

National Convergence for Resilience: Managing Critical Watersheds for Philippine Green Growth and Poverty Reduction

*Keynote Address of Secretary Emmanuel M. De Guzman
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Distinguished members of the sponsor organizations, advocacy leaders of climate action and disaster risk reduction, local chief executives, colleagues in the government, ladies and gentlemen:

I wish to convey our grateful appreciation to the Asian Development Bank as principal sponsor of this important conference and workshop that will facilitate the sharing of good practices on strengthening local government capacity to identify and demonstrate priority adaptation and mitigation opportunities in critical watersheds, initiatives that ADB has been generously supporting.

I also wish to convey our gratitude to the three co-sponsors of this event: the Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction (JFPR), the Institute for Global Environmental Strategies (IGES), and the Southeast Asian Regional Centre for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA) consortium.

This collaboration between and among regional and international agencies exemplifies the kind of convergence for shared goals, that is much needed today to respond to the many development challenges before us in a world of growing interdependence, in a planet increasingly fraught with climate and disaster risk.

And I believe -- as we must all believe -- that together, through this meeting of minds and sharing of knowledge, expertise and experience, we can transcend the challenges of climate change to our communities, and chart a safer and more resilient future for our country.

Ours is a land of incredible beauty endowed with abundant natural resources. Our watersheds contain a rich diversity of animal and plant life; they are repository of intricate and interlinked ecosystems created over millions of years. These watersheds – formed by rivers, lakes, streams, reservoirs, wetlands, and all the underlying ground water – are central not only to our physical environment but also to our country's sustainable development.

Nearly 60% of our cities and municipalities are located in watershed areas or along their out-flow points such as river basins and coastlines. These communities are highly susceptible to flooding, storm surges, and sea-level rise. The deforestation and improper land use in watersheds further complicate the problem of increasing climate and disaster risk in urban areas. Such is the case in disaster-prone cities like Ormoc, Marikina, and Cagayan de Oro, where populations are dense and physical development is massive. In a worldwide study by a British risk consultancy, Manila is cited as among seven cities that face the highest exposure to the adverse impacts of climate change.

Our task, therefore, is to advance the mainstreaming of climate and disaster risk reduction in the integrated development planning and management of watersheds. We must do this in order to ensure climate resilience and green growth in the adjacent urban areas.

The Philippines has 412 river basins that together with our watersheds constitute 70 percent of our landmass. Considered the lifeblood and drivers of the Philippine economy, our rivers, along with their basins and watersheds, deserve the priority attention and focus of our national programs for sustainable development. A total of 18 river basins are targeted for development under a multi-faceted long-term river basin development plan.

An important related concern is water security for our people. The ADB has pointed out that water security is a major concern for most countries in the region, one that is characterized by poor management and lack of investment in infrastructure. Highlighting the link between good governance and good water, the ADB had noted that 65 percent of peoples across the Asia Pacific still live without secure household water supplies. Let us have no doubt that among them is our own people. Water is a looming crisis in many of our urban areas, including in Metro Manila.

Yet our cities are increasingly at risk. The rapid growth of our cities combined with climate change and the urban population explosion, create new stresses for urban settlements and make city dwellers increasingly vulnerable to natural hazards.

This urban migration phenomenon is rapidly changing the landscape of Philippine society. In the 2000 census of population and housing, about 48 percent of Filipinos were living in the urban areas compared to 37 percent two decades earlier. The urban population had grown at rapid annual rate of five percent from 1960 to 1995, and at three percent from 1995 to 2000. By 2030, it is projected that about eight out of ten Filipinos will dwell in the cities.

There are immense social, economic and environmental implications in this rural-to-urban migration pattern in terms of watershed management and poverty alleviation. A steady migration to over-crowded cities or hinterlands contributes to wider deforestation, watershed destruction, and poverty.

Now, given such enormity and growing prevalence of risk, what is our response?

Our response must be strategic: A national convergence for building the resilience of local communities against the impacts of climate change and disasters. By convergence we mean integrating various existing efforts of government to ensure a holistic, risk-and-science-based approach to national and local development planning. By convergence we mean a whole-of-government approach to achieving the goals of our National Climate Change Action Plan, our National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Plan, and our commitment under the Paris Climate Agreement. By convergence we mean we are one against risk.

Given the risk crisis, we all need to contribute more efficiently and effectively to the national challenge to face the problem of climate change and disasters squarely: To prevent new risks and reduce and manage existing ones. We can only be effective in achieving this contribution by implementing measures that are integrated and inclusive.

First let us all work together to ensure that climate and disaster risks are well understood, along with the probability and frequency of the natural hazard, the level of exposure, the degree of vulnerability, and the coping capacity of the community.

Second, let us help in strengthening climate and disaster risk governance. This involves ensuring coherence in our laws, regulations, and public policies, defining roles and responsibilities, guiding and incentivizing the public and private sectors to take action to reduce risk.

Third, let us help show through the projects we undertake that public and private investment in disaster risk prevention and reduction through structural and non-structural measures are essential in enhancing the economic, social, health and cultural resilience of persons, communities, countries and their assets, as well as the environment.

Fourth, we must strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response, take early action in anticipation of events, integrate disaster risk reduction in response preparedness and ensure that capacities are in place for effective response and recovery at all levels.

I trust that the ADB-assisted projects that will be discussed here have much to share in this regard. I highly appreciate the focus of these projects on building resilience and green growth and their alignment with the new international agenda for resilience development. I am, therefore, keen in following the progress of these projects.

To build on, sustain, and enhance the gains of these resilience building initiatives, the Commission will upscale the Ecotown approach to Communities of Resilience or CORE to align with three of the post-2015 international development frameworks:

- (1) The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction which focuses on resilience development to disasters and emphasizes the national and local level accountabilities to prevent creation of risk, reducing risk and managing residual risk.
- (2) The Sustainable Development Goals which emphasizes multi-dimensional and transformative approaches to resilience development through the 17 Global Goals for the next 15 years that ought to end extreme poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and fix climate change.
- (3) And, the Paris Agreement which presents an adaptive approach to resilience development as well as mitigation measures to prevent the accumulation of drivers of climate risks with emphasis on international accountabilities.

As drivers of change, these new frameworks bring forth an opportunity for the country to promote an integrated approach to disaster risk reduction, climate change and sustainable energy and yield co-benefits for economic growth, poverty reduction and eco-system preservation.

Our upscaling of the ecotown framework to CORE is in consonance with implementing these new frameworks. CORE will facilitate building climate and disaster resilience and green growth at the local community level. CORE will respond to the resilience challenge by providing the LGUs the necessary guide and tools for risk assessment and communication and multi-criteria analysis of interventions that will facilitate their preparation of local climate change action plan as well as their local disaster risk reduction and management plan.

Risk assessment is most fundamental in local planning for resilience. It primarily presents an assessment of hazards and vulnerabilities and provides a basis for improving preparedness and response to minimize losses. It also informs policies and decision-making processes intended to reduce risk, raises public awareness, and recommends risk reduction measures that could be implemented at household and community levels. It also provides a knowledge base for recovery to include the specific elements of 'build-back-better.' Finally, it enables the development of financial mechanisms and products for transferring and managing risks.

In the last 6 years, the Government of the Philippines in cooperation with development partners has initiated worthwhile efforts on generating risk information. These include with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on Project READY (disaster aspects) and Climate and disaster exposure database (ClimEx.db). There are several other initiatives that manifest the increasing importance of risk information to development.

On behalf of the Climate Change Commission, I invite you to join and support us, together with national government agencies concerned, civil society, academia, private business groups, international organizations, and other key stakeholders and sectoral leaders, in our national convergence strategy for resilience to deliver eight convergence outputs for the Filipino nation:

- (1) Establishment of a national integrated climate and disaster risk information system; (NICCDIES: LECB) National Integrated Climate Change Database and Information and Exchange System.
- (2) Capacity development of LGUs on risk assessment and multi-criteria and cost-benefit analysis for risk-based local development planning;
- (3) Establishment of a national disaster loss and damage database system;
- (4) Policy development on disaster risk financing and risk transfer mechanism;
- (5) Integration of climate change and disaster risk knowledge in K-12 education and the establishment of The Climate Resilience Museum;
- (6) Transformative information-education-communication on disaster and climate risk reduction, including raising awareness on the post-2015 international development frameworks;
- (7) Strengthening multi-hazard early warning system and services; this will be inextricably linked to the NICCDIES and
- (8) Establishment of monitoring, reporting and evaluation system for the implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 and Sustainable Development Agenda 2015-2030, and the Paris Climate Agreement.

These we will pursue along with the development of a pool of multi-disciplinary expertise at the local level, whose services the LGUs could readily access and avail themselves of in their locality.

There is no more fitting time than now for scaling up our development efforts for resilience and translating their gains to meaningful and productive services for all LGUs than now.

The time is now for convergence and integration on resilience development and green growth that shall lead to good urban and local risk governance, enhanced and strengthened rural livelihood, ensured ecosystems integrity, reduced risk and poverty, and a low-carbon development.

Working together to reduce climate and disaster risk and building resilience in our communities and critical watersheds is a most reliable avenue for our nation to secure a safe, sustainable, and prosperous future for all Filipinos.

Thank you and Mabuhay.