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Regenerative futures: Why and how to move forward as a Philippine State University?

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the concept of regenerative futures as an agendum for leadership at the Davao Oriental State University (DOrSU) in the Philippines. The paper highlights the need for a paradigm shift to reimagine and rethink "sustainability" from a restorative, enrichment, and regenerative standpoint. The initial stance of regenerative futures at DOrSU is environment-centered and biodiversity-focused, but there is a need to lay down key steps to articulate such direction in the university's three interdependent divisions. The paper proposes a pyramid model of the university's regenerative vision, mission, and values and emphasizes the need to teach regenerative futures as contents, outcomes, and values. Regeneration must be adapted as a vision, mission, and core value, and the academic community must collectively define the operationality of these critical terms.

Keywords: Davao Oriental, futures thinking, regenerative development, regenerative futures, Philippines

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The introduction of regenerative futures as a leadership agendum at the Davao Oriental State University (DOrSU) posed a persistent challenge for the academic community. Most concerns stem from the need for more understanding and appreciation of the concept of regeneration. Although deliberate efforts have taken place since 2021, many academics still need to be more involved and engaged. Leadership strategies must be defined and institutionalized to optimize the participation of the university's members and stakeholders.

Ponce and Villegas (2022) described the ever-growing need to position DOrSU as a regenerative futures university. It is anchored on the context of Davao Oriental being a rich natural frontier in the Southeastern part of Mindanao Island, Philippines. The paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the alarming rate at which the environment is deteriorating. It highlights how this pace has surpassed the measures taken to ensure sustainability. Critical ridge-to-reef ecosystems continue to face the threats of deforestation, habitat destruction, pollution, biodiversity loss, and poaching (United Nations, 2023). Therefore, a paradigm shift is called to reimagine and rethink "sustainability" from a restorative, enrichment, and regenerative standpoint.

DOrSU's initial stance on regenerative futures is environment-centered and biodiversity-focused, which is understandable, noting the university's strength in the natural sciences. Novel entomofauna species discoveries in Davao Oriental indicate its natural endowment, being home to unique and rare invertebrates (Cabras et al., 2021; Anichtchenko and Wiesner, 2023; Cabras and Mainda, 2023; Cabras et al., 2023; Shavrin and Medina, 2024). This effectively communicates the university's local efforts to a global platform. Regenerative futures as a paradigm was also introduced in Peru to combat biodiversity loss and climate change (Cordova et al., 2022). Eventually, the concept evolved to encompass other disciplines, ideating multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives on regeneration. However, up to recently, mainstreaming regenerative futures into other scholarly disciplines is lagging. There is a need to lay down key steps to articulate such an agendum in the university's three interdependent divisions: academic; research, innovation, and extension; and administration and finance.

Regenerative futures are at the intersection of regenerative development and futures thinking, and both fields could reciprocally inform one another. That is, regeneration could be envisioned as a desired future, while futures thinking tools may be used to attain regenerative goals. The overarching goal is to achieve net positive socio-economic and environmental outcomes (Camrass, 2020). With this, two critical elements must be examined in planning the next vital steps: reality and time. There is a need to define contextual realities within the university relative to the specific time in the development continuum (i.e., history, present, and future) (Camrass, 2023). Charting a university's future requires a thorough understanding of its past and present. By studying the university's historical development and analyzing its present realities, administrators can gain valuable insights into its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. This information serves as a critical foundation for strategically planning the leadership direction of becoming a regenerative futures university. This includes identifying critical areas of focus, setting realistic goals, and making informed decisions that will help the institution thrive in the years ahead.

Regenerative futures must transcend from being a buzzword by perpetuating the domains of human learning: cognition, action, and emotion. Efforts should be undertaken to teach regenerative futures as contents, outcomes,

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and values. More than being an academic topic, results must be tangible in all academic spheres. This means that regenerative futures should have tangible practical applications to all academics, staff, students, and other stakeholders. In addition, regenerative futures must be value-laden, which means that the academic community must embrace it as an ethos, worldview, and philosophy (Ponce pers. comm., 2023). Figure 1 illustrates the hierarchy of transforming values into mission and vision statements.

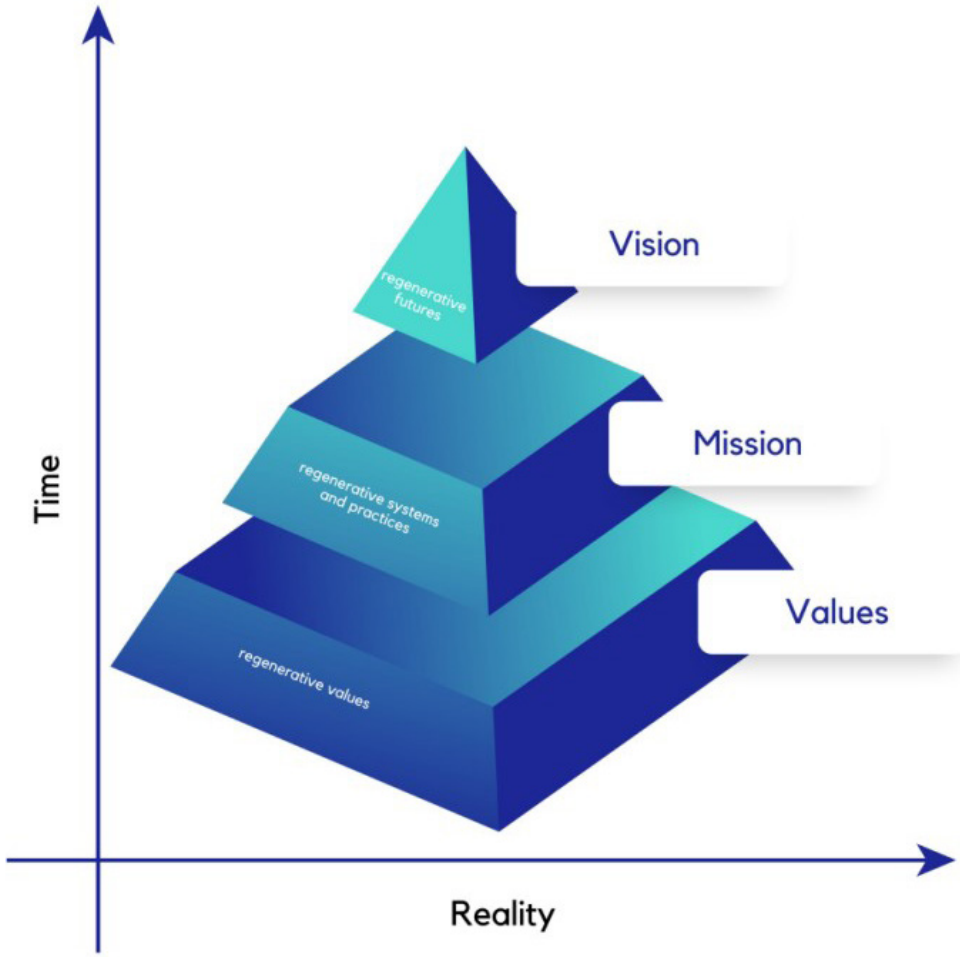

Figure 1. Pyramid model of the regenerative vision, mission, and values of the Davao Oriental State University, Philippines.

The Cognitive Hierarchy Model (Fulton et al., 1996) propounds that strategies must be employed to inculcate values at the onset to attain a desired behavior. Whittaker et al. (2006) utilized the same model in urban wildlife management, asserting that values predict management actions. This means that a value-laden agendum is a prerequisite to system-wide reforms. Therefore, regeneration must be adapted as a vision (regenerative futures), mission (regenerative systems and practices), and, most importantly, core value (regenerative values). However, the operationality of these key terms must be collectively defined by the entire academic community, specifically involving the three divisions (faculty and staff) and the students. The same must be prudently deliberated among Penta helix stakeholders through a participatory and inclusive approach. In this way, the ownership and responsibility of attaining regenerative futures shall be shared among academic community members while ensuring optimum participation.

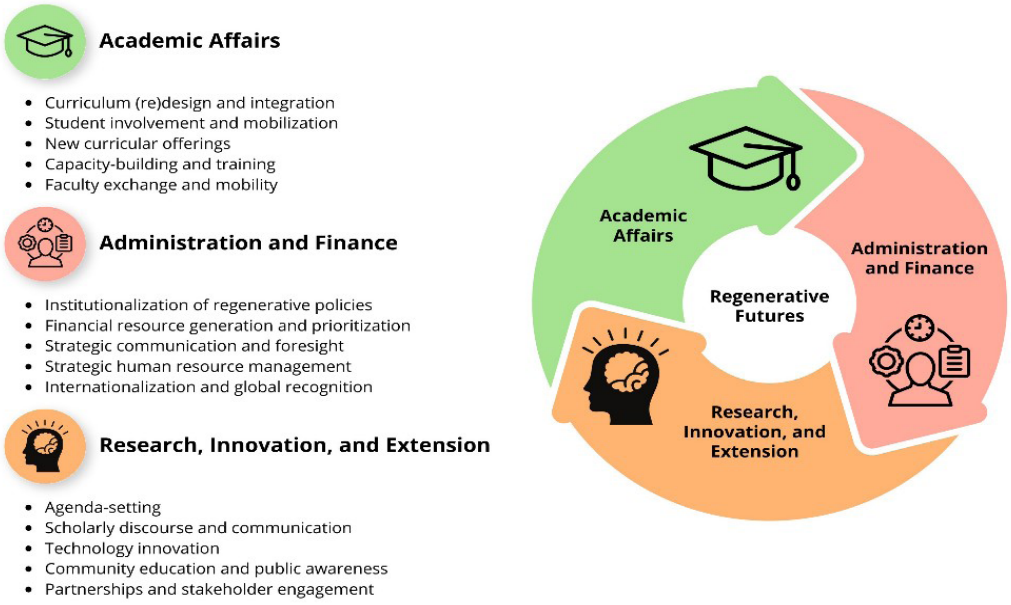

Figure 2. Proposed strategies for mainstreaming regenerative futures in the Davao Oriental State University, Philippines.

Figure 2 elaborates on several proposed strategies to be undertaken by the university. The academic affairs division must take leadership in developing, re-designing, and integrating regenerative futures into the curriculum. It may be offered as a specialized course at the undergraduate or graduate levels. Mena-Guacas et al. (2023) expounded the need to promote community building and collaboration by attracting learners from different specializations to join short courses. Another strategy is integrating it into existing courses, which is an easier route considering the bureaucratic layers of curriculum design and revision. Moreover, faculty and students must be onboarded through in-house capacity-building programs and lecture series. International exposure through academic exchange and mobility must also be prioritized to widen the horizons of academic discourses and engagements. This means that internationalization efforts must be intensified to communicate the university's branding across the global community.

It is fundamental to institutionalize regenerative policies as bases for management decisions and actions in the university. The recently enforced ban on single-use plastics demonstrates the university's commitment to reducing plastic pollution, especially since Davao Oriental is a coastal province. Frictions in the policy implementation have been w observed, although the system is improving over time. This also calls for a regular policy review. According to Herberz et al. (2020), policies such as this have minimal impact on the issue of plastic pollution on a global scale. More policies must be promulgated and strategies employed to attain net positive outcomes in the university systems and practices. Prioritizing this entails a large fiscal capital, underscoring the need to generate financial sufficiency and capacitate human resources. Communication strategies must be employed to increase global visibility and gain international recognition. While this has been widely used in corporations, communication strategies must be employed to inform management decisions (Keller-Bacher and Zerfass, 2019).

In terms of research, innovation, and extension (RIE), the strategy commences with the setting of the regenerative futures agenda. This shall be the

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overarching priority of all RIE initiatives. Gudowsky (2021) detailed a framework for participatory agenda setting (PASE) to respond effectively to contextual needs and challenges. As an academic and research institution, the university is called to initiate scholarly discourses and communications through the publication of research outputs and engaging with the international academic community. The creation of a university-based Center for Futures Thinking and Regenerative Development (CFTRD) is a good strategy to consolidate the university's efforts. It should be emphasized that regenerative futures are not exclusive to the Center, and all fields of specialization must articulate such branding from a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary standpoint. All research units must proactively mainstream the same in their programs, projects, and activities (PPAs). Simultaneously, the university must employ meaningful and impactful engagements with the local and indigenous communities by communicating and collaborating in regenerative efforts. This could focus on knowledge and technology transfer to improve local systems and practices and alleviate stakeholder participation.

The questions of "why" and "how" are fundamental pillars in initiating meaningful and productive conversations around the concept of regenerative futures. Adopting regenerative futures as a leadership agendum is a relatively recent development, but its incorporation into the university system has been progressing consistently. Mainstreaming efforts in the three divisions: academic, research, innovation, and extension, and administration and finance must be prioritized. The faculty, staff, students, and other stakeholders must collectively define why and how to proceed as a unified higher education institution (HEI). Specific strategies must be laid out, from values formation to mission- and vision-setting. This will ensure the agenda permeates the local, indigenous, and global communities for institutional meaning and branding.

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