

**Masdan Mo ang Bukas Ko**  
**(The Making of an Environment Advocacy Song)**

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**ABSTRACT** - “Masdan Ang Bukas Ko” is more than just the making of an advocacy song. It goes beyond the mere motions of composing a song. It details the purposes and objectives, influences, emotions, thought processes, motivation, decisions and preferences on the types of music and technical processes involved in putting together these elements in a song. Writing a song is harder than poem for it entails additional elements such as rhythm, verse, chorus, bridge and genre. Environmental advocacy songs are even harder because of the relevancy factor, which should be made very clear.

An environment advocacy song more often starts with a realization, which translates to concern for the environment. When one is convinced that he has to do his part, no matter how small, he would always search for the chance to make a difference. That opportunity came to me with a request to compose an environment advocacy song. The stage was perfect as songs and music is a good vehicle to propagate an advocacy. The choice of genre that would sound pleasing to greater number of listeners was critical... bossanova-rumba appealed to most age groups.

The actual process of composing a song is unique to a particular artist... but all these peculiarities merged with what an artist loves doing. The peace and solitude of fishing, the rhythmic waves and the spatial character of water bodies provided the perfect setting to write the song.

“Masdan Ang Bukas Ko” is a song of appeal by the next generations to the present generation. It talks about the preservation of nature as a responsibility of everyone particularly those who roam the earth today. It aims to increase not only the level of awareness of everyone on environmental matters but also their level of involvement.

Keywords: song advocacy environment composing nature preservation

## INTRODUCTION

### Overview

A cause or advocacy, be it political, social or environmental, could only succeed when critical mass is achieved. Critical mass, in this case, is the minimum level or number of people pro-actively believing in a cause or advocacy to start and sustain a significant effect or to achieve a result. Achieving critical mass remains to be the primary challenge in this undertaking.

A cause is a reason for action, something that brings about an effect, a sufficient reason for appropriate action, a ground for legal action, a matter and question to be decided, or a principle or movement militantly defended and supported. An advocacy, on the other hand, is a political process by an individual or group that aims to influence public-policy and resource allocation decisions within political, economic, and social systems and institutions. Advocacy can include many activities that a person or an organization undertakes, including media campaigns, public speaking, commissioning and publishing research or polls or the filing of an amicus brief. Lobbying is also a form of advocacy where a direct approach is made to legislators on an issue that plays a significant role in modern politics.

There are really several forms of advocacy, each represents a different approach to effect an ideal and desired change in the system or learned and adopted condition. There is also no

prescribed method to achieve a cause or advocacy. Having stated this, the right tool, methodology, means or procedure will have to be studied to arrive at the most ideal one to achieve set goals and objectives.

Environmental advocacy is not too popular on account of the little concern for environmental issues. A healthy ecology is about the wellness of all living things around us... so this should be a prime concern of everyone. However, environmental concerns and issues, like other causes and advocacies, have the same problem... how to create the necessary awareness and popularize them. Again, popularize with the aim view of creating critical mass.

### Problem

Identifying the right tool to convey political, social or environmental advocacies remains to be the primary challenge. Cost, often exorbitant, is the primordial consideration in this case. Popularizing an advocacy does not come for free and is downright expensive. Although mass media remains to be the most effective way to spread the importance and value of an advocacy, it should be recognized that media outfits (radio and television stations) are also business enterprises. Thus, the only consideration in choosing items that will get "air time" are those which are considered "newsworthy" or "entertaining." Sadly, environmental and ecological advocacies, which include all living things in our environment and necessarily represent life and survival of mankind, oftentimes do not make the grade in terms of their news and entertainment value. Presenting environmental issues and

concerns should, therefore, be presented in a way acceptable to media audiences.

### Importance of the Problem

The importance and critical nature of environmental issues and concerns cannot be disregarded. Unpopular and seemingly less controversial than political issues, such as graft and corruption in government, the environment should also be given preferential attention.

Media advocacy is the strategic use of the mass media as a resource to advance a social, economic, environmental and public policy initiative. In this day and age of advances in media and information technology, mass media seems to be the best, cost effective and plausible way to reach a larger segment of society. Radio and television remain to be the favorite sources of information and entertainment of the populace.

Aside from providing news and information, media outfits also provide entertainment as a means to get as much listeners and viewers. It is the “entertainment” aspect in the business dynamics of media organizations that can be used in popularizing environmental advocacies. This brings us to choosing Music as a medium to create mass awareness. It is also a good conduit in increasing the level of awareness to an advocacy ... environmental advocacies.

### Literature

Music appreciation has different levels, depending on the age and era of musical awareness an individual belongs. “Appreciation,” in this context, means the understanding of the value and merit of the different styles of music. Culture and background also play a role in defining and identifying the preference of individuals and groups to a certain type of music.

There are several levels of music appreciation. Although temporal (pertaining to time, temporary and transitory) in nature, these levels show the progression of individuals in their awareness and knowledge of music.

The following are the basic levels of music appreciation:

- First level would be LULLABYS and NURSERY RHYMES... which gave us the basic rudiments of music;
- Second level is POPULAR or POP music... the songs we often hear on television or radio. The common genre for this level are ballads, folk and country, march and love songs;
- Third level is GENERATION and INFLUENCE music such as rock and roll, heavy metal, rap, disco, etc. Although still part of mainstream music (like the Second and Fourth levels) and appreciated well, they come and go and do not seem to last. “ Parang fad at uso- uso lang”;
- Fourth Level is INTERPRETATIVE music like jazz, rhythm and blues (RnB), blues, reggae, soul, Gospel and Latin music. People who appreciate this type of music have progressed to a level where melodies and lyrics are not the

only consideration but also other critical elements like musicality and instrumentation; and,

- Fifth Level would be CLASSICAL music...which is normally played by an orchestra with tenors and baritones doing the vocals. Unfortunately, even if this is the highest level of musical appreciation and what we all aspire for, only a few progress to this level.

### Objectives

A basic knowledge of the levels of music appreciation will give us a good idea on what type of music will appeal to a larger portion of society. This is critical in getting people to listen to a song. Having chosen music as the means to popularize environmental concerns, the genre will also play an equally important role in capturing the interest of listeners. This becomes critical since the Filipino is a race who loves music, knows music and is quite choosy and discriminating in his choice of songs.

The influence of western music in the Filipino consciousness is quite evident. Most hit songs in the United States and Europe never fail to make it to the “most played” song list in the Philippines. Choosing Western-influenced genre, therefore, for the purpose of getting the attention of Filipino listener, is not a bad idea.

### Initial Background Study and the Results

I have experienced conducting surveys on environmental issues and concerns. Last semester (2<sup>nd</sup> Semester, School Year 2012-2013), I was a member of a group of ENRM 221 (Socio-Cultural Perspectives on the Environment)

students that surveyed and studied the level of awareness on the environment. Other members of the group were: (1) Jerome Adriano; (2) Glaiza Baliwag; (3) Criselle Darantinao; (4) Timothy John Dizon; (5) Analyn Morales; (6) Joy Saquing; (7) Minerva Hermosa; (8) Theresa Rapacona; (9) John Marlo Serquena; (10) Charmaine Jimeno; (11) Shane Powell; and (12) Richelda Galapia.

The respondents in the survey were a curious mix of people engaged in the following employment and livelihood activities: (a) design specialist; (b) accountant; (c) dentist; (d) bank teller; (e) internal auditor; (f) orthodontist; (g) salesman; (h) information technology specialist; (i) dentist-implantologist; (j) teacher; (k) sidewalk vendor; (l) security guard; (m) college student; and a (n) retiree.

A total of 120 respondents belonging to the following age brackets were surveyed. The results can be seen in Table 1, as well as In Figure 1.

Table 1. Ages of the participants.

AGE (years)	NUMBER	PERCENT
10 - 19	2	2
20 - 29	26	21
30 -39	69	57
40 - 49	14	12
50 - 59	8	7
60 - 69	1	1
TOTAL	120	100

When asked, “What is your understanding of the term “Sustainable Environmental Management?” the responses given by the participants can be seen in Table 2.

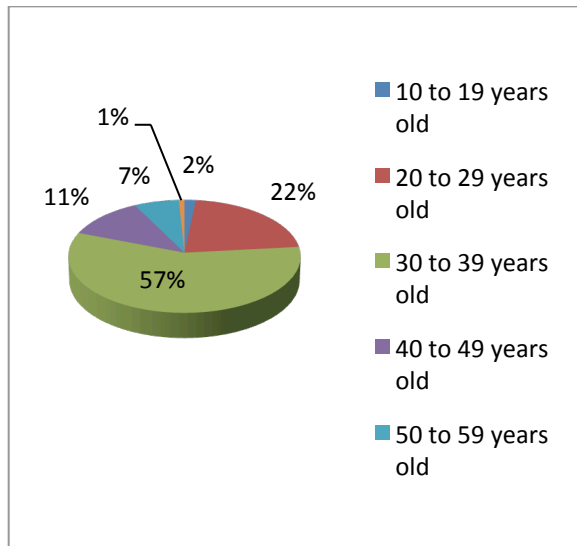


Figure 1. Participants' distribution by age.

Table 2. Responses of the participants on what a sustainable environment is.

RESPONSE	NUMBER	PERCENT
Good management of the environment	16	13
Maintaining / cleaning of the of environment	19	16
Protecting the environment	26	22
Studying the environment	3	2
I don't know	54	45
Others (more of "I don't know")	2	2
TOTAL	120	100

The aggregate total of 47% of the respondents not knowing what

sustainable environmental management is all about is a very disturbing figure. It simply means that many people have little knowledge of issues and concerns about our environment. Therefore, it is really imperative to find ways and means to popularize environmental concerns and issues.

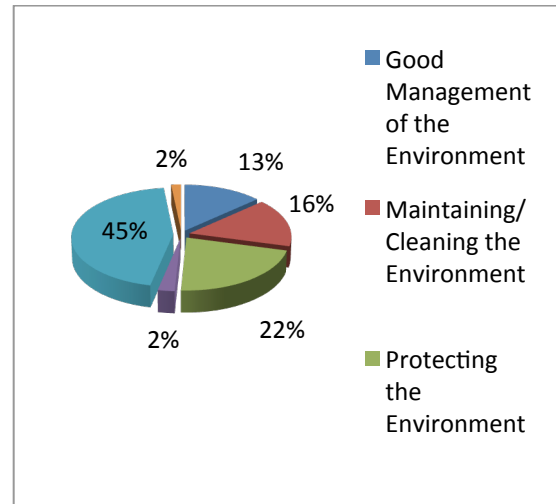


Figure 2. Sources of information on sustainable environment.

The participants were also asked about their sources of information on sustainable environmental environment (Table 3).

Table 3. Participants' sources of information on sustainable environmental management.

INFORMATION SOURCE	NUMBER	PERCENT
Television	24	20
Radio	22	18
Newspapers / Magazines	19	16
Internet	18	15
Others (word of mouth,	37	31

seminar, etc)		
Total	120	100

Thirty eight (38) percent of the respondents replied broadcast media (radio, 20% and television, 18%) when asked where they heard/learned of the sustainable environment. Broadcast media, in this case, is the best and ideal

Study results indicate that sustainable environmental management is a largely unknown concept. The little that people know about it is often vague and meaningless. The survey results showed that the best way to popularize the concept is through mass media (broadcast and print). In order of effectiveness, the popularization should be through: (1) television; (2) radio; and (3) newspaper (Figure 3). Eventually, the group decided to come up with a video presentation documenting the interviews, survey results, conclusion and recommendation.

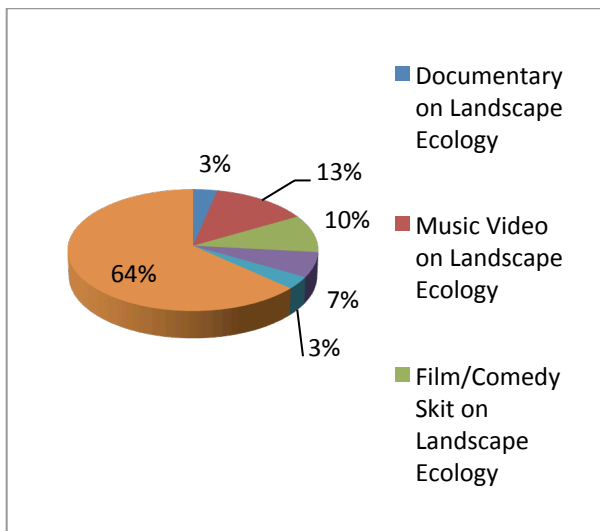


Figure 3. Participants' suggestions on how to disseminate the concept of environmental management.

medium in increasing the level of environmental awareness.

To validate the results of last semester's survey, a parallel survey was again conducted in the First Semester, School Year 2013-2014. It was done under ENRM 230 (Principles and Application of Landscape Ecology).

I worked with Analyn Morales and Jerome Adriano. This time, however, the question asked was: "How do you popularize Landscape Ecology to the illiterate and ignorant?"

The respondents totaled 30. The survey results can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4. Participants' suggestions on how to popularize the concept through mass media.

SUGGESTION	NUMBER	PERCENT
Documentary on landscape ecology	1	3
Music Video on landscape ecology	4	14
Film/Comedy Skit on landscape ecology	3	10
Cartoon/Animation on landscape ecology	2	7
Social Media (Facebook)	1	3
No Suggestion	19	63
TOTAL	30	100

It was not surprising that 63% of the respondents had “no suggestions” as previous survey results indicate low awareness levels of environmental issues and concerns. Visual materials (music videos, documentary films and other visual art forms) are the preferred materials in popularizing environmental matters to a chosen segment of society, in this case, the ignorant and illiterate. This segment of society is presumed to be the harder segment to reach for obvious reasons.

The encouraging result gathered from this survey is that 14% of the respondents suggested music or a music video as the most effective way to popularize landscape ecology to the illiterates and ignorant. This figure, no matter how small and practically insignificant, can be built on. It is still noteworthy since it represents a better percentage of the respondents’ choices compared to other suggestions.

## **MATERIALS AND METHOD**

The data gathered from the studies eventually came to good use. In the early part of April 2013, Professor Janet Martires, my faculty in-charge for ENRM 221 last semester, called to invite me to be one of the judges in a song-writing contest. The competition was a project of Yakap Kalikasan Tungo sa Kaunlaran ng Pilipinas, Inc., an environment advocacy group. The theme of the contest is “Kids to Forest” which is Yakap Kalikasan’s strategy of building awareness and appreciation among children and the youth on the importance of forests and how they, as youth Earth Ambassadors, can contribute to ensure that these forests

will still be there for them and the coming generations. It uses teaching-learning techniques that divert capability and values development from traditional classroom sessions to experiential interactive learning.

After two weeks, Professor Janet again called and asked me to join the song-writing competition, not as a judge but, as a contestant... a songwriter. The invitation honestly gave me some level of discomfort since I have never written an advocacy song before... but I just could not say no to her. I also am aware of the responsibility that goes with writing songs. While songwriters can exercise artistic freedom, they also have to structure their songs to be largely acceptable and within ethical standards. Songs are harder to compose than poetry because they require more than word count and rhyme, they need rhythm, melody and timing. Songwriting is more daunting because songwriters can exercise his own set of values but have to consider the sensitivities and background of their listeners. Songwriting carries with it a deeper responsibility simply because people love and believe in songs and are easily influenced by them. Knowing all these and the fact that I am charting unknown waters, I wanted to sign out but the normal Filipino “bahala na” mentality plus our “pakikisama” tradition got the better of me. However, armed with all the data gathered in the surveys and studies of the previous semester, I drew comfort from the thought that here and now is the opportunity to put all these studies and information to something more concrete... a song... an advocacy song. I just requested

Professor Janet to give me some time to go fishing so I could write the song.

Songwriters have their own unique, peculiar and (sometimes) strange ways in crafting musical pieces. It's a truly odd situation but that's just how it is with most musical artists. Some would lock themselves in rooms, sit in the park, pick a seat in a crowded shopping mall, go to mountaintops, and other unexplainably mysterious ways to compose songs. Me? ... I go fishing. The relative isolation of fishing helps clear my mind of my day-to-day pressures; the silence provides the blank sheet for me to write the melody and lyrics; and, the rhythmic waves provide the cadence and tempo to complete the basic elements of a song. So on 27 April 2013, I went fishing.

The concept and storyline of the song, as I imagined it along the theme of "Kids to Forest", was a young sounding voice singing a song of appeal to his/her parents or the older generation. I made a short list of singers I know who could project this younger sounding voice. Rather than stick to the traditional genre of advocacy songs which are normally folk, ballad, march or pop, I decided to experiment on a Latin beat to make some degree of distinction... bossanova and rumba. String (electric and bass guitars) and percussion instruments (drums, maracas, bells and chimes) would be the preferred musical instruments for this genre. This is also consistent with the fact that the Filipino's love for music is influenced by Western songs.

Getting back home after that fishing trip, I checked on my notes, picked up a guitar, turned on a digital recorder and

did a rough recording of the song. After a few days, I reviewed the recording and transcribed it on the computer. It was also then when I called Ms. Ella Cruz (the fiancée of my nephew) who used to sing in a band (The Hyperbeats) if she was willing to interpret the song. Ella readily accepted and we agreed to rehearse and work on a rough video/recording on election day, 13 May 2013.

During the rehearsal with Ella, I needed to make an on-the-spot arrangement of the song since the original arrangement was tailor-made for me. Ella has a dramatically higher voice range so the song had to be re-arranged, for her to comfortably sing it. That day (May 13<sup>th</sup>), using just an electric guitar as the basic instrumentation, we were able to come up with an entry version of the song using a video recorder. This was submitted to Professor Janet on May 17, 2013. Please go to the following link to view and listen to the rough video/recording and entry version of the song:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gfnul8N-gml>

On 12 June 2013, I received a text message from Mr. Nelson G. Martires, Executive Director of Yakap Kalikasan, with the information that the song made it to the finals of the competition. He also informed me that we are scheduled to do a studio recording of the song on 21 June 2013. The single biggest setback happened before the scheduled recording day. Ella, who works as a flight attendant of the Philippine Airlines, was in San Francisco, United States and was not available. As a back-up option, I gently requested (meaning: no allowance for one month if she refused)



my daughter, Anneka Marie “Neki” A. Antonio, to do the vocals. Another arrangement had to be rushed since Neki’s voice set was different from the available arrangements... Ella’s and mine.

The first studio recording was done at the Blackhole Recording Studio in Los Banos, Laguna. Neki, who really does not have any experience on recording or on-stage performance was a nervous wreck. Luckily, Mr. Armand L. Mauricio (President of Tulisanes and Musical Consultant for Yakap Kalikasan) and Mr. Gari M. Apolinario (Manager of Blackhole and a great sound technician) were there to calm her down, get her to relax and bring out the best in her. Gari and Armand made my job a lot easier.



The author with Anneka Marie Antonio who did the vocals in the recording of the song.

The basic instrumentation was still the electric guitar overlaid with a bass guitar, djembe and chimes which surprisingly were enough to project a full-band sound. Neki and I had to return to Blackhole Recording Studio

last 18 July 2013 to do minor but critical revisions of the first recording.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

“Masdan Ang Bukas Ko” is a song of appeal from the future generations to the present-day generation. The extensive use of “*Ama*” and “*Ina*” refers particularly to this. It also pre-supposes, as a note of hope, that the future generations will be much more enlightened on environmental causes than the present generation... and that they have seriously taken the environment to heart and are begging to be heard with the use of the refrain: “*Ama, masdan ang bukas ko. Ang pakiusap ko para sa iyo. Ina, ang awit kong ito, laman ng puso ko nawa’y dinggin nyo.*”

Global warming is the single-most dominant indicator that our environment is changing for the worst. The youth are aware of this and are beginning to ask: “*Ano ba’ng nangyayari? Umiinit ang mundo. Di mo ba nawawari? Nagkakamali tayo.*” They (the youth) are also beginning to be aware that the present generation might be doing something wrong to the environment and are offering simple but doable solutions: “*Ba’t hindi natin pagisipan pa’no uunlad ang kagubatan. Magtanim tayo ng puno.*” “*Magkaisa tayo.*” highlights the need for cooperation and a united stance in protecting and preserving our natural resources.

“*Magtanim tayo ng puno*” is not only said for what it means but is also a symbolism for waste management, clean air, clean water, loss of biodiversity and other environmental

concerns. Again, “*Magkaisa tayo*” highlights the need for oneness in purpose and action as the key to our success.

Not wanting to sound like a prophet of doom or overly fatalistic but making the same fair warning, these lines were included: “*Ano ba ang hangarin? Kaunlaran ba’y bitin pa rin? Kailangan pa bang pumutol? Baka Diyos na ang tumutol.*” These lines underscore the need to take care of the forest and not over-utilize this resource. Again, “*Kailangan pa bang pumutol*”, although specifically refers to deforestation, may well symbolize the abuse and over-extraction of other resources such as minerals, water resources, and the like. “*Baka Diyos na ang tumutol*” refers to the dire consequences of environmental abuse such as the droughts, increasing water level, floods, and more.

The lines: “*Ba’t hindi natin pagyamanin, ang kalikasan ay lingapin.*” is a shift in focus from the forest (*kagubatan*) to the environment in general (*kalikasan*). Towards the end of the song, it shifts and now refers to a broader concern... taking care of the environment and not just the forest in particular.

The choice of the bossanova-rumba genre was because of the mass and generally accepted appeal of the Latin beat. The “target” of this song is the consciousness of the present generation. Rather than use rap or Negro blues, I would rather use a genre which has a soothing effect, is softer on the senses and is not a strange genre people have never heard before. Besides, we need to get people to listen to the song before they could start appreciating its contents.

Below are the lyrics of the song:

### **MASDAN ANG BUKAS KO**

Ama, masdan ang bukas ko  
Ang pakiusap ko para sa iyo  
Ina, ang awit kong ito  
Laman ng puso ko nawa’y dinggin nyo

Ano ba’ng nangyayari?  
Umiinit ang mundo  
Di mo ba nawawari?  
Nagkakamali tayo

Ba’t hindi natin pagisipan  
pa’no uunlad ang kagubatan  
Magtanim tayo ng puno  
Magkaisa tayo

Ama, masdan ang bukas ko  
Ang pakiusap ko para sa iyo  
Ina, ang awit kong ito  
Laman ng puso ko nawa’y dinggin nyo

Ano ba ang hangarin?  
Kaunlaran ba’y bitin pa rin?  
Kailangan pa bang pumutol?  
baka Diyos na ang tumutol

Ba’t hindi natin pagyamanin  
Ang kalikasan ay lingapin  
Magtanim tayo ng puno  
Magkaisa tayo

Ama, masdan ang bukas ko  
Ang himig kong ito, pakinggan nyo...  
Oh...  
Ina, ang awit kong ito  
Laman ng puso...

For your listening pleasure, please go to this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=78mbTsMEJxQ>

## CONCLUSION

Last semester, I enrolled in the MENRM program of UPOU and going through my next semester at present, I took notice of the many brilliant ideas from my classmates (under the superb on-line management, guidance and moderation from our FICs) on ways and means to protect and restore our environment. But, sadly, all these brilliant exchange of ideas are relegated to mere ideas that only manage to circulate among us (the on-line students). Good as these ideas are, there has to be a better way to communicate them to a larger and critical segment of our society. As I have already mentioned in the beginning of this article, "A cause, be it political, social or environmental, could only succeed when critical mass is achieved." I believe that this is an important element that we need to address.

The invitation by Professor Janet to join the songwriting competition was a spark of bright sunlight for me. There seems to be a great opportunity in this undertaking I should not miss-out. Music, as we Filipinos love so much, is a good tool to communicate our environmental concerns to a greater number of people. I also believe that the talent for songwriting is God-given gift that should be generously shared to foster better friendships and goodwill and for higher causes in life. Not that Ma'am Janet scared, intimidated, coerced and terrorized me enough to join.., I wanted to join because I firmly believe that this will be an effective

measure to increase the level of environmental awareness and concern of a greater number of people. In our page of the "Kids to Forest" album, I wrote: "There might be a few of us singing songs of concern for the environment today but it is a fair and decent start. Believe that there will be more singing with us tomorrow..."

My sincere congratulations to Yakap Kalikasan, UPOU-FMDS headed by Dean Inocencio E. Buot, Jr., the Tulasanes, UN-FAO, Blackhole Recording and the DENR-FMB for an awesome project and I wish them more success!

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