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BUSINESS WORLD

How climate risk reporting can turn ambition into action

By: Benjamin N. Villacorte

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ECO BUSINESS

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By: Liang Lei

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MANILA BULLETIN

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By: Joseph Pedrajas

The trade mission that will be sent by US President Joe Biden to the Philippines will be the first in a series of major commercial events that will be undertaken by Manila and Washington this year, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said Monday, Jan. 15.

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

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By: Kurt Dela Peña

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Quezon City local government and Unilab sustain partnership to bring health services to communities

One of the 17 Global Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations is to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all individuals in all ages. The Quezon City Local Government under the leadership of Mayor Joy Belmonte continues to strengthen the delivery of health services to the community, as part of the Mayor's 14-point agenda which focuses on human and social services, economic development, environment, and climate change, infrastructure, and institutional development.

SUNSTAR

Global warming may be worsening, scientists warn

The latest calculations from several science agencies showing Earth obliterated global heat records last year may seem scary. But scientists worry that what's behind those numbers could be even worse.

Information and Knowledge Management Division

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COP28's bold aspirations toward decarbonization highlight the urgent need for the climate disclosure landscape to evolve rapidly. Climate reporting plays a crucial role in helping us understand whether the whole economy and the sectors and companies within it are moving towards true transition.

This is the first article in a two-part series that will discuss insights from COP28. In this first part, we will discuss insights from the fifth EY Climate Risk Barometer covering current trends in global climate risk reporting, uneven progress within markets and sectors, the adoption of mandatory climate disclosure requirements, and core elements that will shape the reporting landscape.

TRENDS IN CLIMATE RISK REPORTING

The fifth EY Climate Risk Barometer reveals that companies are making progress in climate-related disclosures but fall short of carbon ambitions. This study analyzed 1,500 companies in 51 countries based on two metrics: the number of disclosures made per the recommendations by the Task Force on Climate-Related Financial Disclosures or TCFD (coverage) and the extent and detail of each disclosure (quality).

Climate transparency is clearly on the rise, with the quality score jumping from 44% in 2022 to 50% in 2023. This trend suggests that companies are putting in the time and effort to enhance the information shared with stakeholders. However, the 50% score reflects minimal advances, considering the TCFD has been around for eight years, which some may say has already been ample time for companies to fine-tune their reporting.

Alongside the increase in quality, disclosure coverage saw a steep year-on-year increase. Company scores soared from 84% to 90%. Yet, pressing concerns remain, particularly about the granularity and quality of disclosures and the effectiveness of the regulatory environment in driving genuine action beyond reporting.

Meanwhile, the average score for governance disclosure quality climbed from 46% to 52%, partly due to regulatory pressure — but this is still low. Transition planning remains patchy, with only half of the companies (53%) presenting clear roadmaps. Furthermore, companies continue to focus more on risk than opportunity analysis (77% vs. 68%) despite a slight improvement in the latter.

UNEVEN PROGRESS WITHIN MARKETS AND SECTORS

From a market perspective, Japan, South Korea, the Americas, and most of Europe are leading in disclosure quality. This is unsurprising as these countries and regions can draw on several years of mandatory TCFD disclosures.

On the other hand, while the Middle East and Southeast Asia have made strides in disclosure performance compared to last year, these regions are still lagging. To accelerate progress, governments can adopt mandatory climate disclosure requirements. This can potentially change the currently low scores to a significant extent.

Sector-wise, companies with the most exposure to transition risk dominated disclosure scores again. Energy leads in both quality and coverage, but its quality performance is greatly matched by financial institutions (e.g., credit bureaus, exchanges, and financial services providers) with a 46% to 54% year-on-year leap. In fact, this year saw changes in quality across the board, with the biggest ones in information technology (IT), real estate, mining, and agriculture.

Companies across all sectors face heightened demand for detailed disclosures of their climate-related risks alongside financial implications. This pressure comes from government regulators, investors, and the public. As such, the shift in scores is linked to stakeholders, putting pressure on businesses heavily reliant on fossil fuels to lay down their decarbonization plans and start making progress. In the case of financial institutions, investors are urging them to reduce their brown lending.

This is good pressure, however, as climate risk management strategies must not be separate from corporate reporting. Businesses must view climate disclosures as a comprehensive, forward-looking effort to understand the anticipated financial impact. Therefore, it should be assessed in the context of the company’s value chain and wider market dynamics.

IFRS S1 AND S2

It is worth noting that many companies are embracing comprehensive sustainability reporting frameworks like the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) Standards alongside the International Sustainability Standards Board (ISSB) disclosure requirements — the IFRS S1 General Requirements for Disclosure of Sustainability-related Financial

Information and IFRS S2 Climate-related Disclosures. These standards unveil material climate risks and opportunities, allowing investors, lenders, and creditors to assess companies' governance, strategy, environmental, and societal impacts.

The ISSB offers "transition reliefs" to help companies ease into new sustainability reporting standards. In the first year, companies can prioritize and report only climate-related information and publish disclosures together with their half-year report. They can also hold off disclosing their Scope 3 greenhouse gas emissions, a report that uncovers climate exposure within their value chains.

In this country, the Board of Accountancy (BoA) is laying the groundwork for the adoption of the ISSB disclosure standards with Resolution No. 44. The date of adoption is being determined by the BoA, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), and Financial and Sustainability Reporting Standards Council (FSRSC) — previously known as the Financial Reporting Standards Council. To ensure smooth implementation and evaluation, the FSRSC established the Philippine Sustainability Reporting Committee (PSRC), which is set to issue local interpretation and guidance for IFRS S1 and S2.

3 ELEMENTS AFFECTING FUTURE CLIMATE DISCLOSURES

In addition to companies' disclosure performance against TCFD recommendations, this year's research also included three core elements that will shape the reporting landscape for the next few years. These are:

ISSB preparedness. This refers to the readiness to meet IFRS S2 requirements, marked by changes in 1) Governance: adopting the increased ISSB disclosure requirement and disclosing whether organizations have the necessary skills at the board level to oversee climate-related strategies; 2) Strategy: deepening climate disclosures, both by analyzing detailed scenarios for future impacts and setting value chain emission targets alongside overall emission reduction goals; and 3) Metrics and targets: moving towards disclosing businesses' most significant Scope 3 emissions.

Transition planning. This refers to the move to include concrete transition plans — how companies will adapt and grow as the global economy transitions to net zero — in their business strategy and disclose the details to stakeholders.

Climate risk reflection in financial statements. This refers to the integration of climate risks into financial statements, quantifying potential losses from stranded assets and valuing assets based on their resilience to climate change.

FROM A COMPLIANCE BURDEN TO A STRATEGIC ASSET

It’s time to view climate risk reporting as a strategic resource instead of a compliance burden. Instead of using frameworks solely for disclosure, forward-thinking organizations analyze how climate impacts their business strategy. High-risk businesses, such as those in energy and IT, can evaluate risk management and financial impact using these insights to chart resilient growth strategies and identify key vulnerabilities.

By establishing robust data governance structures, they turn climate data into a potent tool that will help them thrive in the face of climate challenges. When companies embrace the spirit of reporting frameworks to drive underlying business changes, they realize financial, customer, employee, societal, and planetary value from the effort.

The next article in this series will discuss strategies from the Ernst & Young (EY) keynote session at COP28. Philippine companies should consider these urgently to move from setting ambitious goals to achieving tangible results that will shape the country’s reporting landscape for the next few years.

ECO BUSINESS

Ten-fold solar growth needed in climate fight, says photovoltaics 'godfather'

By: Liang Lei

Nevermind that nations at last month's COP28 climate negotiations agreed to help triple renewable energy capacity globally in seven years. A pioneer of photovoltaic technology wants the solar industry to focus on a larger goal: increase the yearly installed capacity by 10 times, in the next 10 years.

That would be the level at which fossil fuels can be replaced, and climate change meaningfully tackled, Professor Martin Green said. International organisations do not model such high growth rates because their calculations tend to be conservative, he added.

The 76-year old Australian engineering don has spent decades poring over the chemistry and circuitry of solar panels. Green has held annual photovoltaic efficiency records for silicon cells in about 30 of the last 40 years. Ninety per cent of the market today uses one of his panel designs. His Chinese students are often credited for an industry boom in the 2000s, when large solar panel factories went global. Media often gives him the "godfather of solar" moniker.

Solar power is seen as a key climate technology today. Annual installation rates have grown tenfold over the past decade, and total capacity surpassed 1 terawatt (TW) in 2022 – contributing to about an eighth of the total power generating potential worldwide.

But the rallying cry is for solar and renewables to displace fossil fuels, and Green acknowledges that another dectupling of solar capacity will be challenging for the mature energy industry. Better government planning will be needed to expand markets, and perhaps large solar farms can float on gentle equatorial waters if land is scarce, he said.

Meanwhile, scientists are racing to improve the efficiency of solar cells from 20-odd per cent to over 40 per cent, possibly through stacking advanced materials on top of silicon wafers. A group of materials known as "perovskites" have shown the most promise, though they contain toxic lead and still have durability issues. Other designs have been floated, and Green thinks they should receive more attention.

Eco-Business caught up with Green in Singapore, where he was speaking at the Global Young Scientists Summit, to hear about the latest innovations in photovoltaics and his outlook for the solar industry.

What are the energy and climate implications of eventually having 40 per cent efficient solar cells on the market, compared to the 20 per cent efficient ones today?
Solar cells already provide one of the cheapest way of generating electricity in most countries, according to the International Energy Agency. Commercial solar modules now are in the 20 to 24 per cent sort of efficiency range, and the present cells are cheap enough.

But if you can get to 40 per cent, that will just drive them to a new level of cost efficiency. The lower you can go with cost, the quicker their uptake will be. You can install more panels as a way of overcoming intermittency issues. There have been numerous studies that have shown that you can reliably run electricity networks on solar and wind, combined with storage and transmission.

With more efficient panels you can also use less panels and less land area for a given capacity, which might be particularly important for countries like Singapore where space is not really available.

Can more efficient cells arrive in the market fast enough to fight climate change? We only have a few years left before we breach the 1.5°C warming limit.
I think we've already missed the 1.5°C opportunity – last year planetary warming already reached 1.48°C. But a 2°C limit is still on the table – that is worth shooting for.

In reality things haven't been happening quickly enough to even reach 2°C. The big hope is, if solar can maintain the growth rates it has in the recent past, it will be at a level to provide significant CO2 emissions reductions and displace fossil fuels. In Australia it is happening more rapidly than most people would expect.

Unfortunately I don't think the adoption of 40 per cent efficient cells is coming fast enough; but we're pushing to bring it about as quickly as we can. There is one technology of particular interest at the moment – stacking what's known as perovskite on top of silicon – but it has stability issues. That is where the real work is required, to get perovskite cells to match the stability of silicon. But perovskite cells could be on the market within a year if someone can demonstrate the long-term viability of the product.

In the early 2000s solar had a breakthrough in costs when Chinese firms grew big, listed in the United States and went international. Today, with China and the United States at loggerheads, do you think such cost breakthroughs can still happen?
At that time, there was no other mechanism that was encouraging investment on the scale required for the development of the solar industry, except for US interest in Chinese stocks – so that was what triggered the growth of the industry. Being a sustainable technology sort of helped in that process.

Most solar companies are now listed on the Shenzhen or Hong Kong stock exchanges, rather than the US ones – the US stock markets lost interest about 2010, after the global financial crisis. Once the solar industry matured in China, the Chinese government has sort of looked after them in terms of maintaining growth and encouraging development in a sensible way. It promoted schemes that helped the strong companies to do well while the weaker ones fell by the wayside.

Southeast Asia is a region where renewables and solar growth is far from where it needs to be. What is your assessment of this?
There is a lot of solar manufacturing happening in Southeast Asia – Vietnam, Malaysia, and Thailand to a lesser extent – mainly through companies controlled by China, as a response to the China import tariffs by the US. There is REC group also manufacturing in Singapore.

In terms of solar power, Vietnam is sort of an exception; it was number three in the world for solar installed in 2020. Some of their coal power plans seem to have been shelved now because solar is providing the cheaper option, and can be built faster. Thailand is getting up to 3, 4 per cent penetration of the electricity network with solar. There is a bit of progress on some fronts in this region.

I guess it is about having role models to copy. Countries doing well in the region will provide a model for the rest to follow.

In Australia, regulations for large solar field installations are still being worked through, and there is often a lot of resistance from incumbent electricity generation authorities. An effort to streamline the rapid introduction of solar would be very important for its uptake.

The counterargument to the point about solar being cheap, that we hear here, is that the necessary grid upgrades are expensive. How do you respond to that?
For Australia, many systems have small amounts of battery storage to provide continuity of supply, and there are designated renewable energy zones with common transmission lines. That is the way the issue is being addressed here. You need some form of oversight of the big picture, about where it is most sensible to install solar.

Is research into solar panels still popular? You started your lecture at the Global Young Scientists Summit saying solar is the technology of the 20th century.
I didn’t mean that there was nothing else to be done. There is a lot of scientific interest, particularly in perovskites. If you pick up a Science or Nature magazine, and look for an article on solar, it will be on perovskite solar cells.

Some of the most highly cited scientists in the world in recent years have been those working on perovskites. It used to be graphene that was a hot topic, and now it has been knocked off its perch.

Michael Graetzel – he is one of the world's highest cited scientists. His h-index – a way of ranking scientists in terms of the impact of their publications – is over 300, meaning he's had over 300 papers cited over 300 times. It is super high.

So perovskite is a very popular area scientifically, but there is less interest if you're working on technologies that may prove more important in the longer term.

It might be very difficult to get an article published that made a minor improvement in the performance of some of the other cell technologies, whereas with perovskites, you might get a paper published in Nature or Science with any incremental improvement.

A lot of people became interested in perovskite because there are a lot of quality papers on it published in the quality journals – there is a bit of an echo chamber effect occurring here.

It sounds like you feel the excitement in perovskite is unwarranted, or blocking other solar technology?
It'd be better if the effort was spread over other technologies, but for researchers, it is not going to be as rewarding or helpful to their careers, since the prospects of getting a high impact paper is very low because of the lack of interest.

There are different classes of materials (besides perovskite) that you could stack onto silicon to improve the cell's efficiency, but perovskite is receiving 99.99 per cent of the attention.

Is there enough attention within the perovskite community in dealing with the environmental risks of lower durability and lead pollution?
There has been a lot of research on those areas – perovskite cell stability is the real issue and it also affects whether the technology makes it commercially or not.

The amount of waste generated by solar is not really enormous. Aluminium frames are easy to recycle. Glass is fairly easy to recycle, but it hasn't got much value because there is a lot of glass coming from other waste streams as well. There are calculations saying if the world is only powered by solar cells, we'd generate 40 per cent more glass waste than present – you'd rather not do that but it is not a problem entirely out of proportion.

In standard silicon products, there is nothing really toxic apart from the lead in the solder that connects the cells together, some manufacturers are marketing products without any toxic materials at all.

Is that still the case if perovskite cells – with higher lead content – come to market in the next few years? Do they need extra regulations?
I wouldn't recommend them for consumer products, and in many countries – including the whole of Europe – you wouldn't get a lead-based solar cell in a consumer product.

But for professional systems there are exceptions. Some people have done studies saying perovskite cells are thin, so the lead content in them isn't all that much, and would not pollute too much if leached.

There are plenty of arguments along those lines but in terms of environmental legislation, the modules wouldn't pass European hazardous substance standards – unless solar has a special exemption – which it and wind enjoy at the moment, but gets periodically reviewed.

There is the danger that a review somewhere down the road might revoke that special exemption for solar, so it'd be better to have products without toxic elements at all.

Overall, do you see the solar glass half full, or half empty?
The main challenge is just to maintain that really rapid growth we've seen over the last two decades. Ten years ago we had 10 times less installations than now. If we can grow it another 10 times in the next decade, we could have 60 per cent of world electricity supplied by solar – which is the sort of level needed to address climate change.

Growing installations by ten times in a decade is a lot steeper than what the world pledged at COP28, to triple renewables by 2030.
Indeed. So this year solar uptake might amount to 0.4 terawatts of installations, and eventually 4 terawatts a year. That is the level the market could saturate at, and eventually solar could supply all the energy the world needs – the thinking is that the world will become more electrified as it displaces fossil fuels, such as from heating applications.

But as the industry is much bigger now, it obviously becomes more difficult. Analysts are expecting this year to be a bit quieter after high growth last year, but I'm hoping it still grows vigorously this year as well.

The most important thing is having a market for the cells. So some type of international effort to seriously address climate change could provide the path for solar installations to grow by another factor of 10 over this coming decade.

FINANCIAL TIMES

Snowfall in Davos belies climate change toll across Europe

By: Attracta Mooney and Steven Bernard

Heavier snowfall ahead of this week's World Economic Forum at Davos belied a broader downturn in snow coverage across Europe in recent years.

The high-altitude resort had about 80cm of snow at the bottom ski lift on Friday compared to 55cm on average for January, according to Davos-based climate scientist Christoph Marty at the WSL Institute of Snow and Avalanche Research. But ski towns just a few kilometres away were suffering a dearth of snow as a result of climate change.

"We have above-average snow in Davos, but if you go 12km lower down, you have below-average [snow coverage]," said Marty. "It shows how vulnerable the snowpack is to temperature [rise]."

Temperatures in Switzerland and other Alpine areas are rising faster than the global average rate. Average temperatures in the Alps have risen almost 2C from pre-industrial levels, the Research Center for Alpine Ecosystems estimates, well above the long-term global figure of at least 1.1C.

The rise is amplified in mountain regions, since warmth leads to shrinkage in areas covered with ice and snow, which would normally reflect the sun's rays. Instead, underlying rock and vegetation absorb the sun's heat and contribute to even more melting.

According to an FT analysis of National Snow and Ice Data Center data, overall snow cover in Switzerland has fallen almost 8 percentage points when comparing three-year averages straddling the 2002-03 to 2004-05 seasons with the 2020-21 to 2022-23 seasons.

The data shows that snow cover has fallen significantly across much of central and eastern Europe in particular. In the Alpine region, the average decline in snow cover was about 4.3 percentage points.

Following a wet start to winter, snow conditions in Europe at higher elevations have been more favourable in the past week after an Arctic blast brought fresh snow. However, at lower altitudes in Italy, France and Switzerland, cover remains patchy.

About half an hour's drive from Davos at the village of Küblis — altitude 815m versus Davos at 1,560m — the snow depth this season was 8cm compared to the long-term average of 16cm, Marty said.

According to a study published in Nature last year, the number of snow days in the Alps has fallen more in the past 20 years than over the previous 600.

Marco Carrer, a professor at the University of Padova and an author of the research, said that for about 500 years, snow cover was "more or less stable", but since the 1900s, that had changed dramatically, particularly over the past two decades.

The decline in persistent snow days was entirely related to climate change, he said.

Even on days with heavy snowfall, melting was a problem. "As the temperature is warming the snow is melting faster," Carrer said. "There is an absolute connection with climate change."

For the many who rely on Alpine snow melt for water supplies during the summer, the fall-off in snow coverage was particularly worrying, leaving those areas at risk of droughts and water shortages, he said.

The most recent study published in Nature this month found that human-induced global warming had caused declines in Northern Hemisphere snowpack in spring over the 1981—2020 period, including in areas where snow is crucial for water supplies.

A snowpack in spring is important for ensuring a supply of drinking and irrigation water, but this can be affected by early melts.

The naturally occurring El Niño weather phenomenon, which began last year and contributes to the warming of the Pacific Ocean, can also affect European snowfall, potentially leading to a colder, snowier winter.

Marty, who has been studying Davos's snow for two decades, said despite the higher altitude, the Alpine town had experienced some "snow-poor winters" in recent years, including a Christmas where the town and valley were "not white".

GMA

PH to get P625.8M for health services, climate adaptation – Canadian minister
By: Michaella Del Callar

Reinforcing its bilateral ties with the Philippines, Canada is providing P625.8 million or CAD$15 million to strengthen the Marcos administration's efforts to improve public health services and the country's climate adaptation initiatives, Canada's top development official said.

Canadian Minister of International Development Ahmed Hussen said his government is committed to build on strong ties with Manila and seek ways to enhance cooperation under Canada's Indo-Pacific Strategy, particularly on regional security, addressing climate change, protecting maritime environments, access to healthcare, and build more resilient, inclusive and prosperous societies.

"Canadian overseas development assistance is meant to be deployed in the Philippines in a manner that complements, supplements, and supports Philippine national priorities," Hussen recently told a selected group of journalists in Manila.

On climate adaptation, Canada is providing P333.7 million or CAD$8 million over five years in grant financing to build resilience of vulnerable communities by supporting nature-based solutions – such as reforestation and coastal wetlands restoration – for climate adaptation.

The project will target six regions across the country representing key biodiversity or protected areas, Hussen said.

On health services, P292 million or CAD$7 million will be provided to the Philippines over six years in grant financing to strengthen the capacity of local governments, and support health facilities and communities to improve delivery of, and access to, health services.

Hussen said it seeks to aid vulnerable populations, including women and girls and indigenous people, in four geographically isolated and disaster-prone provinces.

"As part of our Indo-Pacific strategy, which is Canada's way to focus in this region in terms of diplomacy, trade and investment, and development, the Philippines is central to that strategy," Hussen said, adding cooperation with Manila on renewable energy and food security is also in the pipeline.

Hussen also highlighted the vibrant people-to-people ties between the two countries, through tourists, scholars and Filipinos in Canada, where close to a million people of Filipino descent work and live - the fourth biggest diaspora population in Canada.

Annual official development assistance to the Philippines from Canada is valued at around P1 billion or CAD$24 million to P1.04 or CAD$25 million, focusing on peace and security, economic, and health programs.

MANILA BULLETIN

Biden's trade mission first of many commercial PH-US events in 2024 — DFA

By: Joseph Pedrajas

The trade mission that will be sent by US President Joe Biden to the Philippines will be the first in a series of major commercial events that will be undertaken by Manila and Washington this year, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) said Monday, Jan. 15.

After Biden announced over the weekend that US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimond will lead the Presidential Trade and Investment Mission, DFA confirmed that it will be welcoming the delegation that will arrive in the country on March 11.

Biden's announcement follows through his earlier commitment to President Marcos during the latter's visit to Washington in May to "spur more capital-intensive investments in the country's innovation economy, clean energy transition, critical minerals sector, and food security," DFA added.

DFA said the mission would be "a testament to the two countries' resolve to forge broader and deeper public-private partnerships for enduring, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and development."

During Marcos' visit to the US, the President said he was able to forge a more vital Philippine-US relationship in a range of areas thst included food security, agricultural productivity development, digital economy, energy security, climate change, and cybersecurity.

He added his meeting with Biden allowed him to ensure the country's resilience from economic threats, including global supply chain disruptions and economic coercion.

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Climate change, no longer a distant threat, is hurting kids now

By: Kurt Dela Peña

The average temperature in the Philippines is expected to rise by 1.8 C in 2050, but the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) stressed that climate change is already happening—that it is no longer a distant threat, it is already the reality.

Pagasa pointed out that current warming has increasingly posed serious challenges to people and the environment, and will continue to do so in the years to come, saying that its adverse effects are already being seen and may intensify extremely over time, especially if nothing is done to lessen emissions of greenhouse gases.

A column for the INQUIRER once stated that while it may be hard to think of climate change when joblessness is rising and poverty is worsening, “we all have to concern ourselves with it now because it is no longer just some vague realm of scientists and world leaders.” It has already become a problem, “one that’s already hurting all of us,” especially the poor.

But based on a new report by the United Nations Children’s Fund (Unicef), the way climate change is altering the mental and physical health of children is seriously concerning, too, with Oyunsaikhan Dendevnorov, its representative to the Philippines, stressing that “children are demanding change, but their needs are far too often relegated to the sidelines.”

As the Copernicus Climate Change Service revealed, global temperatures reached record high levels in 2023, making it the “warmest year on record” with an average of 14.98 C, 0.17 C higher than in 2016. It said, too, that last year was 0.60 C warmer than the 1991 to 2020 average and 1.48 C warmer than the 1850 to 1900 pre-industrial level. It was the hottest year in centuries.

An analysis by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), pointed this out too, saying that Earth’s average surface temperature last year was the warmest on record, exceeding by 1.2 C the average for NASA’s baseline period of 1951 to 1980. “We are facing a climate crisis,” NASA administrator Bill Nelson said.

But with the El Niño this year, the UN said 2024 could even be warmer, with the United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration predicting that there is a one in three chance that 2024 will be warmer in 2023 — and a 99 percent certainty that this year will be one of the five warmest years ever.

Little to no water

Unicef's report, "The Climate-Changed Child," released late last year, shed light on how climate change is threatening, or already impacting, children as a result of water scarcity and lack of access to safe drinking water services, which, Unicef said, are some of the ways in which the impacts of climate change are being felt.

It said one in three children, or 739 million worldwide, already live in areas exposed to high or very high water scarcity, with climate change threatening to make this worse. Likewise, the double burden of dwindling water availability and unsafe drinking water and sanitation services is compounding the challenge, putting children at even greater risk.

Then in the Philippines, Unicef pointed out that only 45 percent of school-aged children have access to an improved water source with a regular supply of water, while some 26 percent drink water from unimproved sources or have no access to water in schools at all, saying that pervasive drought in some areas "exacerbate[s] water scarcity."

"Typhoons and flooding, which have become more frequent, damage water infrastructure, [too]," it said.

Based on data from the British Geological Survey, groundwater is the source of over 50 percent potable water supply and 85 percent of piped water supply in the Philippines.

It said groundwater is strategically and economically important to current and future water supply "and is the principal source of dry season river flows," which are used for drinking water, too.

A 2015 study by the World Resources Institute likewise pointed out that the Philippines may experience more severe water scarcity in 2040.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources had pointed out that as early as 1996, monitoring of the Philippines' rivers showed that only 51 percent of the classified rivers still met the standards for their most beneficial use. The rest were already polluted, especially by domestic wastewater.

"Yet, only three percent of investments in water supply and sanitation were going to sanitation and sewage treatment," it said.

Children at high risk

As stressed by Unicef, the bodies and minds of children are uniquely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change: “As the climate changes and water supply and services are affected, children’s mental and physical health are also changing.”

“From the moment of conception until they grow into adulthood, the health and development of children’s brains, lungs, immune systems, and other critical functions are affected by the environment they grow up in,” it said.

Unicef pointed out that in the Philippines most especially, child malnutrition is worsened by crop failures and rising food prices, which is exacerbated by higher temperatures and increased rainfall linked to climate change.

“The bodies and minds of children in the Philippines are vulnerable to polluted air, poor nutrition, and extreme heat. Their world is changing and so too is their well-being as climate change affects their mental and physical health,” Dendevnorov said.

Based on the Children’s Climate Risk Index, which is structured with two indicators—exposure to climate and environmental hazards, shocks and stresses, and child vulnerability—the Philippines, with a score of 7.1, was 36th out of 163 countries, indicating that children in the Philippines are confronted with the stark reality of being at high risk of climate change.

Quezon City local government and Unilab sustain partnership to bring health services to communities

One of the 17 Global Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations is to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all individuals in all ages. The Quezon City Local Government under the leadership of Mayor Joy Belmonte continues to strengthen the delivery of health services to the community, as part of the Mayor's 14-point agenda which focuses on human and social services, economic development, environment, and climate change, infrastructure, and institutional development.

The thrust to provide better healthcare is supported by strong partnerships with government agencies and stakeholders from the private sector. The LGU, through the Quezon City Health Department, has partnered with Unilab with programs that spanned decades of cooperation towards a mutual goal to provide responsive health and wellness services to QCitizens.

Through Unilab's External Affairs Division, the Quezon City Health Department was able to implement community-based initiatives which involved projects on primary care, non-communicable and communicable diseases, maternal, newborn, child health and nutrition which were managed by doctors, midwives and barangay health workers.

In 2021, at the height of the pandemic, QC Health Department and Unilab implemented a series of vaccination activities for priority sectors in partnership with Caritas Philippines. These activities were done in several churches and sites of Quezon City. Unilab also supported QC as it reached out to senior citizens given the limitations of the pandemic.

Supporting the start of life

The collaboration between the QC Government and Unilab began in 2007 when Unilab assisted Barangay Health Workers in the City with their monitoring tools to measure healthcare needs of its constituents at the grassroots levels. The data from the health workers' journals had gaps in maternal and newborn health services that needed to be addressed. There was decreasing compliance among mothers from their prenatal checkups to post-partum antenatal care, family planning services, and child vaccination. This gave rise to focus on maternal care which included the involvement of private lying-in clinics in Quezon City in order to ensure safe childbirth and recommendations on post-natal care.

The Quezon City Health Department has taken steps to ensure the health and wellbeing of its QCitizens by strengthening its programs and partnerships. One of its initiatives to protect maternal and neonatal health and wellbeing was the Maternal Health Summit

held in 2012 in partnership with Unilab's Bayanihan sa Kalusugan program. The LGU collaborated with Unilab for a number of intervention activities which included the education of barangay health workers, public and private midwives, traditional birthing assistants or hilots, and the expectant mothers themselves.

It was also through this partnership that the Seal of Excellence (SoE) for maternal lying-in clinics was conceptualized in 2016, as a quality label for private lying-in clinics that have achieved all Maternal, Neonatal, Child health and Nutrition (MNCH) Indicators, such as DOH's License to Operate (LTO); Phil Health Accreditation, Sanitary Permit and membership in the City's Service Delivery network (SDN), now called as Primary Care Providers Network (PCPN). This is a way to improve availability and access to safe, effective, and transformative health services for maternal and neonatal health in Quezon City.

The recent Seal of Excellence Awards, which is now on its 7th year, has set the benchmark for maternal and childcare, especially among private lying-ins. The sustained partnership of QCHD and Unilab demonstrated an ideal public and private partnership that benefits the communities within the LGU.

At the awarding ceremony that recognized 37 birthing clinics in the City, Mayor Joy Belmonte expressed her full support and recognition to the QC Health Department in continuing the implementation of the Seal of Excellence and vows to continue the LGU's support for the program under Universal Health Care. "The Quezon City Government is determined to ensure that all development goals are met to protect public health, improve maternal health and reduce both maternal and neonatal mortality through a localized and sustainable maternal and newborn child health and nutrition approach, and by focusing on the leadership and governance initiatives to properly implement a functional primary care provider network under the Universal Health Care Act," said Dr. Ramona Asuncion DG Abarquez, QCHD Officer-in-Charge.

Dr. Dave Anthony Vergara, QC Health Care Operations Officer, lauded the extraordinary initiative, noting that it revolutionizes the realm of maternal care in Quezon City. "As a testament to the city government's dedication to enhancing healthcare for mothers and newborns, this stands as a formidable symbol. With the main goal of saving maternal and newborn lives, the awards empower mothers through innovative transformations in the quality of care they receive."

"We are grateful for the trust and confidence of Quezon City in Unilab as a partner in providing access to its constituents to quality health care. The standards that this partnership has set through collaborative programs and the immeasurable dedication of its health sector under the leadership of Mayor Joy Belmonte and the QCHD define genuine public service. We look forward to collaborating more closely with Quezon City

as we jointly pursue the thrust of the government to implement Universal Health Care," says Claire D. Papa, Unilab Assistant Vice President and Head of Unilab's External Affairs and Social Partnerships Division.

SUNSTAR

Global warming may be worsening, scientists warn

The latest calculations from several science agencies showing Earth obliterated global heat records last year may seem scary. But scientists worry that what's behind those numbers could be even worse.

The Associated Press asked more than three dozen scientists in interviews and emails what the smashed records mean. Most said they fear an acceleration of climate change that is already right at the edge of the 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit) increase since pre-industrial times that nations had hoped to stay within.

“The heat over the last calendar year was a dramatic message from Mother Nature,” said University of Arizona climate scientist Katharine Jacobs. Scientists say warming air and water is making deadly and costly heat waves, floods, droughts, storms and wildfires more intense and more likely.

This last year was a doozy.

Average global temperatures broke the previous record by a little more than a quarter of a degree (0.15 degrees Celsius), a big margin, according to calculations Friday from two top American science agencies, the British meteorological service and a private group founded by a climate skeptic.

Several of the scientists who made the calculations said the climate behaved in strange ways in 2023. They wonder whether human-caused climate change and a natural El Niño were augmented by a freak blip or whether “there's something more systematic afoot,” as NASA climate scientist Gavin Schmidt put it — including a much-debated acceleration of warming.

A partial answer may not come until late spring or early summer. That's when a strong El Nino — the cyclical warming of Pacific Ocean waters that affects global weather patterns — is expected to fade away. If ocean temperatures, including deep waters, keep setting records well into the summer, like in 2023, that would be an ominous clue, they say.

Nearly every scientist who responded to AP's questions blamed greenhouse gases from the burning of fossil fuels as the overwhelmingly largest reason the world hit temperatures that human civilization has not likely seen before. El Nino, which is bordering on “very strong,” is the second-biggest factor, with other conditions far behind, they said.

The trouble with 2023, NASA's Schmidt said, is “it was a very strange year ... The more you dig into it, the less clear it seems.”

One part of that is the timing for when 2023's big burst of heat began, according to Schmidt and Samantha Burgess, deputy director of Europe's Copernicus Climate Service, which earlier this week put warming at 1.48 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial times.

Temperatures are typically highest above normal in late winter and spring, they said. But 2023's highest heat kicked in around June and lingered at record levels for months.

Deep ocean heat, a big player in global temperatures, behaved in a similar way, Burgess said.

Former NASA climate scientist James Hansen, often considered the godfather of global warming science, theorized last year that warming was accelerating. While many of the scientists contacted by AP said they suspect it is happening, others were adamant that evidence so far supports only a steady and long-predicted increase.

“There is some evidence that the rate of warming over the past decade or so is slightly faster than the decade or so previous — which meets the mathematical definition of acceleration,” said UCLA climate scientist Daniel Swain. “However, this too is largely in line with predictions” that warming would accelerate at a certain point, especially when particle pollution in the air decreases.

The U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration calculated that Earth in 2023 had an average temperature of 59.12 degrees (15.08 degrees Celsius). That’s 0.27 degrees (0.15 degrees Celsius) warmer than the previous record set in 2016 and 2.43 degrees (1.35 degrees Celsius) warmer than pre-industrial temperatures.

“It’s almost as if we popped ourselves off the staircase (of normal global warming temperature increases) onto a slightly warmer regime,” said Russ Vose, global monitoring chief for NOAA’s National Centers for Environmental Information. He said he sees acceleration of warming.

NASA and the United Kingdom Meteorological Office had the warming since the mid-19th century a bit higher at 2.5 degrees (1.39 degrees Celsius) and 2.63 degrees (1.46 degrees Celsius) respectively. Records go back to 1850.

The World Meteorological Organization, combining the measurements announced Friday with Japanese and European calculations released earlier this month, pegged

2023 at 1.45 degrees Celsius (2.61 degrees Fahrenheit) warmer than pre-industrial temperatures.

Many of the climate scientists saw little hope of stopping warming at the 1.5-degree goal called for in the 2015 Paris agreement that sought to avert the worst consequences of climate change.

“I do not consider it realistic that we can limit warming (averaged over several years) to 1.5C,” wrote Woodwell Climate Research Center scientist Jennifer Francis in an email. “It is technically possible but politically impossible.”

“The slow pace of climate action and the continued disinformation that catalyzes it has never been about lack of science or even lack of solutions: it has always been, and remains, about lack of political will,” said Katharine Hayhoe, chief scientist at The Nature Conservancy.

Both NASA and NOAA said the last 10 years, from 2014 to 2023, have been the 10 hottest years they’ve measured. It’s the third time in the last eight years that a global heat record was set. Randall Cerveny, an Arizona State University scientist who helps coordinate record-keeping for the WMO, said the big worry isn’t that a record was broken last year, but that they keep getting broken so frequently.

“It’s the rapidity of the continual change that is, to me, most alarming,” Cerveny said.

Cornell University climate scientist Natalie Mahowald said, “This is just a taste of what we can expect in the future, especially if we continue to fail to cut carbon dioxide fast enough.”

That's why so many scientists contacted by The Associated Press are anxious.

“I've been worried since the early 1990s,” said Brown University climate scientist Kim Cobb. “I am more worried than ever. My worry increases with every year that global emissions move in the wrong direction.”

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