
4. The people, in symbiosis with nature, are the primary beneficiary of development. Government policies and programs should be geared toward the enhancement of people's potentials and well-being, equitable distribution of wealth, power and access to resources to people, and safeguarding of conditions necessary for nature's renewal and restoration.
5. Development should pursue a sustainable future. It ensures a harmonious and respectful relationship between people and nature. Development should be an exercise of responsible utilization and stewardship of natural wealth and resources benefiting present and future generations.
6. Development requires recognition and enhancement of religious and cultural diversity in Philippine society.
7. In the pursuit of the desired goal of development, the responsible and cooperative spirit should prevail. Government, business, media, and civil society should forge innovative partnerships for development that benefits all.
8. Development involves cooperation among peoples of different nations on the basis of peaceful and meaningful coexistence and respect for each nation's sovereignty and national integrity.

Part II

Goals for Philippine Development

Philippine development is predicated on the attainment of the following goals:

THE PRESERVATION OF NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY

- Defense and preservation of sovereign rights in the national territory, its archipelagic baselines, domains, and natural resources through the rule of law.
- Categorical rejection of all forms of foreign intervention in the nation's affairs and impositions of multilateral institutions and foreign governments contrary to the national interest.
- Critical engagement with global market that opens further avenues for genuine economic development.
- Setting up of effective safeguards and compensatory programs prior and during the implementation of international trade and investment agreements in order to improve domestic players' competitiveness, as well as protect those most adversely affected by economic openness.
- Protection of the rights and welfare of our overseas Filipino workers and their families and the expedited and expanded efforts to offer them meaningful options for repatriation and integration back into our home economy, political system and society.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION, CONSERVATION AND REGENERATION

- Effective implementation of a strategic education and information campaign and curriculum on environmental protection and conservation in the formal and non-formal education systems.
- Strict enforcement of environmental laws and policy reforms, prohibition of environmentally destructive practices, continuing ecological research and community-based resource management
- Promotion of integrated and sustainable management of natural resources and land use, ecosystem conservation, regeneration, restoration, and resilience
- Champion climate change adaptation and mitigation measures
- Securing and protection of the rights of ecosystems and species to exist, thrive and regenerate
- Recognition, protection, elevation, and replication of our indigenous peoples' traditional knowledge of the natural ecosystems

EQUITABLE ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND EMPLOYMENT GENERATION

- Protection of ancestral domains, implementation of genuine agrarian, aquatic and urban land reform and sustainable development and industrialization.

- Creation of greater opportunities for gainful employment for all and continuing educational reforms for skills improvement of the country's labor force.
- Promotion of the country's industrialization through an industrial policy that harnesses the creativity and entrepreneurial spirit of Filipinos in priority sectors and generates quality jobs for all.
- Promotion of labor security and just compensation.
- Promotion of alternative economic schemes such as microfinance organizations, social enterprises, and savings-based autonomous cooperatives and its principles of cooperativism.
- Expansion of access to a wide range of products and services in the formal financial system, notably: savings, credit, payments, health and unemployment insurance, education loans, pensions, remittance services and investments.
- Provision of meaningful opportunities in the country for the Philippines' burgeoning middle class in order to meet their ambitions here rather than abroad.

EFFECTIVE, DEMOCRATIC AND PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE

- Promotion of transparency, accountability, responsiveness, and efficiency among public officials.
- Freedom of information across all branches of government
- Universal protection, respect, and observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms, especially as stated in the Philippine Constitution
- Combatting misinformation, disinformation, fake news, and other ways of sharing false information especially through social media
- Institutionalization of structures and mechanisms for meaningful participation of NGOs and People's Organizations (POs) in decision-making at the local and national levels with regard to development policies and programs and their enforcement.
- Full implementation of local autonomy, decentralization and devolution, and participation of citizens, especially the vulnerable and marginalized sectors, in governance.
- Upholding the Rule of Law, i.e. that no one is above the law and the law is applied equally and fairly.
- Strengthening of democratic institutions, and protection of democratic processes

SOCIAL PROTECTION, SERVICES, AND WELLBEING

- Fair and equitable access to basic social services for all, especially food security, quality healthcare and education, social welfare, and decent and affordable shelter
- Locally led, timely and appropriate humanitarian response and resilience work that support and empower affected families and communities
- An effective social protection system for all, and affirmative action and holistic support for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups
- Promotion of the culture and practice of solidarity, cooperation and sharing among families and communities

THE PEACEFUL RESOLUTION OF ALL ARMED CONFLICTS

- The peaceful and democratic resolution of all armed conflicts based on critical examination of the roots of the problems.

- Promotion of dialogue and consensus-building among all armed groups with the participation of community members, NGOs and POs
- Effective delivery of significant equitable support, such as economic activities, administrative and social services, and technical assistance to affected families and communities to rebuild lives and re-establish trust
- Institutionalization of processes for Transitional Justice and Reconciliation and holistic healing

THE SAFEGUARDING OF FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS AND RIGHTS

- The safeguarding of fundamental freedoms and human rights as enshrined in the Philippine Constitution, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights and all other international laws and legal instruments to which the Philippine Government is signatory to, particularly those concerning women, children and other vulnerable groups
- Independence of the judiciary and provision of legal aid or free legal services to the poor and marginalized
- Respect for the principles of rule of law and proper enforcement of law and order
- Promotion and protection of human rights in digital environments, particularly freedom of expression and association, privacy rights and data protection, and freedom from harmful content and disinformation online

FOSTERING A CULTURE OF INVOLVEMENT

- Growth of an informed citizenry involved in national and local issues and committed to democratic reform and addressing the problems of injustice, poverty and marginalization, and inequality.
- Cultivation of commitment to and compassion for the poor and the marginalized and a spirit of service and volunteerism in the pursuit of development work.
- Practice of inclusion and non-discrimination based on gender, race, age, religion, culture, and economic status

PROTECTION OF INDIGENOUS LAND AND CULTURES

- Recognition, respect, and protection of/for the right of all indigenous peoples to self-determination.
- Promotion of people's traditions and indigenous knowledge, skills and practices.
- Initiating of avenues and opportunities for the preservation and creative flourishing of indigenous and Filipino culture.

HARNESSING DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

- Recognition of the internet as a global public good and new digital technologies as potential contributors to holistic development of people and to impactful lives and livelihoods, while mitigating its risks on people and nature
- Promotion of digital inclusion, digital literacy, and participation of all, especially women, in digital life through universal, equitable, and meaningful access to the infrastructure of and content on the internet

- Continuing development of digital technologies that serve the public interest and are free from domination and control by States and private companies

Part III Responsibilities of Development NGOs

Consistent with our development principles and the pursuit of our development goals, we shall maintain the soundness and integrity of our organizations by ensuring that:

A. Our organizations serve clear development objectives consistent with our vision-mission and understood by all our board members, staff, and stakeholders: beneficiaries, donors/funders, academics, other partners, and the youth.

B. We acknowledge accountability to our various publics and stakeholders. We shall manage our organizations with the highest standards of competence, integrity and professionalism, making full and responsible use of our resources. We will ensure that our governance structures are designed to facilitate the implementation of our objectives and that these mechanisms are not compromised by conflicting interests.

Specifically, each of our organizations will ensure:

- That the composition of its highest governing body is in accord with criteria set under the organization's by-laws, and that the members of this body shall serve according to the prescribed by-laws of the organizations.
- That this body holds regular meetings and elections of officers in accordance with the organization's by-laws.
- That this body is involved in policy and program formulation, thereby giving the organization necessary guidance and assistance.
- That regular policy reviews are conducted involving both board and staff; and that such reviews shall become occasions for open, truthful, meaningful, and productive discussions, and therefore instruments for strengthening the organization and its development interventions.
- That there are clearly-stated policies on conflicts of interest that cover members of the governing body, members of the staff, and volunteers.
- That there are regular meetings between the chief executive officer and the staff, and that such meetings facilitate open communication among all program implementers and effective program implementation.
- That our performance indicators, time tables, financial plans and systems for monitoring, evaluation and documentation are established, clearly defined and implemented.

C. Our organizations will ensure that our financial policies, systems and practices comply with existing laws, generally accepted accounting principles, and agreements reached with our donors and fund sources. We shall also endeavor to grow as financially sustainable organizations, utilizing resource generation strategies that are consistent with development values, and with our organization's vision-mission-goal statements.

D. To remain relevant and responsive amidst constantly changing environments, we shall endeavor to:

1. Curate studies or participate in regular analysis of the global/regional and national/local socio-political environment to discern implications on development work and develop creative responses to emerging challenges.
2. Strive to infuse into our work at the community level an understanding of the wider contexts of development; and constantly relate our interventions with the endeavors of other groups who share similar values and development principles in the areas where we operate.
3. Continually root our work in the principles and praxis of community organizing-community development, in its evolving form and practice, such that our interventions remain faithful to the needs and problems of the constituencies we work with.
4. Work in increasing collaboration with fellow NGOs and other civil society organizations (CSOs), government agencies (national and local levels), and other stakeholders: beneficiaries, donors/funders, academics, other partners, and the youth, promoting dialogue and consensus building so as to widen the reach, eliminate overlaps and competition and, in the process, increase the impact of our efforts in behalf of the marginalized.
5. Continue to popularize or innovate programs and projects that immediately and strategically address the needs of the poor, building upon past experiences, successes, good practices, and current initiatives of fellow CSOs in different parts of the country.
6. Strive to acquire the necessary competencies that will imbue increasing relevance and impact in our interventions.
7. Reinvent our roles, organizational structures and processes, attitudes and modes of intervention in response to the demands of change and always in the context of reaffirming, strengthening and promoting the core values and principles espoused by this Covenant. Strive to create venues for serious reflection on the role, identity and direction of CSOs in particular conjunctures.
8. Continue to look for ways to encourage among the young and among members of different professions an interest and a commitment to development work, so as to harness fresh energies, new perspectives and relevant competencies for the challenges that lie ahead.
9. Continue to nurture future leaders from the CSO community who shall competently lead at the national and local levels and keep the principles and practice of development work alive and flourishing across generations.

E. To help the CAUCUS OF DEVELOPMENT NGO NETWORKS (CODE-NGO) sustain its vital work of consensus-building, innovation, leadership and advocacy – both within the NGO and larger CSO community and outside it, within policy-making circles as well as the larger community of the general public—we shall:

1. Strive to align our programs to achieve the goals and objectives that we have set for CODE-NGO.
2. Demonstrate our accountability by regularly submitting annual and financial reports, organizational profiles and other information that may be required of us—this is to help CODE-NGO develop a comprehensive and current perspective of development work.

3. Actively participate in relevant CODE-NGO activities and, wherever it is within our capacity, initiate these activities in our respective areas with CODE-NGO or other members.
4. Regularly contribute resources to enable CODE-NGO to continuously serve our needs as members and serve as a catalyst and leading light in the CSO community.
5. Strengthen and improve decision-making processes and consensus building mechanisms within CODE-NGO.

F. In relation to our STAFF, we shall:

1. Design and ensure adequate resources for human resource for development programs that emphasize both skills and developmental values.
2. Promote wellbeing and address issues faced by development practitioners as they practice and grow in their profession.
3. Adopt gender-sensitive and non-discriminatory practices in dealing with our staff.
4. Provide just compensation and benefits to promote staff welfare.
5. Comply with labor law standards and BIR rules and regulations.
6. Encourage a simple yet decent and dignified lifestyle consistent with our solidarity with the disadvantaged communities we serve.

G. In relation to the COMMUNITIES we work with, we shall:

1. Protect and enhance the integrity and autonomy of people's organizations (POs) to instill vigilance and safeguard freedom of expression.
2. Respect indigenous knowledge and practice and enhance the culture, structures and initiatives.
3. Provide access to all forms of relevant information and appropriate technology, strategies, and systems.
4. Empower communities toward democratic, participative and shared leadership.
5. Facilitate linkages, cooperation and collaboration among POs and communities with local government units (LGUs), funding agencies and other support mechanisms.
6. Assist in translating their experiences in program implementation into policy recommendation.
7. Support empowering economic structures and systems founded on members' democratic control and equitable distribution of benefit.
8. Make our organizations safe for community members, most especially children and young people, by safeguarding them from harm, abuse, and distress.

H. In relation to our FELLOW NGOs, we shall:

1. Promote greater cooperation and solidarity, through constant dialogue, sharing of resources, information, expertise and experiences, and enhance mutual development based upon the premise that we are partners, not competitors in people's development.
2. Maintain a high standard of professionalism based on honesty and dedication in the service of the people.
3. Strive for gradual self-reliance by developing skills and generating resources.
4. Strive towards unity while upholding pluralism in the interpretation and expression of development work.

5. Ensure that inter-NGO relations are based on mutual respect and independence such that the work of others is acknowledged, conflict among agencies found in the same communities is resolved, and the integrity of each agency is enhanced and its personnel developed.
6. Promote the rights, welfare and development of NGO personnel.

I. In relation to our partner FUNDING AGENCIES, we shall:

1. Nurture transparency, mutual respect and mutual accountability with our partners.
2. Strive toward a two-way sharing and appreciation of development frameworks, areas of priority and procedures.
3. Agree upon the parameters of success through evaluations that are participatory in nature.
4. Comply with all mutually agreed upon grant, loan or partnership provisions.
5. Strive to diversify partners so that our organizations do not become mere extensions of particular funding agencies.

J. In relation to the GOVERNMENT, we shall:

1. Strive to create an atmosphere of openness, mutual respect and critical engagement based on the perspective that people's organizations (POs) and non-government organizations (NGOs) perform an important role in a democratic society.
2. Foster genuine dialogue - where each party is mindful of the other and is intentional in establishing a living mutual relation with the other, where all are heard, where different information/knowledge are articulated - especially in areas and programs where both GOs and POs/NGOs are involved.
3. Advocate for common or complementing goals, objectives and methodologies for programs and projects, while maintaining the autonomy of POs and NGOs.
4. Participate in governance processes at all levels and monitor/evaluate government, especially in relation to the implementation of policies and programs and the performance of government officials in which we are involved.
5. Strive to engage with government at all levels in creative and strategic ways:
 - o Direct our advocacy efforts toward obtaining policies that will promote strategic reforms.
 - o Find ways to direct public assistance or resources to where they are more appropriately suited.
 - o Formulate and propose concrete alternatives to policies and programs that we find inimical to the interests of the poor and marginalized.
 - o Offer our services in performing some of government's functions especially if it will be of benefit to our partner communities and if it will increase our leverage for negotiation.

K. In relation to the BUSINESS SECTOR, we shall:

1. Strive to create an atmosphere of openness, mutual respect based on the principle that development is a multisectoral concern and engagement of government, business, media, and civil society (including academe).
2. Expand partnerships for social development and corporate philanthropy and sustainability initiatives through dialogues, joint programs for development, sharing of resources, and advocacies for the common good.

3. Build the capacities of our social enterprises and cooperatives and establish an equitable arrangement in the value chain of businesses.
4. Contribute to the growth of good corporate citizenship in the country by recognizing models of good business practices.
5. Promote corporate social awareness and social responsibilities of business sector and translate this into meaningful services and programs that are beneficial to people, planet (nature), profit, and purpose.

L. In relation to the ACADEMIC SECTOR, we shall:

1. Sustain an internal self-reflexive process among our staff, members and volunteers in order to critically examine the theoretical frameworks, assumptions and biases that undermine our practices.
2. Develop and publish knowledge products of our lived experiences (successes and failures) in development work and register these with open licensing and public domain tools.
3. Collaborate with scholars and academic institutions to explore continued partnerships in teaching, research, and community engagement.
4. Require proper attribution of our knowledge products and allow others, especially scholars and academic institutions, to make use of our work for theory building and enhanced application.
5. Utilize academic research for the benefit of our communities, and, in turn, we ask partner academics to assist us in continuously refining our understanding of our own work by sharing their analyses of the empirics we provide.

M. In relation to MEDIA, we shall:

1. Uphold the freedom of the media, in its traditional and digital expressions and channels, as an essential partner in ensuring the free flow of information and in upholding free expression.
2. Partner with media to promote a truth-based public discourse and to ensure transparency and accountability of public and private institutions.
3. Collaborate with media organizations and practitioners in dismantling ecosystems of disinformation which undermine democratic deliberation, enable unhealthy political polarization, and diminish democratic participation.
4. Support media organizations in their efforts to uphold professionalism within their ranks versus corruption, and to promote the safety, security, and welfare of journalists and media practitioners, including their rights to self-organization.

Part IV

Urgent Calls and Challenges

1. We call on the Philippine development NGO community to adopt the principles, goals, and provisions embodied in this Covenant.
2. We enjoin Filipino citizens and volunteers to participate, contribute, or to render volunteer service in development undertakings in the communities.
3. We enjoin the Philippine Government, the business sector, and media to respect this Covenant and use this as basis for relating with the development NGO community.
4. We urge the government, the armed groups and extremist groups to respect the neutrality and unhampered rights of NGOs in the performance of their work.
5. We call on foreign governments, multi-lateral agencies and international NGOs to demonstrate their commitment to development by using the Covenant and the United Nations' Declaration on the Right to Development as the general framework for development assistance to the Philippines.
6. As the Philippines faces a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world, we call on everyone to constantly hold a vision of a future we want, learn progressively, and adapt to change with clarity, agility, courage, and hope.