



NEWS ROUNDUP

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By: Cai Ordinario

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By: Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson

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ECO BUSINESS

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By: Mary Judaline Partlow

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Late Tuesday, the European Union's Copernicus Earth Observation Program released its compiled global temperature data for 2023, and to say that the findings were shocking would be an understatement. It was widely anticipated that the data would show 2023 was the hottest year on record, but what was not expected was that it would show the planet has already reached the climate "red line" of an average 1.5 degrees Celsius temperature over the pre-industrial average.

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Information and Knowledge Management Division

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Extreme weather events and an economic downturn are among the top risks cited by Filipino experts, according to the World Economic Forum's (WEF) 2024 Global Risk Report.

Based on the 19th edition of the report, apart from these, other top risks in the Philippines are energy supply shortage, inflation and infectious diseases.

The top five short-term risks globally are misinformation and disinformation followed by extreme weather events; societal polarization; cyber insecurity; and interstate armed conflict.

"An unstable global order characterized by polarizing narratives and insecurity, the worsening impacts of extreme weather and economic uncertainty are causing accelerating risks—including misinformation and disinformation—to propagate," said Saadia Zahidi, Managing Director, World Economic Forum. "World leaders must come together to address short-term crises as well as lay the groundwork for a more resilient, sustainable, inclusive future."

The report, produced in partnership with Zurich Insurance Group and Marsh McLennan, draws on the views of over 1,400 global risks experts, policy-makers and industry leaders surveyed in September 2023.

WEF said the results highlighted a predominantly negative outlook for the world in the short term that is expected to worsen over the long term. While 30 percent of global experts expect a higher chance of global catastrophes in the next two years, nearly two-thirds expect this in the next 10 years, the report stated.

Long-term risks, meanwhile, are extreme weather events; critical change to Earth systems; biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse; natural resource shortages; and misinformation and disinformation.

"The world is undergoing significant structural transformations with AI, climate change, geopolitical shifts and demographic transitions. Ninety-one percent of risk experts surveyed express pessimism over the 10-year horizon. Known risks are intensifying and new risks are emerging—but they also provide opportunities," John Scott, Head of Sustainability Risk, Zurich Insurance Group, said.

“Collective and coordinated cross-border actions play their part, but localized strategies are critical for reducing the impact of global risks. The individual actions of citizens, countries and companies can move the needle on global risk reduction, contributing to a brighter, safer world,” he added.

The WEF said the findings argue that cooperation on urgent global issues could be in increasingly short supply, requiring new approaches to addressing risks.

It noted that two-thirds of global experts anticipate a multipolar or fragmented order to take shape over the next decade, in which middle and great powers contest and set—but also enforce—new rules and norms.

The report, WEF said, calls on leaders to rethink action to address global risks. The report recommended efforts to train global cooperation on building guardrails for the most disruptive emerging risks, such as agreements addressing the integration of AI in conflict decision-making.

The report also explored other types of action that need not be exclusively dependent on cross-border cooperation, such as shoring up individual and state resilience through digital literacy campaigns on misinformation and disinformation.

These efforts also include fostering greater research and development on climate modeling and technologies with the potential to speed up the energy transition, with both public and private sectors playing a role.

BUSINESS WORLD

[US saw record 'billion-dollar' climate disasters, high temps in 2023](#)

The US had more “billion-dollar” floods, fires and other climate disasters in 2023 than ever before, and the country’s average temperature was the fifth highest on record, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) said on Tuesday.

Among the disasters was a wildfire on Maui, the nation’s deadliest in more than a century, severe floods in California, two tornado outbreaks in central states, a winter storm in the northeast last February, and Hurricane Idalia in August.

“For millions of Americans impacted by a seemingly endless onslaught of weather and climate disasters, 2023 has hit a new record for many extremes,” NOAA chief scientist Sarah Kapnick, said as her agency released its annual report.

Ms. Kapnick added that the extremes we now face “will continue to worsen due to climate change.”

Most mainstream scientists say the burning of fossil fuels is causing more floods, droughts, heat waves and rising sea levels. The El Niño weather phenomenon, which warms surface waters in the eastern Pacific Ocean, also contributed to higher temperatures last year.

What scientists do not yet know is whether 2023’s extreme heat is a sign that global warming is accelerating.

NOAA said the 28 climate disasters that caused over a billion dollars in damage each topped the previous record set in 2020 by six. The 28 events caused nearly \$93 billion in damages, NOAA said, adding the price tag is expected to rise once the costs of a December storm and flooding on the East Coast are totaled.

NOAA said the average temperatures last month made it the warmest December in its 129 years of keeping track.

The average annual temperature in the contiguous U.S. was 54.4 degrees Fahrenheit (12.4 degrees Celsius) last year, which was 2.4 degrees Fahrenheit above the average in NOAA’s records.

Five US states — Louisiana, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Hampshire and Texas — saw their warmest years on record, while another six states recorded their second-warmest.

WB sees PHL as fastest-growing economy in Southeast Asia this year

By: Luisa Maria Jacinta C. Jocson

The World Bank (WB) expects the Philippines to be among the fastest-growing economies in Southeast Asia this year.

In its latest Global Economic Prospects, the multilateral lender projected Philippine gross domestic product (GDP) to expand by 5.8% in 2024, same as its forecast in December.

The Philippine growth projection is the fastest among Southeast Asian economies, tied with Cambodia (5.8%), and ahead of Vietnam (5.5%), Indonesia (4.9%), Malaysia (4.3%), Lao People's Democratic Republic (4.1%), Timor-Leste (3.5%), Thailand (3.2%) and Myanmar (2%).

However, this is below the Development Budget Coordination Committee's (DBCC) 6.5-7.5% growth target for 2024.

The World Bank's growth forecast for the Philippines is also higher than its 4.5% projection for East Asia and the Pacific.

The multilateral lender sees slower growth in the region due to the "anticipated deceleration in economic activity in China."

Other risks to the growth outlook include geopolitical tensions in the Middle East that could lead to higher oil prices, dampened global trade, tightening financial conditions and climate-related disasters, it said.

"Extreme weather events, the frequency of which has increased in recent decades as a result of climate change, also pose a downside risk to the regional outlook," it added.

In the Philippines, the government is preparing for the potential impact of the El Niño weather event this year.

The latest bulletin from the state weather bureau showed that El Niño will likely persist from March to May, when dry season crops are often harvested.

National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Secretary Arsenio M. Balisacan earlier said El Niño would likely affect the agriculture sector and drive food prices higher, which could threaten the inflation downtrend.

On the other hand, the multilateral lender said resilient domestic demand could spur growth drivers in the East Asia and Pacific region.

“Modest inflation, and in many cases robust labor markets supported by buoyant service activity, are anticipated to sustain household spending,” it said.

“In some economies, increased government spending, including on social protection and public sector wages, will also support demand,” it added.

However, investment inflows may be dampened due to lagged effects from policy tightening and elevated public debt, the World Bank said.

For 2025, the World Bank maintained its GDP projection for the Philippines at 5.8%, the same as its previous forecast. This would be below the government’s 6.5-8% growth goal.

At 5.8%, the Philippines is expected to be the third-fastest growing economy in Southeast Asia next year, behind Cambodia (6.1%) and Vietnam (6%).

The bank also kept its growth forecast for 2023 at 5.6%, which would fall short of the government’s 6-7% GDP target.

The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) is set to release fourth-quarter and full-year 2023 GDP data on Jan. 31.

INFLATION

Meanwhile, the World Bank said headline inflation in the East Asia and Pacific region might ease slightly amid “moderating global commodity prices, improved food supplies and well-anchored inflation expectations.”

In its December update, the multilateral lender projected Philippine inflation to settle at 3.6% this year and 3% in 2025.

In 2023, inflation averaged 6%, the highest in 14 years. This also marked the second straight year average inflation breached the 2-4% target.

The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) expects inflation to average 3.7% this year and 3.2% in 2025.

“Despite inflation receding below target in many economies, interest rates are expected to remain broadly unchanged in 2024 on account of tight monetary policy in major advanced economies, lingering concerns about weakening exchange rates and capital outflows, and the potential for a resurgence in inflation,” the World Bank said.

The Philippine central bank raised borrowing costs by 450 basis points from May 2022 to October last year, bringing the key rate to a 16-year high of 6.5%.

BSP Governor Eli M. Remolona, Jr. has said the central bank would only consider policy easing if inflation settles comfortably within the target.

ECO BUSINESS

[\[Opinion\] 'Cli-fi' might not save the world, but writing it could help with your eco-anxiety](#)

By: Dr Rachel Hennessy, Alex Cothren and Amy T Matthews

The consequences of climate change weigh on all of us, especially as we face an El Niño summer, with floods and fires already making themselves felt in the Australian environment.

But even outside of being directly affected, there is evidence that mere awareness of climate change can be detrimental to your mental health and wellbeing. Terms such as “climate change anxiety”, “eco-anxiety” and “solastalgia” are regularly used to describe the negative emotional states created by thinking and worrying about climate change and environmental destruction.

If just knowing about climate change is emotionally difficult, what is it like spending years focusing on and writing about the topic? Research has looked at the emotional impact close engagement with climate change can have on groups such as climate scientists and climate activists.

But little time has been given to writers of climate fiction, or “cli-fi” – a relatively new genre of fiction focused on climate

What can a genre do?

Cli-fi has been touted as one of the ways to help save the world, with an emphasis on how imagining our future might make us reconsider our relationship to the natural world.

Fictions in this genre have primarily imagined dystopian worlds where the very worst has happened and humanity is (often barely) surviving in flooded or desolate wastelands. These apocalyptic visions are meant to serve as warnings, to galvanise us to action, making sure this bleak future doesn't happen.

This seems a good idea in theory, but do dystopian fictions help us engage with the climate crisis? An empirical study of the effects of climate fiction on readers' attitudes or actions found little evidence that those who read cli-fi have a stronger engagement with environmental concerns.

There has been some discussion of the influence of these books on readers. But perhaps the value is not in the reading, but in the writing? Might writing provide

emotionally supportive strategies for all of us? Can the act of writing itself counter “eco-anxiety”?

Waking in the night

We talked to 16 Australian and New Zealand authors of “cli-fi” , including James Bradley, Mireille Juchau and Jennifer Mills. Their responses made it clear that writing about a climate-changed future does more than bring up the anticipated negative emotions.

Of course, sitting with the climate crisis is challenging. It demands we wrestle with guilt, shame, responsibility, rage and despair. Writers of climate fiction are often drawn to the genre because they are already thinking about the climate and feeling anxious.

Clare Moleta said her climate anxiety was “a bit more concentrated” while writing her novel *Unsheltered*, but also that the manifestations of this anxiety were familiar to her: “I had waking patches in the night over that time, where I’d be very intensely imagining something and grieving it [...] But to be fair, I do that anyway.”

But many of the writers spoke of the writing process as helping, not exacerbating, their anxiety. For some, writing about climate change gave them a sense of purpose. Jennifer Mills, whose cli-fi novel *Dyschronia* was shortlisted for the Miles Franklin Literary Award in 2019, stated that “having a book to write gives you something to do. [It] makes you feel like you have some power over the events that are happening around you.”

Climate fiction can be a method of transforming anxiety into something useful. Miles Allinson says that “writing about my own fear put that fear to use, in a way that was, if not comforting, then at least energising”. He argues for the therapeutic aspect of imagining and writing one’s worst fears: “Sometimes when you turn towards something and start to live it, with all its difficulties and mystery, then something changes [...] It’s actually not as hard as you sometimes think it will be. It’s sometimes more terrifying to close your eyes, I have found.”

James Bradley, author of several works of speculative fiction, including *Clade* and *Ghost Species*, observed that the “process of imagining demands you to think about what happens next [...] To imagine the complexity of the lived experience of what lies ahead, and to insist that life will go on and history will keep happening”.

While peering into our climate-changed future can be emotionally difficult, Kate Mildenhall said it can help prepare us for what is to come: “We have to imagine ten years in the future and we have to imagine 50 years in the future. And if we do that, we

are forearmed and we also begin to make small changes immediately, we don't even know we're making them, just to move towards or away from that future."

Imagining our future lives can offer a sense of hope. We are currently living with bushfires, floods, pandemics and the extreme challenges of the climate crisis; the future is our present and the ways we think about it will dictate the ways we act and cope.

Therapeutic benefits

Approaching writing about climate change as a process, rather than thinking about writing as a product produced by professional authors, is a new method for alleviating climate anxiety.

The mental health and wellbeing benefits of creative writing have been established. Studies have explored how writing can reduce anxiety in those affected by natural disasters. Much of the research in this area focuses on expressive writing or other similar therapeutic-focused techniques that produce quickly written and usually insular work, not intended for an audience.

This is different from the experiences of the writers interviewed here. Yet, as the writers quoted here have shown, the imaginative process of crafting fictional narratives about difficult topics comes with its own benefits.

In discussing their findings from one of the few studies to focus on the wellbeing effect of writing fictional narratives, Catherine Deveney and Patrick Lawson state: "it is in the craft of writing, the combination of technique and emotional catharsis, that some of the therapeutic benefits of writing can be found".

We tend to think of writing as a professional activity, but it is an art form practised by amateurs as well as professionals. The 2022 National Arts Participation Survey found that one in seven Australians engage in creative writing. The value of such writing is more than its end product.

We need to shift from worrying about the effects of cli-fi texts to thinking about the benefits of writing creatively as we imagine our possible futures. As Mireille Juchau observes, the sense of control when writing on a difficult topic "helps to manage anxiety [...] Whether it's climate change, or something else, when I'm preoccupied, writing helps put some order into the chaos".

PHILIPPINE NEWS AGENCY

[2023 was hottest year on record, says EU's C3S](#)

Just-concluded 2023 was the hottest year in recorded history, and likely beyond, the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) said on Tuesday in a report.

"With the global-average temperature 14.98 C (58.96F), 2023 has replaced 2016 as the warmest calendar year on record," it noted, adding that "each month from June to December in 2023 was warmer than the corresponding month in any previous year."

July and August 2023 were the warmest two months on record, according to the report.

More specifically, 2023 was the second-warmest year for Europe, 1.02C above the 1991-2020 average, and just 0.17C cooler than 2020, the warmest year on record for the continent.

As such, temperatures in Europe were above average for 11 months during 2023, with September being the warmest September on record.

The European winter (December 2022 – February 2023) was the second-warmest winter on record.

The report warned that growing greenhouse emissions also led to unusually high ocean temperatures, which can have significant and sometimes devastating impacts on ocean ecosystems and biodiversity, and lead to socioeconomic impacts.

Commenting on the report, Samantha Burgess, C3S's deputy director, said on X: "2023 was an exceptional year with climate records tumbling like dominoes."

"Temperatures during 2023 likely exceed those of any period in at least the last 100,000 years," Burgess also said, adding that it also marked the first time on record that every day within a year exceeded a 1C temperature difference above the 1850-1900 pre-industrial level.

Negros Oriental preps for high dengue cases due to extreme weather

By: Mary Judaline Partlow

The Provincial Health Office (PHO) of Negros Oriental is looking at the possible rise of dengue cases due to the El Niño phenomenon predicted to start this month with extreme weather conditions such as heavy rainfall and extreme dry spell.

PHO chief Dr. Liland Estacion said Wednesday the public should not let their guard down despite a decline in dengue cases in 2023 compared to the previous year.

Estacion said heavy rainfall would be conducive to more breeding places for the vector mosquitos carrying the deadly dengue virus.

There is no longer what they call “dengue season” which usually takes place mid-year onwards due to several factors such as climate change and a growing populace, the health official said.

Records at the PHO showed that Negros Oriental logged 1,503 dengue cases and five deaths in 2023, 35 percent lower than the 2022 recorded figure of 2,300 cases and 11 deaths.

The top ten cities and municipalities with the highest number of dengue cases last year were Dumaguete City (220 cases); La Libertad (164); Sibulan (116); Bindoy (98); Bais City (88); Siaton (88); Ayungon (76); Valencia (69); Tanjay City (65); and Manjuyod (64).

The deaths were posted from Ayungon, Valencia, Mabinay, Pamplona, and Sibulan.

THE MANILA TIMES

[\[Opinion\] The final warning from Earth's climate](#)

Late Tuesday, the European Union's Copernicus Earth Observation Program released its compiled global temperature data for 2023, and to say that the findings were shocking would be an understatement. It was widely anticipated that the data would show 2023 was the hottest year on record, but what was not expected was that it would show the planet has already reached the climate "red line" of an average 1.5 degrees Celsius temperature over the pre-industrial average.

The 1.5 C threshold is the level of warming at which significantly destructive climate effects will begin to occur, some of them irreversible, which is why global agreements on climate change action, such as the 2015 Paris Agreement, set 1.5 C as a target. Over the past two or three years, climate researchers and policymakers have become increasingly resigned to the inevitability that the planet will exceed the target, as actions to reduce greenhouse gases and other causes of global warming have been too slow and inadequate. However, almost all climate models, except those considered to show unlikely extreme scenarios, have suggested that the 1.5 C threshold would be crossed in 6 to 10 years, giving humanity a chance to improve its response and, if not limit the global temperature increase to below 1.5 C, at least prevent it from going too far beyond that.

For context, even though the temperature increase is stated as being compared to the "pre-industrial" average, the actual comparison is with the period broadly defining the first half-century of the Industrial Age, 1850-1900. Historians mark the start of the Industrial Age as occurring sometime between the last decade of the 18th century and the middle of the 19th century, but complete and reliable climate records are only consistently available from 1850 onwards.

According to Copernicus, 2023 was the warmest calendar year in global temperature data records going back to 1850, with an average surface air temperature of 14.98 degrees C. This was 0.17 C higher than the previous record year (2016), 0.6 C higher than the global average for the period 1991-2020, and 1.48 C higher than the 1850-1900 average. In a media statement, Copernicus said it is very likely that 2023 was the warmest year on Earth in at least the last 100,000 years.

The superlatives do not stop there. 2023 marked the first time that every day in the year had an average temperature at least 1 C above the pre-industrial average, and nearly half of the days of the year exceeded the 1.5 C threshold. Two days in November were more than 2 C warmer than the pre-industrial average.

From June to December 2023, each month was warmer than the corresponding month in any previous year, with July and August being the warmest two months on record. December 2023 was also extraordinarily warm, the warmest December on record, with an average temperature of 13.51 C, 0.85 C above the 1991-2020 average, and an astonishing 1.78 C above the 1850-1900 average.

One particularly disturbing revelation of all this is that global warming is proceeding much faster than expected. Climate change deniers have consistently dismissed climate models as inaccurate, and it seems they are ironically correct — but not because the models are describing something that is not happening, but that they underestimate the scale and speed of what is happening.

The implication of the Copernicus findings is that the pretension that "there is still time" to act to prevent the worst effects of human-caused climate change "before it's too late" is utterly shattered. We are, quite frankly, out of time and no longer have the luxury of thinking in terms of "by 2030" or "by 2050" as timelines for accomplishing climate response actions. Our focus now needs to shift to the most immediate actions we can take, whether on a global level, as a nation, or as individuals, to adapt to climate effects and halt further damage from harmful emissions and ecosystem destruction. Hard choices are going to need to be made and made quickly, and unfortunately, we will have to accept some costs and sacrifices. It is the price we now must pay for our decades of inaction, of entertaining "debate" about the reality of climate change, and of putting off until some distant tomorrow things we should have done yesterday.

[World News in Brief: Time for climate justice urges UN chief, Ukraine war update, call for 'free and fair' elections](#)

The European climate agency on Tuesday reported that record global heat last year showed an overall increase of 1.48°C above pre-industrial levels – just a fraction below the 1.5-degree threshold laid out by the historic Paris Agreement on climate change.

Under the deal agreed by 193 countries in 2015 in the French capital, sticking to the limit will help humankind avoid the worst impacts of rising temperatures.

This month is also on track to be so warm that for the first time ever, a 12-month cycle may exceed the 1.5°C threshold, according to Europe's Copernicus climate agency.

Responding to the news at the regular briefing for correspondents in New York, UN Spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric said that Secretary-General António Guterres "believes that humanity's actions are scorching the Earth" and that last year "was a mere preview of the catastrophic future that awaits if we don't act now."

'Path-breaking action' needed

The UN chief said that the necessary response to record-breaking temperatures is "path-breaking action".

"Mr. Guterres believes that leaders must commit to serious new national climate action plans" rapidly and fairly "and invest in helping vulnerable countries to combat climate chaos", Mr. Dujarric continued

"We can still avoid the worst of the climate catastrophe, he believes, but only if we if we act now with the ambition required to limit the rise of global temperatures to 1.5°C and deliver climate justice."

Dozens killed in Ukraine hostilities

It's been almost two years since the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine where hostilities continue to kill and injure civilians every day, UN humanitarians said on Tuesday.

Aid coordination office OCHA reported that dozens of non-combatants including children had been killed in attacks on Monday in Donetsk, Dnipro and Kherson regions.

Schools and homes were also damaged in the southern and eastern zones along with critical infrastructure.

In an update, OCHA said more than 14.6 million people - or 40 per cent of the population - will need humanitarian assistance this year.

UN refugee agency, UNHCR, reported that war has also forced some 6.3 million Ukrainians to flee abroad.

"On top of the violence, Ukraine is now in the grip of a deep winter. A continued large scale humanitarian operation is as urgent as it ever was," said OCHA's spokesperson Jens Laerke briefing the media in Geneva.

He announced that the Ukraine humanitarian needs and response plan alongside a regional refugee response plan for 2024, will be launched by the two key agencies during a special event in Geneva on 15 January.

Meeting the most urgent needs in Ukraine and neighbouring countries will require stepped-up and sustained support from Member States, the private sector and partners, UN humanitarians said.

Elections in 2024 must be free and fair: UN rights chief

Democracy is in the spotlight this year with more than 60 countries due to hold elections which governments must ensure are free and fair, the UN's top human rights official said on Tuesday.

Polls are happening in the next 12 months from Azerbaijan to the United States which provide the opportunity "to rise above divisive politics and demand respect of human rights", Volker Türk said, in a message posted online on X.

2024 will be a "critical year" for voters everywhere, the High Commissioner for Human Rights predicted, as he encouraged the promotion of "inclusion and civic freedoms, climate action and peace".

Peacekeeping chief continues Middle East visit in Lebanon

Jean-Pierre Lacroix, the head of the UN's Peace Operations Department, arrived in Lebanon on Tuesday to discuss the critical role of the UN peacekeeping force in the south of the country, known as UNIFIL.

The mission patrols the so-called Blue Line along Lebanon's southern frontier, which was the line of withdrawal for Israeli forces set by the UN in 2000, to make room for a formal border agreement at a later date.

As Israel and Hezbollah militants continue to exchange fire across the Blue Line during the on-going Gaza conflict, the UN and humanitarian partners are continuing to scale up their response in the hope of avoiding any further escalation of hostilities.

Thousands of civilians displaced

According to latest figures, more than 76,000 people have been displaced by fighting in the south, while tens of thousands of Israelis have also left the frontier region, fearing for their safety.

"Humanitarian access continues to be constrained, mainly along the Blue Line, which is hampering our efforts to deliver essential supplies", said Stéphane Dujarric on Tuesday.

Mr. Dujarric said Mr. Lacroix was scheduled to meet the caretaker Prime Minister of Lebanon, the Speaker of the Parliament, and other officials. He will then head to Naqoura in southern Lebanon to meet representatives of the Lebanese Armed Forces, UNIFIL leadership and peacekeepers.

The head of Peace Operations is visiting the UN's three peacekeeping missions in the Middle East and was in Syria in the past few days, where he met with the leadership and peacekeepers from the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF), as well as senior Syrian Government officials.

After Lebanon, Mr. Lacroix will visit the UNTSO, the UN Truce Supervision Organization headquarters in Jerusalem and is scheduled to meet with Israeli government and military officials.

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

[Baguio strides towards walkability, active mobility in climate change fight](#)

By: Jerson Kent Danao

If anyone ever thought that long walks are just for the young, then Danilo and Florence Quinto will surely prove them wrong. They regularly stroll along a closed-off Session Road, Baguio's most prominent thoroughfare.

In their advanced age, the Quintos are staunch advocates for walking and an inspiration to younger people to get moving.

Florence, 57, has long made walking a priority for going around the city. "Since 1987 naglalakad na ako dito sa Baguio City, 'yun lang hindi pa advocate sa walkable city ang tawag," she said.

(Since 1987, I have already been walking in Baguio City, but then, we were not yet called walkable city advocates.)

Danilo, 72, founder of the Blue Zones Wellness and Longevity Movement, believes walking should be integrated into urban lifestyles.

"Walking is one of the best and easiest movement exercises, which should be promoted in urban communities," he said.

In August 2019, the lower part of Session Road was first closed off to motor vehicles for a six-month trial. Four years later—and after a hiatus during the COVID-19 pandemic—the area remains a pedestrian-only zone every Sunday.

It has also become a highly anticipated event and a weekly habit for many, including the Quintos. For the local government, the activity is even seen as an important measure to combat climate change.

However, could this weekly habit go beyond Session Road and pave the way for the chronically congested Baguio's transformation into a walkable and more sustainable city?

More vehicles, more pollutants

The closure of Session Road is one of the city's efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, as stated in Baguio City's Local Climate Change Action Plan (LCCAP) for 2020 to 2030.

“The one-way traffic scheme is intended to decongest Session Road, improve the air quality in the area, and encourage residents and tourists alike to walk in line with the City’s program on developing a healthy environment,” a portion of the LCCAP read.

Baguio City had 32,686 road vehicles based on 2021 data obtained from the City Planning, Development and Sustainability Office (CPDSO).

The transport sector accounted for 24% of the city’s climate pollutants, according to the 2019 Emission Inventory of the group Clean Air Asia. Ninety-four percent of the air pollutants originated from mobile sources, specifically passenger cars, utility vehicles, motorcycles, buses, trucks, and jeepneys.

Steven Bruce Layugan, an architect at the CPDSO, said that various administrations of the Baguio City local government have made multiple attempts to convert Session Road into a more pedestrian-priority area.

According to Layugan, the initiative started as a way for the city’s small businesses to showcase their products and services and increase their revenue. Later on, it became part of the city’s plans to inject new life to its environment and culture.

“The promotion of walkability will help improve the air quality. At the same time, ease vehicular congestion by having that modal shift into low carbon and active transport,” he said.

Session Road’s closure also allows pedestrians to do busking, cultural performances, or just simply walk. Layugan said that Session Road has become a “canvas for the socio-cultural sector.”

“People from all walks of life get to feature and express themselves from chalk art, street dancing, cosplay, cultural dances, and photography,” he said.

Pedestrianization: Not a walk in the park

While Baguio resident and former Philippine delegate to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Lot Felizco welcomes any measure to reduce fossil fuel emissions, she believes that pedestrianization should not be limited to the famous tourist spot merely as a means to boost tourism.

“Unless pedestrianization is linked to a wider strategy to reduce emissions and provide cleaner options for the riding public, then the effects on emissions reduction and climate change will be minuscule,” Felizco said.

According to Layugan, walkability in Baguio City is still in its “infancy stage.” A walkable city is where people can walk safely and conveniently from one place to another and access their basic needs.

Establishing a walkable Baguio still has a lot of roadblocks to clear.

“Convincing the people of Baguio to shift their conventional mobility and transport modes can only happen once they will see that the use of active transport and low carbon mobility has much more benefits as compared to using private cars,” Layugan said.

Layugan also mentioned the challenge with the city’s topography, where the moderately flat to rolling hilly terrain would involve a lot of infrastructure changes.

Despite these challenges, Baguio was recognized as among the country’s “Most Bicycle-Friendly Cities” for 2023 by mobility advocates.

The Baguio LCCAP also includes specific budgetary allocations for the improvement of pedestrian lanes and sidewalks in order to “promote Baguio as a walkable city and deter the use of vehicles.”

For Danilo, Burnham Park, Military Cutoff, and streets going to Pacdal, Mines View Park, the Mansion House, Camp John Hay and the Baguio Country Club are the most walkable streets in the city.

Meanwhile, these pedestrian-friendly streets are important not only for Florence, but for all of the Quinto clan. She pins her hope that a walkable Baguio would mean a safer and less polluted city.

“Mahalaga sa aming pamilya, napaka-importante na maging walkable lahat ng parte ng Baguio, walang stress sa traffic,” she said. “Hopefully later, kung sana mababawasan ang mga sasakyan, less pollution.”

(“For our family, it is very important that all parts of Baguio become walkable, no stress in traffic,” she said. “Hopefully later, there will be less cars and pollution.”)

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