



NEWS ROUNDUP

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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

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By: Jane Bautista

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PHILIPPINE NEWS AGENCY

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By: Nanette Guadalquiver

The Negros Occidental provincial government is gearing up for focused responses to help farmers cope with the effects of the El Niño phenomenon, seen to last until the second quarter of 2024.

Information and Knowledge Management Division

CNBC

[Climate change has forced millions to flee their homes — and Asia is ‘not prepared’](#)

By: Chelsea Ong

As the number of climate disasters increase, more people are being forced to flee their homes, especially in Asia.

A record 32.6 million internal displacements were associated with disasters in 2022 — that’s 41% higher than the annual average of the past decade, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. It was far more than the 28.3 million people displaced by conflict and violence that same year.

In particular, four of the top five countries with the highest number of new internal displacements due to disasters in 2022 were in Asia, said the IDMC. Pakistan had the highest number at 8.2 million, followed by the Philippines at 5.5 million and China at 3.6 million.

The situation is set to get worse.

According to a 2021 World Bank report, climate change could force 216 million people across six regions to move within their countries by 2050.

However, Vinod Thomas, visiting senior fellow at ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, noted that these estimates may understate the reality.

“Projections usually underestimate how bad things are, and all the projections point in one direction — this is going to increase, and increase very rapidly,” said Thomas.

South Asia most at risk

In the region, South Asia is likely to have the most people displaced by climate change due to the density of its populations and its vulnerability to the effects of climate change, he added. In particular, he noted that Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan are likely to be the most affected.

According to the World Economic Forum, 10% to 18% of South Asia’s GDP is at risk due to climate disasters. This is at about thrice the risk North America faces and 10 times more than Europe.

Climate change driven internal displacement has severe economic repercussions for the host country, said Thomas.

During Australia's Black Summer bushfires from 2019 to 2020, the loss of economic production of one person missing a day of work was about \$510, according to the IDMC. There were 65,000 new displacements because of the bushfires.

Covering just the housing needs of those unable to return to their homes for a year was also estimated to cost between \$44 million and \$52 million, the IDMC said.

People displaced by climate disasters, however, could also decide to leave the country entirely.

"What we have seen regarding external movement is the tip of the iceberg and just a glimpse of what is likely to happen," Thomas said. "And we are not prepared for that."

Migration pathways

While internal displacement due to climate change is much more common than cross-border displacement, people may gradually start moving across borders as the effects of climate change worsen, said Tamara Wood, senior research fellow at the Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law.

In November, Australia signed a migration deal with Tuvalu offering 280 citizens permanent residency in Australia each year.

In Southeast Asia, UNHCR senior advisor on migration and human rights Pia Oberoi told CNBC that many people are already moving in the face of climate change and environmental degradation.

However, such movements can sometimes be disguised as traditional migration flows such as labor migration, she said.

For instance, there is little research about why Bangladeshi migrant workers in Southeast Asia are moving overseas to work, often willing to take on large debts to do so.

Some have nothing to return to, Oberoi explained, as climate change may have hurt their crop production at home. Others may be returning to slum areas in the cities they were forced to move to if they return to their home country, she added.

Given that people may be forced to move in the context of climate change because they are no longer able to cope in their home countries, governments need to relook the migration channels they offer to see what more can be done to protect people's human rights, she said.

For example, it is not easy for people to return to see their families through these migration paths even though the right to family life is important, she added.

Wood noted that sustainable ways of helping those leaving their countries due to climate change should include offering them more than a visa, but also providing support like ensuring their qualifications are recognized or helping them integrate into the culture, and facilitating movement of money back home.

“We need to conduct better research to understand their situation and vulnerability, and then build that into pathways to provide a protective response,” said Oberoi. Countries can look within their legal systems to figure out how to help people affected by climate change, she added.

Improving measures don’t “always require putting in place a new category of protection or a new refugee definition or new humanitarian pathways,” Oberoi said. “It could just be the pathways we already have responding adequately to the protection needs of people that are moving.”

Wood said putting these measures in place can help those who want to make a preemptive decision to move, to do so in a controlled and well-planned way. That way, they can gradually adjust instead of being driven to do so when they reach crisis point, she added.

What more needs to be done

Countries need to focus on three steps to deal with climate displacement, said Thomas, citing relief and rehabilitation, adaptation to climate change and mitigation by decarbonizing economies.

He said Asian countries are not prepared for the relief and rehabilitation of refugees, and have done poorly in building social and financial safety nets.

Something to consider going forward would be a facility that pulls resources across countries and makes them available when needed, Thomas added.

“Most of the time, the problem is that when the problem hits, you’re not ready with the financing,” he said. “So the facility can be opened up as needed, and otherwise, it just earns interest.”

When it comes to adaptation, the money allocated to such measures, such as coastal defenses, has to be considered as part of the investment budget — not an optional budget, Thomas said.

“We have to continuously increase adaptation capacity,” said Thomas. “Being able to withstand and improve is what it takes to move the needle on climate migration.”

Wood suggested that other countries, like the Global North or industrialized countries that have contributed more to climate change, should also step up. She said that could come in the form of providing migration pathways and work opportunities, as well as funding to help other countries adapt and manage the issue.

In 2009, developed countries promised to mobilize \$100 billion a year by 2020 to help poorer nations hit by disasters caused by climate change. Last month, the OECD said the overdue promise may have been achieved.

But the fund is just a starting point and a mere drop in the bucket, Thomas pointed out, adding that public opinion needs to change and the pressure needs to be on politicians to take action now.

“In the meantime, while we are talking and discussing and quibbling, the millions of climate migrants are the forgotten casualties of climate change,” said Thomas. “They are hidden, they have no voice, and they don’t even have an identity.”

DOWN TO EARTH

COP28 offered important outcomes, but not enough to meet Paris goals

By: Gurinder Kaur

The 28th Conference of Parties (COP28) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change concluded on December 13, 2023 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE). The conference is the largest climate summit globally and has been held every year since 1995.

The main purpose of the COP28 was to limit the increase in the average temperature of the earth to 1.5 degrees Celsius above the temperature of the pre-industrial revolution period by the end of the century.

It took into account the efforts of all countries, reducing dependence on coal and other fossil fuels, generating energy from renewable sources, reducing emissions of methane and other greenhouse gases, reducing the losses of developing countries from natural disasters caused by temperature rise, and planning for the future after considering issues such as the establishment of a Loss and Damage fund for compensation.

Some important outcomes of this conference are to be welcomed. The Loss and Damage Fund became operational on the first day of COP28, which had been in the works for the past three decades. Fund collection started on the first day of the COP28 and \$792 million has been accumulated so far.

Second was the decision to transition from fossil fuels (coal, oil and natural gas) in energy systems in a just, orderly and equitable manner with renewable energy generation to reduce carbon emissions by 2050 in order to control the increase in average global temperature.

This decision sounds historic and admirable in language, but it deserves some special discussion. Another important achievement was the decision to generate 11,000 gigawatts of energy from renewable energy sources globally by 2030. Nuclear energy has also been brought under the category of clean energy at this conference.

At the same time, 160 countries have agreed to make necessary changes to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in food and agriculture-related systems, as these two systems account for one-third of total GHG emissions. The decision was voluntary and not under any international agreements.

The President of the Climate Crisis Advisory Group and the former chief adviser of the United Kingdom said the wording of the agreement on fossil fuels was too weak. Many scientists have also called the agreement flawed.

The Editor-in-Chief of the journal Nature, Magdalena Skipper said, “Fossil fuels should be stopped in all cases because, according to science, these fuels are increasing the temperature of the earth. Leaders around the world must accept this reality.”

An editorial in the journal also brought out that the conference had missed an opportunity to tackle global warming. Climate doesn’t care who emits greenhouse gases, the editorial continued. The scientists said that loopholes included the call to “accelerate” carbon capture and storage to trap emissions from burning fossil fuels, an option that can play a minor role at best.

The COP28 has taken place at a time when the earth’s average temperature is repeatedly breaking old records and setting new records relating to temperature rise. To limit the earth’s average temperature rise to 1.5°C by 2050, greenhouse gas emissions need to be reduced by 43 per cent by 2030 and 60 per cent by 2030 after they peak in 2025.

Achieving this goal seems unlikely with an agreement to continue producing energy from fossil fuels. So far, the average temperature of the earth has increased by 1.1°C compared to the pre-industrial era.

Agreements to gradually reduce the use of fossil fuels instead of completely phasing them out revealed the hidden stakes of oil-producing countries, multinational companies and countries like the United States, China and others with huge oil and coal reserves, along with major use of these fuels.

The Dubai conference was also attended by a large number of industry representatives, including around 2,500 from the oil and natural gas sector, 475 from the carbon capture and storage sector and over 100 from commercial agriculture.

According to a report by the World Economic Forum, GHG emissions are continuously increasing by 1.5 per cent per year, while according to the Paris Climate Agreement of 2015, they should be reduced by 7 per cent every year from 2019 to 2030. According to a report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, if all countries in the world cut greenhouse gas emissions under the Nationally Determined Contributions as promised, there would be only a 2 per cent reduction in emissions by 2030 compared to 2019.

In the Paris Agreement, countries had agreed that by 2050, the increase in the average temperature of the earth should be limited to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial temperatures. According to the latest estimates, all countries in the world are falling far short of their pledges made under the agreement. The year 2023 may be the hottest year on record so far, according to temperature records. This year's average temperature may also register an increase of 1.5°C.

Initiating a Loss and Damage Fund is a laudable initiative, but the amount collected is too little to compensate for the losses caused by natural disasters in developing countries. In 2022, a flood in Pakistan caused a loss of \$16 billion. According to United Nations estimates, developing countries will need \$300 billion every year by 2030 to cope with natural disasters caused by climate change.

Developing countries are also demanding that these funds be given in the form of grants instead of loans. The US, the largest emitter of GHG in history, contributed only \$17.5 million to the Loss and Damage Fund.

The COP28 was chaired by Sultan Al-Jaber, who is the head of a major oil company. The agreements to 'transition away' from fossil fuels suit the interests of a few but may be harmful for people and the planet. It is also important that out of the 198 countries, 130 countries had demanded a complete phase out of energy from fossil fuels.

In 2009, developed countries pledged \$100 billion annually to the Climate Fund to help developing countries, but this amount has never been fully collected and distributed to developing countries. A lot of promises are made at every conference, but they are rarely fulfilled. Since 1995, the Parties to the COP have continued to hold summits on increasing natural disasters, but there is no sign of a reduction in GHG emissions.

Developing countries had high hopes from COP28 like agreements on drastic reductions in GHG emissions and restrictions on energy production from fossil fuels (coal, oil and natural gas). However, with the continued use of fossil fuels, the average temperature of the earth may increase even more in the future. The conference has made the use of fossil fuels too flexible and soft at a cost to every country in the world in the form of lives, property, and growing disasters.

Head of the Marshall Islands, John Silk, who was disappointed with the performance of the conference, said he came to the conference to address the greatest challenge of our generation, but we have all come to an agreement that is full of problems.

EURO NEWS

[Buckled lines and landslides: How climate change is hitting Europe's rail industry](#)

By: Rebecca Ann Hughes

Climate change is increasingly becoming a major challenge for rail transport. Storms, snowfall, floods and fires are putting rail networks to the test across Europe.

In Austria alone, Railjets and other ÖBB trains were forced to a standstill 1,900 times in 2023 due to weather conditions, according to Austrian newspaper Kronen Zeitung.

So how is the rail industry adapting to a warming planet?

How is climate change affecting the rail industry?

"We have never had as many train cancellations due to storms in recent years as we did last August," ÖBB spokesperson Bernhard Rieder told Austrian press.

"The floods in Tyrol and Salzburg alone and massive mudslides after thunderstorms led to 716 unscheduled stops due to the weather."

He added that increasing temperatures in the Alpine region are leading to a rise in embankment and forest fires, track distortions and a decline in protective forests due to heat stress.

"We are watching the disruptions caused by extreme weather events with concern," he said.

In the UK, a government advisor warned that travel disruption would be worsened by climate change unless the country's rail network received more funding.

Speaking in August, Sir John Armitt pointed to the heavy rainfall that hit train travel with flash floods and landslides.

Heatwaves were also responsible for widespread train cancellations, due to problems like buckled rails and fallen overhead power lines.

Railway tracks are engineered to withstand a certain range of temperatures but can become distorted in very hot conditions.

Heat can also cause overhead power lines to sag and catch on train equipment.

How is the rail industry adapting to climate change?

In Austria, overhead power lines are being retrofitted to prevent overheating. Additionally, rails are being made more heat-resistant by applying white paint.

Slopes at risk of slipping are monitored even more closely and weather observation is also being expanded.

In the UK, more has been spent on drainage, and technology is being introduced to remotely monitor rail temperature.

Following the death of three people in August 2020 when a train collided with a landslip in Aberdeenshire, Network Rail has developed new software to predict sudden, torrential rainfall.

The company's Cardiff operations centre deploys heat sensors and cameras to keep track of rail conditions around the region.

Although this won't tackle service disruptions, it means safety can be improved by putting speed restrictions in place and calling in maintenance teams.

Europe's 'tri-brid' trains that could revolutionise rail transport

The rail industry is also turning its attention to the root of the problem and working to reduce its impact on global warming.

Italian company Hitachi Rail has developed a ground-breaking tri-brid train.

The Masaccio locomotive can be powered in three ways: via overhead electric lines, via a diesel hybrid engine or via battery.

The revolutionary battery can be charged when the train is running on electricity from the overhead lines. It can also harness the braking energy from the train stopping.

This planet-friendly battery can power the train, without the need for diesel, for short sections of line where there are gaps in the electrification.

It is also employed during the approach and departure from stations to the train doesn't contribute to a town's noise or air pollution.

The trains are tested in a specially built climate chamber that simulates temperatures from -50 to +40C to ensure they can withstand the weather extremes of the future.

PALAWAN NEWS

El Niño Impact: 18 provinces, including Palawan, in 2024

By: Elmer Badilla

Seventeen provinces, including Palawan, are expected to take a hit from the El Niño phenomenon, according to the Philippine Atmospheric Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA).

The affected provinces include Benguet, Ifugao, Kalinga, Apayao, Mountain Province, Ilocos Sur, La Union, Pangasinan, Cagayan, Nueva Ecija, Nueva Viscaya, Pampanga, Tarlac, Batangas, Cavite, Oriental Mindoro, and Palawan.

PAGASA also forecasted a potential for dry conditions in the Spratly Islands and a dry spell in Abra, Ilocos Norte, Isabela, Quirino, Bataan, Bulacan, Zambales, Aurora, Occidental Mindoro, and Metro Manila.

El Niño, a climatic phenomenon characterized by warmer-than-average sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific with the potential for drought conditions, poses a threat to water resources and agricultural activities.

This climatic event is part of the larger El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) cycle, which influences weather patterns globally.

Pagasa also explained that a dry spell occurs when there are two consecutive months with a 21 to 60 percent reduction in average rainfall.

Drought conditions, on the other hand, are defined as five consecutive months with below-normal rainfall or three consecutive months with more than a 60 percent decrease from the usual.

In anticipation of the potential impact of the looming El Niño, President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. has issued directives to various government agencies, emphasizing the need for “proactive and science-based long-term solutions,” including a public awareness campaign focusing on water and energy conservation.

The Department of Agriculture is actively engaged in mapping out areas susceptible to negative effects from the impending dry spell.

Department of Science and Technology Secretary Renato Solidum Jr. has drawn parallels between the current El Niño situation and the devastating 1997-1998 event,

the most severe experienced by the Philippines, resulting in significant agricultural damage amounting to billions of pesos.

Addressing the media during a Malacañang press briefing, Secretary Solidum expressed concerns about the likelihood of moderate to severe drought conditions persisting from February to May 2024.

“Now, based on recent conditions, moderate to severe drought conditions are likely from February to May 2024. And by the end of May, there would be 77 percent of the provinces of the country that would have potential for drought—that would be around 65 provinces—and seven percent potential for dry spells, or around six provinces,” Solidum said.

“And because of this, we need to further intensify our efforts to make sure that we are ready for this, especially in the various fields that were already mentioned, like health, water, agriculture, sanitation, and, of course, peace and order, and we also need to involve everyone in this effort,” he added.

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Post-revelry air quality 'unhealthy' in Metro Manila areas — DENR

By: Jane Bautista

Several Metro Manila cities greeted the new year with poorer air quality, with some seeing an “acutely unhealthy” level of pollutants, data from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) showed.

Based on the 8 a.m. data from the Environmental Management Bureau (EMB), air quality in Mandaluyong City reached an “acutely unhealthy” ambient air quality index (AQI) value of 260, as the monitoring station in the area gathered a high level of suspended particles 10 micrometers or less (PM10) in size like dust from paved and unpaved roadways, no thanks to the traditional burning of fireworks and firecrackers to welcome the new year.

“While some of these particles can be filtered by the body, these can irritate your eyes, nose, and throat,” the DENR explained in an earlier statement.

Based on collected PM10 data, the air quality in the cities of Makati and Pateros was “very unhealthy” while it was “unhealthy for sensitive groups” in Taguig City and Pasig City, and “fair” in Caloocan City and San Juan City.

The monitoring stations in the remaining cities in Metro Manila, however, were offline at the time while Quezon City and Valenzuela City had “no station.”

‘Emergency’ status

Data from the DENR website showed that Makati City, Pasig City, and Pateros even reached an ambient AQI value of 1,000 with an “emergency” status at 8 a.m. for monitoring stations that collected particles 2.5 micrometers or less (PM2.5).

The United States-based Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said these fine particles were “dangerous because they can get into the deep parts of your lungs — or even into your blood.”

While the remarks indicated an “emergency” level in the three areas, the DENR’s data were not color-coded maroon—the identifier for the emergency category in DENR Administrative Order No. 2020-14.

The 1,000 AQI shown in the EMB graphics also exceeded the scale of 0-500.

The Inquirer sought clarification from the DENR but it had yet to respond at press time on Monday.

In Caloocan City, the EMB recorded an air quality value of 106, which is “unhealthy for sensitive groups.”

Under this condition, the DENR cautioned people to limit outdoor exertion while those with heart or respiratory diseases like asthma were advised to stay indoors.

By 10 a.m., the EMB’s updated data for monitoring stations of PM2.5 showed that Pasig City remained at the emergency level while air quality in Makati was acutely unhealthy and fair in Caloocan City and Pateros.

On the other hand, based on PM10 monitoring, air quality in Mandaluyong City slightly improved but was still classified as very unhealthy for sensitive groups.

According to the same indicator, air quality in the cities of Pasig, San Juan, and Makati was seen as “fair” by 10 a.m., while it was “good” in Caloocan City, Taguig City, and Pateros.

Rhea Torres, a weather specialist at the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa), said they also monitored “thermal inversion” in Metro Manila and parts of Calabarzon (Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, Quezon) region resulting in thick smog on Monday.

The DENR-EMB earlier explained that temperature inversion was a natural phenomenon wherein smog — a combination of smoke and fog — and other particulate matter are trapped closer to the ground.

“What happened was that the pollutants or the components in the drying particles of these fireworks, as well as the pollution in our environment, mixed and came together so it was thicker compared to the normal haze or smog that we experience in the last few months,” Torres said in an interview with “Balitanghali.”

She added that both haze and smog are forms of pollution, but that smog was thicker and could reduce visibility.

Fortunately, by 6 p.m., DENR data showed that air quality had improved to “good,” both for PM10 and PM2.5, except for Mandaluyong which showed a “fair” status for the PM10 indicator.

PHILIPPINE NEWS AGENCY

[Negros Occidental gears up for continued El Niño response](#)

By: Nanette Guadalquiver

The Negros Occidental provincial government is gearing up for focused responses to help farmers cope with the effects of the El Niño phenomenon, seen to last until the second quarter of 2024.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration, which issued an El Niño alert in May last year, indicated an expected increase in the likelihood of below-normal rainfall conditions in particular areas of the country, which could have negative impacts, such as dry spells and droughts.

Provincial Administrator Rayfrando Diaz II said the efforts will focus on “productive and already irrigated lands,” which are likely to be less affected, to ensure ample rice supply in the province.

“We have already identified areas where water can be impounded in our rice-producing local government units,” he told reporters on Wednesday.

Diaz said the provincial government has procured 30 sets of water pumps with pipes to distribute water supply to the irrigation system from impounding sites.

Rice farmers under the Federation of Irrigators’ Association of Central Negros-Bago River Irrigation System, mainly from Bago City, La Carlota City, Valladolid, Pulpandan, and San Enrique, will benefit from the assistance.

Bago City alone, considered “the rice bowl of Negros Occidental,” yields more than 30 percent of the rice production of the province.

“The El Niño phenomenon is now affecting us. We are ready. I have asked the farmers, they say we can do it. We are prepared and we can meet the challenges of El Niño head on,” Diaz said.

Earlier, the provincial government allotted some PHP15 million in funding for the El Niño response to cover the acquisition of materials and equipment to maximize the management of available surface water.

“(This month), we will be able to have it delivered and distributed to farmers in the pre-identified areas. We are prepared to deploy the soonest time possible,” Diaz said.

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