



# permaculture

EARTH CARE, PEOPLE CARE, FUTURE CARE

## Using Permaculture to Design for Resilience and Regeneration

*Sarah Queblatin, Green Releaf Initiative*

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Green Releaf Initiative in the Philippines supports recovering communities, especially displaced people from typhoons, teaching people how to become more resilient against future disasters.



“What if we changed the narrative of Disaster Risk Reduction or DRR, into that of Design for Resilience and Regeneration?”

This is what inspires our design as Green Releaf Initiative. It started in 2009 when I was helping pack relief goods full of plastics and processed food. Looking at the massive pile of carbon packed to respond to the floods and mass displacement caused by Typhoon

Ketsana, I wondered, “how might we address problems without the same factors that caused the problem in the first place?”

This inquiry led to circular design called 'Green Releaf' which eventually paved the way to studying permaculture and ecovillage design education years later. In 2017, Green Releaf became a registered non-profit organization through seed funding from LUSH Re:Fund.

I live in what the Global Peace Index in 2019 would refer to as “the most vulnerable country in the world facing multiple climate hazards”. The Philippines faces an average of 20 typhoons a year, on top of historical conflict and other natural hazards like volcanic eruptions and earthquakes. Living with a 'go bag' for emergencies since childhood, my reality motivates me to design deeper, in ways that go beyond aid.

## Design for resilience: supporting recovering communities

In three years, Green Releaf prototyped two initiatives and emergent long-term programs that used permaculture as a recovery and prevention approach for disasters and displacement.

To support communities recovering from radical changes, we prototyped two designs.



*Garden at Madrasa with Marawi Siege IDPs demonstrating what they learned ©Sarah Queblatin*

Garden to Garden Releaf is a land-based response to address immediate food security. After an ISIS allied siege of Marawi City in 2017, we supported around 500 internally displaced peoples (IDPs) by setting up rainwater catchments, sourced vegetable food packs from nearby organic farms until the garden we co-created with a composting system with the IDPs was ready for harvest. We grew a school garden for displaced children living in a tent city across it in



partnership with the Global Network on Religions for Children. We partnered with Catholic Relief Services and the World Food Program to apply permaculture in backyard gardens of 60+ displaced families in a resettlement at ground zero.



*Women IDPs at the resettlement with their vermicomposting system ©Ash Abdullah*

The Witnessing Trees Project was inspired by old growth trees that withstood time to witness history take place in a certain location. I remember sitting under a tree at the COP21 in Paris bearing witness to the agreement to end the fossil fuel era and reflected on the role of trees in climate vulnerable countries like mine. Apart from its capacity to sink carbon and act as windbreaks, I recalled how trees became lifelines for those who survived floods and powerful typhoon winds in communities I worked with in the past either by climbing them or tying themselves on them.



*Permaculture demonstration site in the making with indigenous farmers of Kalinga ©Gumay Tenda*

The ecosystem based DRR project was prototyped in an indigenous community in Kalinga province, a year after it was affected by Typhoon Haima in 2016, through the invitation of the Department of Education. We used permaculture to demonstrate the potential for regenerative livelihood through ecosystem restoration as the village of Balawag suffered crop loss not just through typhoons but from degrading soil from land conversion to GM corn with glyphosate use.

Through a 1.5 ha demonstration site in partnership with the local government and agencies, we trained 16 grassroots indigenous leaders, 60+ farmers, 200+ students, and individuals in practical permaculture. An integration of permaculture in the agricultural curriculum of the school is underway as the project resumes after the Covid-19 lockdowns for its transition into a five-year regenerative development program.

## **Design for regeneration: enabling systemic and collective impact**

In our third year, we prepared to weave existing regenerative practices and designed Re:Source Regeneration Labs as a regenerative design lab and learning journey so we can catalyze and scale their solutions for collective whole systems impact. The process combines permaculture and ecovillage design principles with Theory U along with Filipino ways of problem solving.

In early 2020, we designed a regenerative aid lab inviting informal aid actors that were responding to the displacement brought about by the Taal Volcano eruption. We gathered mappers, breastfeeding groups, mental health advocates, community kitchens, and farmers



together to cross-pollinate and design systemic solutions together through a regenerative design sprint.

Apart from the regenerative aid lab, we have also activated ecosystems for regeneration particularly for those doing zero waste and circular economies that helped contribute to the National Plan of Action for Marine Litter. We also run a slower lab for the design of a regenerative economy by enabling organic farming and ecotourism in Sagada, Mountain Province.



*Ecosystem mapping of organic farming and ecotourism initiatives in Sagada Mountain Province ©Sarah Queblatin*

## Scaling up, wide and deep

The next stages of the above-mentioned initiatives are inviting us to scale and replicate what we started with new partners and communities while completing what we started as Covid-19 and new disasters have halted our projects earlier this year.

To enhance our permaculture work in indigenous communities through a landscape approach to food sovereignty, Living Story Landscapes was born using culture and creativity to document traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) to honor indigenous permaculture practices already existing in a place. We will be embarking on this with two new indigenous tribes replicating what we started in Kalinga.

Our Regenerative Transitions program is born out of a five year regenerative development plan co-designed with the indigenous village in Balawag, Tabuk City, Kalinga and the local government as a continuation of the Witnessing Trees project. Currently we are preparing to integrate this approach in a regenerative food

ecosystems lab in 2021 to bring together partner cities and municipalities for a landscape approach to food to prevent further natural disasters while addressing hunger in 7.6 million families due to the pandemic.



*Regenerative transition program dialogue and planning between government and indigenous leaders ©Gumay Tenda*

## Our Grassroots Permaculture Leadership and Permaculture Design

Certification program is meant for early adopters in community partners who can be multipliers of the permaculture solutions they learn in the demonstration sites we create with them.

In the wake of Super Typhoons Goni and Vamco that just recently caused massive loss and damage in November 2020, we are now preparing to activate informal aid activities together once again, learning from our first prototype to scale it. Through Garden Releaf, we are also preparing to support sustainable agriculture associations in Tiwi, Albay to grow food for immediate food security and typhoon proofing and repairing damaged farm structures through the leadership of one of our PDC students.

A peer to peer coaching program and the development of alternative learning materials are emerging out of the covid-19 travel limitations. Our goal is to have more IDPs or grassroots community members impacted by radical changes to learn and practice permaculture so they can be first responders for regenerative solutions in communities for future disasters and displacement to come.

For more information about Green Releaf, visit  
[www.greenreleaf.org](http://www.greenreleaf.org) (<http://www.greenreleaf.org>)

Green Releaf

is a finalist in the Permaculture Magazine

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