Engaging Citizens in Sustainable Development in Switzerland, France, Denmark, Malta, Sweden, and the Philippines

by

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Abstract

We live in a finite world, and the sooner we come to terms with this, the better. Because the world we live in does not consist of infinite resources, we must understand that sustainable development is necessary for our survival. We can no longer afford to continue utilizing our resources at the current rate we are doing. We must aim to meet our needs in the present, and at the same time, ensure that we are cognizant and considerate of the needs of the generations that succeed us.

As published by the United Nations (2015), the following are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals that aim to transform the world by 2030: 1) no poverty; 2) zero hunger; 3) good health and well-being; 4) quality education; 5) gender equality; 6) clean water and sanitation; 7) affordable and clean energy; 8) decent work and economic growth; 9) industry, innovation, and infrastructure; 10) reduced inequality; 11) sustainable cities and communities; 12) responsible consumption and production; 13) climate action; 14) life below water; 15) life on land; 16) peace and justice strong institutions; and 17) partnerships to achieve the goal.

Indubitably, some countries are performing better when it comes to adopting sustainable living compared to others.

Introduction

This paper aims to analyze, synthesize, and critique existing literature and policies on sustainable development in the Philippines, a developing country in Southeast Asia. I also conduct a review on research that tackles the same in the five countries deemed as the best stewards of the planet as indicated by their commitment to sustainable development. These countries, according to the Environmental Performance Index (2018, as cited in Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy, n.d.), are Switzerland, France, Denmark, Malta, and Sweden. I shall refer to these countries as the Top 5 hereafter.

In this paper, I have used the following questions to guide me in reviewing literature and policy on sustainable development in the aforementioned countries:

1. How are the Top 5 informing or engaging their citizens in sustainable development?

2. What are the primary challenges to sustainable development in the Philippines?

3. What sustainable development initiatives or programs do the Top 5 have in place that the Philippines can learn from, or emulate?

Theoretical Framework

Considering the complexity of the United Nation's agenda for sustainable development, understanding the relationship between nations' social and environmental outcomes is a crucial task for social scientists (Kelly, 2020). I argue that Critical Theory would be a suitable lens from which I could efficiently conduct my research, and effectively analyze, synthesize, and critique existing literature on policies, programs, and even challenges to sustainable development in the Philippines, a developing country in Southeast Asia. While we deal with the finite nature of this planet that we live in, and work towards achieving sustainable development regardless of our respective countries' economic statuses, one thing has become clear and undisputable—the global economy attempts to satisfy the appetites and needs of rapidly growing numbers of people in the world who have become entirely dependent upon it, and this dependence creates ubiquitous allegiance to the globalized economic system as well as ample opportunity for the powerful to profit from scarcity (Evans, 2010).

While sustainable development should be every nation's responsibility regardless of its economic ranking, it seems that the saying, "We are in the same boat," does not apply to this situation. Evans (2010) likens this global endeavor to "riding a runaway horse headed off for a cliff". He proceeds to say that people feel powerless to change direction, and nervous about leaping off, even though many are well aware of the imminent doom the world faces if it stays the course, as opposed to embracing, and adopting sustainability. However, it seems that the very structures

of modern industrial societies, and the social power relationships embedded in these structures tend to prohibit the kind of radical shifts in social systems that are key requirements to living sustainably. The fact that wealthy countries like Switzerland, France, Denmark, Malta, and Sweden rank high up on achieving Sustainable Development Goals while the Philippines is only on the 99th spot—out of 168 participating countries—might be a case in point. Examining these points has convinced me that Critical Theory could be a good theory to guide researchers as well as policymakers into understanding that sustainable development should not be approached in a one-size-fits-all manner.

Critical Theory possesses an ontology that is modified objective in nature, and a subjective epistemology (Sears et al., 2015). It sees science as a political endeavor, and highlights that context and history are indispensable in conducting research. I perceive the critical research paradigm as "interpretivism on steroids". Simply put, I view critical researchers as the new and improved breed of interpretivists. If the main goal of interpretivists is to gain relevant insight into the experiences of their participants, critical researchers aspire for far more than this. The goals of critical researchers go beyond merely having a look at situations from the vantage point of their participants. The end goal is to bring about beneficial change. For critical researchers, the study is ineffectual until it adds value to the lives of the immediate participants, or a community, a society, or a nation as a whole. That being the case, the bigger question is "Now that we have a stronger grasp of the matter, how do we improve upon it?" As academics, critical researchers are fueled by thoughts such as "How do we make significant changes?"

Given the nature of sustainable development as being a social issue, as much as it is an "objective" truth that is addressed by science and the government, I believe that Critical Theory would be valuable to understanding sustainable development, and tailor-making approaches,

strategies, and policies for individual audiences—in this case, for example, developed countries vs. developing countries. From the perspective of someone like me who is reviewing literature, viewing material from the lens of a Critical Theorist might also help me have a better understanding of why certain sustainable development practices work well among the Top 5, and may not be effective in a less wealthy nation like the Philippines. At the same time, I would like to be keen on what the Top 5 are doing right, and perhaps might be feasible for the Philippines to emulate.

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

This section of the paper aims to orient the readers on the Sustainable Development Goals outlined by the United Nations to help the readers understand what sustainable development is about, in the first place. Through this section of the paper, I aim to only give context to what encompasses sustainable development; although, please note that this paper will not discuss each one in detail. Nor does this paper intend to scrutinize every country included in this study in every area of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. Now that my purpose for writing this section has been communicated and established, let us have a look at the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This portion also briefly discusses the United Nations' top priorities, and the areas where the world is "winning" and "lagging".

To reiterate, the following are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals that aim to transform the world by 2030: 1) no poverty; 2) zero hunger; 3) good health and well-being; 4) quality education; 5) gender equality; 6) clean water and sanitation; 7) affordable and clean energy; 8) decent work and economic growth; 9) industry, innovation, and infrastructure; 10) reduced inequality; 11) sustainable cities and communities; 12) responsible consumption and production;

13) climate action; 14) life below water; 15) life on land; 16) peace and justice strong institutions; and 17) partnerships to achieve the goal.

During a high-level political forum held in July 2019, the United Nations (2019) reported recent positive trends that include the continued decline of extreme poverty and child mortality cases, progress against diseases including hepatitis as well as progress towards areas that pertain to gender equality, such as more gender-responsive budgeting. The United Nations also reported that electricity access in the poorest, and most underdeveloped countries is rapidly increasing. Global labor productivity is also on the rise, while global unemployment rates and the proportion of urban populations living in slums are both tailing off. The proportion of waters under national jurisdiction covered by marine protected areas have more than doubled since 2010, and means of implementation are being more swiftly mobilized in certain areas (United Nations, 2019).

The United Nations (2019) stressed that that the principle to leave no one behind is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda, which puts emphasis on the need to direct special attention to African countries, least developed countries, land-locked developing countries, small island developing states, countries in conflict and post-conflict situations, and the challenges faced by middle-income countries. The demographic identified as at-risk of being left behind are as follows: children and youth, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV or AIDS, the elderly, indigenous communities, refugees and internally displaced persons and migrants (United Nations, 2019). The good news seems to be that governments around the world have been making great progress when it comes to prioritizing the integration of the Sustainable Development Goals into their national policies. They are even creating institutional arrangements that will aid in driving, and monitoring progress towards the transformation necessary in their countries' economies as well as societies. Regional and local governments, businesses, civil society, academia and youth are ensuring

alignment in their actions and initiatives towards implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, and the United Nations development system is undergoing reforms to respond to the paradigm shift at the heart of the 2030 Agenda (United Nations, 2019).

On the downside, United Nations (2019) has also projected that we will miss the target to fully eradicate extreme poverty by 2030, as it is projected that it will be at six percent by then. They also admitted the glaring problem that the world has with regard to biodiversity. For instance, we are losing biodiversity at an alarmingly rapid rate given that approximately one million species are already on the verge of extinction.

Some Challenges

The above report on the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was released in July 2019, a little less than a year before the COVID-19 pandemic struck the world. While generally speaking, we—the world—were making notable progress when it comes to working towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals prior to the pandemic, we have yet to fully see how much the COVID-19 global crisis has slowed us down in terms of reaching our targets. One limitation that I see is that there is not yet a lot of research to be reviewed, and has been conducted in the midst of COVID-19 that compare as well as contrast our accomplishments and shortcomings—pre-pandemic and during pandemic—in relation to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals as a global community. I wish for researchers, in the near future, to be able to answer the following questions:

1) How has COVID-19 further set back developing countries in achieving Sustainable Development Goals?

2) What particular aspects of the Sustainable Development Goals were massively impacted by COVID-19?

3) How much has the COVID-19 pandemic impeded the progress of the Top 5 and the Philippines—especially the Philippines—in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the United Nations?

I would like to reiterate that this paper will not discuss every item on the United Nations' 2030 Agenda. In addition, the abovementioned three questions are not the focus of this paper either. Rather, I acknowledge as early as in this section, that the abovementioned three questions are the gaps in existing literature as well as in policy analysis that I have observed thus far. As early as this section, I shall make it known that these three questions are some of the limitations of this paper.

While a handful of articles have been released in 2020, there is not much literature written yet about how the Philippines is fairing in its sustainable development endeavors amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. While this is a global health crisis, and every country in this study has had a setback since the start of COVID-19, it might be safe to assume that among the six countries included in this literature review, the Philippines being the poorest would most likely perform the least when it comes to sustainable development.

Contributions of My Study

This study aims to contribute to literature by providing a sound critique or evaluation of how the Top 5 are addressing the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the United Nations as well as how they are informing or engaging their citizens into aligning with the Goals and

leading themselves, if applicable. In addition, this study aims to look at the challenges that the Philippines is facing relating to sustainable development as well as any sustainable development initiatives or programs that the Top 5 have in their respective countries, that might be useful or inspirational for the Philippines, albeit, it is not economically and geographically in the same location as the Top 5.

Key Findings

United Nations (2019) proclaimed Switzerland as being at an advanced stage in terms of achieving a number of the Sustainable Development Goals. For instance, the country has fully eradicated poverty. Furthermore, education is free and compulsory across the country. On one hand, the world has seen the most progress when it comes to poverty alleviation as well as the creation or conversion of sustainable cities and communities (Rappler, 2020). On the other hand, the world is performing the worst in the area of achieving targets relating to climate change and biodiversity conservation. Overall, however, the world is not on track with the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the United Nations (Rappler, 2020).

Switzerland at the Top

Switzerland is recognized as the world's most eco-friendly country (Anderson, 2020, as cited in Pebble Magazine, 2021). In September 2016, the country made history when it became the first country to vote for implementing a green economy (European Environment Agency, 2020). However, the Swiss government swiftly realized that they could not achieve its desired targets overnight, so it got going with its greener, more sustainable objectives immediately. In response to this, Switzerland's new initiatives consisted of a goal to achieve sustainability by 2050

via the OneEarth Initiative. OneEarth is based on reaching one hundred percent renewable energy, the protection and restoration of fifty percent of our planet's oceans and lands, and a transition to "regenerative, carbon-negative agriculture" (Anderson, 2020, as cited in Pebble Magazine, 2021).

Switzerland has been doing an exemplary job when it comes to informing and engaging its citizens to participate in sustainable development efforts. One aspect, that the Swiss are heavily engaged in, is waste management. When it comes to recycling and waste management, Switzerland is indubitably one of the world leaders. Segregating and recycling are parts of every Swiss family's everyday chore at home, and these efforts are certainly not put to waste. The country meticulously separates, and recycles organic and recyclable waste while converting the rest to energy. For example, the waste-to-energy plant in Kuhn, Switzerland processes 100,000 tons of combustible waste every year, serving a total of 300,000 residents in 150 communities (Shaburishvili, 2019). Then, because the plant is very close the city of Thun, particular attention was paid in ensuring ecological and social safeties. The plant boasts of an efficient air pollution control system which ensures air quality standards are met and emissions are kept to a minimum.

From the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015, it has consistently ignited Switzerland's commitment to sustainable development. This is not only true within their country, but it also applies in the international scene (Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform, 2018). It, indeed, strengthens the country's engagement for an economy that is environmentally reasonable, and well thought-out. From the very beginning, Switzerland has been the "driving force" behind the 2030 Agenda, and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Switzerland has championed a robust mechanism for follow-up and review, including Voluntary National Reviews as well as a review of Sustainable Development Goals implementation at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (Sustainable Development Goals

Knowledge Platform, 2018). From 1997, the Federal Council has defined its priorities for carrying out sustainable development on a national level. A comprehensive system for monitoring sustainable development at the national level was authored in 2003.

Switzerland takes preservation of water quality with utmost dedication. Through the country's wastewater treatment plant in Bern, the country is able to clean 90 million litres of wastewater every day while simultaneously producing biogas from the sewage sludge. They, then, use this gas in public transportation systems. The country's plant in Bern is targeting to add an additional cleaning process to remove micropollutants from wastewater (Shaburishvili, 2019).

As the world's leader in Sustainable Development, Switzerland exhibits a solid understanding of its commitment not only to ensure attaining the Sustainable Development Goals within its borders; instead, it also cares deeply about the rest of the world. Case in point, as climate change and global warming become more of every nation's daily reality, more people are being displaced due to climate disasters like extreme weather events and water scarcity. As a matter of fact, the World Economic Forum predicts that "by the end of the century, climate change may drive 660,000 additional asylum seekers per year toward Europe" (World Economic 2018, as cited in Shaburishvili, 2019).

Along with Norway, Switzerland founded the Nansen Initiative back in 2015. This intended to address challenges related to climate migration on a global scale, involving other countries to protect, displaced people as a result of natural disasters. The initiative was endorsed to such a degree that it has since grown into the Platform on Disaster Displacement and includes support, committee and team members from all over the world (World Economic Forum, 2018).

How is France Doing?

Like Switzerland, France actively supported the United Nations when it adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development back in September 2015. So much so that as of this writing, France still ranks second among all participating nations when it comes to being a model country for being on pace with the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. So how exactly is France mobilized to help fulfill the Sustainable Development Goals? French Prime Minister Jean Castex mandated the Interministerial Delegate for Sustainable Development in a serious effort to achieve all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (France Diplomacy, 2021). Interministerial Delegate for Sustainable Development has partnered with the ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs to see the attainment of these aspirations into fruition. The Delegate oversees a network of senior officials responsible for coordinating all sustainable development issues across different ministries. According to France Diplomacy (2021), the country's financial pledge to aid sustainable development were outlined by the Interministerial Delegate for Sustainable Development as far back as November 2016.

According to Focus 2030 (2019), the Sustainable Development Goals are not quite well-known in France. For example, in August 2019, it was published in a study that only approximately ten percent of the French people say they know what the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals are. However, according to France Diplomacy (2021), they take into account the importance of involving civil society, the private sector and citizens when it comes to the successful implementation of the SDGs. France is working for what it considers to be even more inclusive decision-making and action processes. The National Council for Development and International Solidarity as well as the National Council for the Ecological Transition are the two preferred forums for liaison on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. For

instance, collaborative activities relating to the Sustainable Development Goals were conducted for a day in April 2016 that they claim had helped continue regular discussions with civil society regarding the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, with a focus on co-construction and collective intelligence for a massive mobilization toward achieving these goals. However, there is not much literature that outlines its follow-through, and how truly "involved" the French citizens are in terms of working towards the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. Comprehensive research that discusses, in detail, the citizens' participation and consistency in working towards fulfilling each item on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development would be helpful.

Living Sustainably in Denmark

Right behind Switzerland and France comes Denmark as another one of the frontrunners in sustainable development. Some of the benefits that the Danes enjoy are sophisticated universal health care and educational system, gender equality, a generous social safety net, cooperation among social partners, responsible business, clean and efficient energy production, personal freedom and more (Sustainable Development Goals Knowledge Platform, 2021).

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark (2021) emphasizes that the country is keen on doing its party in achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030. To address this, the government has put together an elaborate action plan that aim to address not only environmental sustainability, but also social goals such as equality and inclusion.

The shipping industry is a field in which Denmark is pioneering sustainability. Case in point, Maersk—the world's largest container shipping company and one of the largest companies in Denmark—has made it a priority to reduce the carbon dioxide impact of shipping, which is

expected to grow up to 250 percent by 2050 if no intervention at all, is put in place (International Maritime Organization, 2020, as cited in Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2021).

As a people, the Danes understand that sustainable development, in order to be attained successfully, must be every citizen's endeavor. This is a belief that they take seriously as a nation, and they are heavily involved in daily undertakings that take them closer to achieving the 2030 Agenda. Sustainability means different things to different people. To the Danes, sustainability is a holistic approach that entails water management, waste recycling, renewable energy, and green transportation including the bicycling culture (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2021). Through decades of extraordinary and sustained efforts, the country has built a world-class green energy system that delivers a cleaner everyday life and more green energy. To be specific, Denmark has focused on building energy-efficient infrastructures and establishments, which is quite a valuable contributor in a country where heating is required for more than half of the year.

Malta's Sustainable Development Vision for 2050

Malta is a small island state that have limited natural resources. The country is densely populated, and its economy is growing, and doing quite well. Malta takes pride in putting sustainable development at the center of the country's economic, social, and environmental development. Case in point, the Maltese Government adopted the Sustainable Development Act way back in 2012, which resulted in a legislative framework that mandated the Government to make sustainable development policies as mainstream as possible, so that ordinary citizens were made aware of them (Ministry for the Environment, Sustainable Development and Climate Change, 2018).

The country's Sustainable Development Act requires the Maltese Government to be transparent when it comes to its sustainable development endeavors. The Ministry for the Environment, Sustainable Development and Climate Change was delegated as the "competent authority for Sustainable Development" as indicated in the Act. One of the responsibilities emerging from the Act, is the development and implementation of Malta's Sustainable Development Strategy (Ministry for the Environment, Sustainable Development and Climate Change, 2018).

Literature does not state clearly how exactly Malta is actively educating its people on sustainable development. However, the Maltese Government is serious in terms of ensuring that every Maltese enjoys the country's healthy, strong and resilient labour market as the Government believes that it is key to social progress. Back in 2018, to be specific, the Government visualized the production of abundant, better-quality jobs that would meet the needs of every individual in terms of pay, security and prospects (Ministry for the Environment, Sustainable Development and Climate Change, 2018). Up to the present, while the government continues to create the necessary frameworks and incentives to sustain Malta's realized Vision, employers, employees as well as trade unions have the prime responsibility for ensuring a healthy, strong and resilient labour market today, and in the future.

By 2050, Malta aims for a more diverse and inclusive society in which everyone will feel proud of their identity and heritage and be accepted for them. Race, color, ethnic origin, age, disability, religion, sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity are merely characteristics, and not a social status, that determines the level of rights every Maltese can enjoy (Ministry for the Environment, Sustainable Development and Climate Change, 2018).

How is Sweden so Sustainable?

According to Ahlberg (2009), the first national sustainable development strategy was adopted by the Government and Parliament as early as 2002. Sweden's capital city of Stockholm has always been admired when it comes to creating initiatives and programs. In fact, it was designated as an "EU lighthouse city" along with Cologne, Germany and Barcelona, Spain. A lighthouse city pertains to a city that is looked up to for the projects it implements, and whose projects are replicated by the rest of Europe if found to be effective (Wakefield, 2017). Stockholm's interpretation of being and working smart is about becoming greener; it aspires to be fossil-fuel free by 2040, and sees eco-policies as the smartest thing not only for the Swedish capital or the whole of Sweden, but the country wants the same for entire planet, too. Now, that is quite an ambition!

Another interesting fact about Sweden is that it is the pioneer in initiating a carbon tax for carbon-intensive fuels like oil and natural gas. They started doing this as far back as 1995. The outcome was incredible: the country's dependence on fossil fuels got heavily cut down. As of this writing, Sweden remains to have the highest percentage of renewable energy in the European Union. Colloquially, the Swedish city of Stockholm is dubbed as a "city of tomorrow". And, this nickname is quite fitting. Stockholm is as eco-friendly as any city could get, it seems. For example, biofuel, generated from sewage, is available at petrol stations all over the city, and they regularly used by taxis and cars. Moreover, the city has extended its use to bigger vehicles like vans and lorries, which are particularly polluting (Wakefield, 2017).

Sweden, much like other countries who are at the top of their game when it comes to living sustainably, is very particular with energy conservation. These are absolutely major areas in which the Swedish Government holds its citizens accountable. When they started implementing this, the

Government believed that changing behavior begins with small steps (Wakefield, 2017). For instance, on one privately-constructed estate residents are supplied with tablets that show their real-time energy usage. This is in an attempt to equip the citizens with a more solid understanding of how they consume—or waste—gas, water and electricity. While residents are able to view their light, heat and water consumption on a real-time basis, they are also able track their usage over a period of time, find out the best times to run appliances, and even, compare their usage with that of their neighbors.

When it comes to informing and engaging its citizens in terms of living sustainably, data shows that Sweden, the fifth-ranking nation in terms of achieving the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, has it down pat!

The Challenges to Sustainable Development in the Philippines

World Bank (2019) had projected that poverty incidence in the Philippines was at 23.1 percent in 2017, and 21.9 percent in 2018. In World Bank's recent report, it has found that the poverty rate in the Philippines would, in fact, be declining to 19.8 percent in 2020, and further down to 18.7 percent in 2021. The reduction in poverty among Filipinos is supposed to be great news. However, while statistics tells us a good story, we must understand that this report was released in 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, one other major threat to sustainable development that the Philippines faces climate change. This is because the climate crisis directly—and massively—impacts the country's water and agriculture sectors. According to Pulhin et al. (2007), agriculture wastage resulting from extreme weather disasters have seen record-high damages in the recent past amounting to thousands of dollars.

A sizeable part of the Filipino population suffers from water scarcity, agricultural production losses, and a plunge in energy supply during droughts as well as damage to infrastructure and properties due to flooding brought by typhoons. These result in not only major environmental repercussions, but also societal problems that negatively influence the nation's attainment of sustainability goals and inclusive growth, which are at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Adaptation initiatives and programs whose goal is to answer to these impacts should integrate approaches to capture the synergies of agriculture and water sectors, and consider social, economic and environmental aspects to effectively maximize the desired outcomes (Pulhin et al., 2007).

Conclusions

Based on the literature, policies, programs, and initiatives that I have examined through the course of conducting this review, I have observed significant similarities when it comes to how Switzerland, France, Denmark, Malta, and Sweden have reversed erroneous and obsolete practices, and turned to sustainable ways of living. While France may lack in terms of a follow-through in informing and engaging its ordinary citizens in sustainable development efforts, the French Government, nonetheless, has been consistently doing well as a steward country that champion the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Both Switzerland and France have committees that lead voluntary national reviews as well as promote checks and balances in their sustainable development strategies. Both Switzerland and Denmark boast of strategic practices and state-of-the-art technologies when it comes to waste management and recycling. France and Denmark have enrolled and engaged their respective citizens into energy conservation in simple ways like the bicycle culture. Denmark's citizens enjoy prosperous lives

by enjoying benefits like quality healthcare and free education. Gender equality, generous safety nets, and cooperation among stakeholders are also part of the policies of the Danish Government. Universal healthcare systems are present among the Top 5. Like in Denmark, Free education is also offered by Switzerland's and Sweden's governments. While education is not completely free in France, its citizens only have to pay a small cost. Malta requires the mainstreaming of projects and initiatives relating to Sustainable Development Goals, as the country's Government believes in owing, and therefore ensuring, transparency to the public. Standard of living is also impressive as the Maltese people appreciate a labor market that is resilient and competitive—one that holds every sector accountable, namely: business owners, the Government, and the Maltese citizens themselves. Last but not least of the Top 5 is Sweden, who just like Switzerland is at the forefront of energy conversion. Sweden, in fact, converts sewage waste into biofuel, which is then made available at petrol stations. Taxis, cars, and bigger vehicles all make use of this. Although not rolled out throughout Sweden, in select residences in Stockholm, citizens are heavily engaged and held accountable as they are tasked to regularly monitor their respective household's energy and resource consumption and wastage. To be specific, every household is issued a tablet with an application that allows them to view their consumption real-time. This also gets them to compare and contrast their consumption with their neighbors' performance pertaining resource conservation. Now, how cool is that?

The Top 5 are, no doubt, rightful of their position as the "best stewards of sustainable development" with all their initiatives, programs, and policies, and how these five countries' efforts trickle down to their own citizens who benefit from living sustainably. Would it not be great if the Philippines, and every other developing country, could easily follow suit? With all the literature I have gathered in the course of my research, though, it may be safe to infer that it was

far easier for the Top 5 to focus on achieving each item on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development because they, in the first place, have been wealthy from the start, and did not have to fight poverty and for basic survival concerns. It may be a different case for the Philippines. Although it was steadily making progress in its efforts to eradicate poverty prior to COVID-19, for instance, it was still an issue that was—in fact, still is—at the center of many Filipinos' everyday existence that may deter them from engaging in sustainable development initiatives. Hunger is still on the rise. As a matter of fact, according to data released in 2020, the percentage of Filipinos who were "involuntarily hungry" in May 2020 (16.7 percent, or 4.2 million families) almost doubled since December 2019 (8.8 percent, or around 2.1 million families). This is the highest the number has been since September 2014 (22.8% or 4.8 million families) (Tantuco, 2020).

Perhaps, a few of the practices that the Philippines can emulate would be the Top 5's projects on energy conservation as well as waste management and recycling. The Philippine Government may also need to focus on bettering the lives of every Filipino by addressing their essential needs, first and foremost, such as food, shelter, healthcare, and education. Viewing the Philippines' many challenges through the lens of Critical Research Paradigm (Critical Theory), has provided me with the requisite compassion, in order to understand that this "third-world" country cannot just copy what the Top 5 are doing excellently that get them closer and closer to ticking off every item on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. At the end of the day, while all that inspiration from the Top 5 is wonderful, economic power still—and tremendously so—plays an all-important, indispensable role in order for the Philippines to turn goals into actions.

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