



NEWS ROUNDUP

06 MARCH 2023 [08:00 am]

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CNA

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MANILA BULLETIN

[The agricultural landscape of the Philippines](#)

By: Brian Trias

I had the pleasure of attending a lecture recently by the former Department of Agriculture (DA) Assistant Secretary Leandro Gazmin regarding the economics of agriculture. Somewhere in the beginning of his lecture, he asked us if we thought the Philippines was an agricultural country. Some said yes, some said no. After giving his lecture, which included statistics from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), he asked us that same question again, and some of us still came to that same conclusion that we are not. If you make it to the end of this article, perhaps, you can decide for yourself whether we are or are not. I will let you be the judge.

[US, EU pledge billions in ocean aid at int'l conference](#)

By: Agence-France-Presse

PANAMA CITY, Panama — A global conference to save the world's oceans kicked off Thursday in Panama with urgent calls to adopt an international protection treaty, along with billions of dollars in US and EU pledges for research, monitoring and conservation.

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

[How local food systems ensure sufficient supply and help the planet](#)

The global food system — which encompasses the journey of food production from the farms to our plates — is exerting enormous pressure on our environment.

[Manila Water plants 1.4 million trees under its watershed protection and management program](#)

By: Dennis Guterrez

Manila, Philippines — Since the launch of East Zone concessionaire Manila Water's watershed management program in 2006, Manila Water has partnered with the public and private sector, such as the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System, various local government units, indigenous people residing in watershed communities, and other stakeholders for the implementation of its watershed management program.

[Masungi Georeserve denies agreeing to BuCor plan to develop area](#)

MANILA, Philippines — The private caretaker of the Masungi Georeserve in Rizal province has denied conceding to the plan of the Bureau of Corrections (BuCor) to develop 270 hectares of the 400-ha protected area as the new site for its headquarters.

PHILIPPINE NEWS AGENCY

[Scotland becomes 1st country to ban climate-harming anesthetic](#)

LONDON – Scotland has become the first country in the world to ban the use of the anesthetic desflurane due to its harmful impact on the environment.

RAPPLER

[\[Opinion\] Wanted: A just transition for the jeepney sector amid the climate crisis](#)

By: Tony La Viña, Kaloi Zarate, Jayvy Gamboa

The impending weeklong jeepney strike on March 6 to 12 has resurfaced the heated and spirited debate on the Public Utility Vehicle Modernization Program (PUVMP) and the issues that come with it. Among these issues are the lack of available financial support and safety nets for jeepney modernization and the decreased accessibility of public transport caused by the consolidation of franchises and fleet management.

THE MANILA TIMES

[\[Opinion\] Treat the climate emergency as an emergency](#)

Two pieces of news in the past week provided a shocking assessment of the impact of climate change and an alarming forecast of where things are headed. The term "climate emergency" is frequently, and sometimes glibly used, but the recent news item adds near real-time dimensions to it, confirming in a stark way that it is indeed an emergency, and that the country should respond to it as such.

[Quirino Province aims for Philippines's Net Zero Emissions leadership](#)

QUIRINO Province is aiming to become the country's first leader in Net Zero Emissions in just a few short years, thanks to a newly-forged partnership with local resilience advocacy Climate Smart Philippines, under the stewardship of internationally-acclaimed science diplomat Glenn Banaguas. The bid aims to see Quirino achieving net zero emissions by 2050.

THE STAR

[Philippines and Vietnam agree to work together and keep their sea safe from outsiders](#)

TOKYO/MANILA, March 5 (Vietnam News/ANN): Vietnam Deputy Prime Minister Tran Hong Ha received Philippine Secretary of Energy Raphael Perpetuo M. Lotilla on the sidelines of the Asia Zero Emission Community (AZEC) Ministerial Meeting in Tokyo, Japan on Saturday (March 4).

CCC IN THE NEWS:

RAPPLER

[\[Opinion\] Years later, Department of Disaster Resilience still the wrong solution](#)

By: John Leo C. Algo

New administration, same faces, same shortsighted proposals. Motions have reemerged in the 19th Philippine Congress for establishing a Department of Disaster Resilience (DDR). Despite being named a priority of the previous leadership, bills proposing its creation ultimately failed to be passed in both houses of the legislature.

THE MANILA TIMES

[\[Opinion\] Pricing catastrophe insurance](#)

By: Herminia Jacinto

PRICING products is always a difficult task to do. Vehicles, goods and even food products can put together the cost of raw materials, labor and other items to arrive at the total cost. But pricing services and other intangible products is a big challenge.

Information and Knowledge Management Division

BUSINESS MIRROR

Quirino province aims to lead in PHL's net zero emission

Quirino province is aiming to become the country's first leader in net zero emissions in just a few years, thanks to a newly-forged partnership with local resilience advocacy Climate Smart Philippines, under the stewardship of internationally-acclaimed science diplomat Glenn Banaguas.

The bid aims to see Quirino achieving net zero emissions by 2050.

Banaguas will share Climate Smart Philippines's knowledge and experience with the people and local government of Quirino.

By establishing mutually-reinforcing community-to-community learning networks and partnerships, the leadership of the province has expressed optimism about avoiding the worst impacts of climate change by committing to achieving net zero emissions within the next three decades.

"We are deeply honored to have Mr. Banaguas's expertise and guidance as we set ourselves on the path to this ambitious but worthy goal," said Quirino Gov. Dakila Cua, who is also the president of the Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines (Ulap).

"Building on the actions in Quirino's strengthened climate change plan, this provides a roadmap to how Quirino will meet the enhanced Paris and Glasgow Agreement targets to reduce emission before 2040," he mentioned.

"We are confident that we can steer our beloved province onto a path of leadership and greatness. We will replicate the success of our commitment with the other provinces in the country," Cua added.

A Fellow of the UK-based Royal Society for the Arts, Banaguas is one of Asia's leading experts in environment, climate change and disaster risk.

He is the chairman of the Asean Science Diplomats and the US-Asean Fellows for Science and Technology, and the Climate Diplomat of the EU-Asia Expert Panel for Climate Diplomacy and Environmental Security.

He was also Lee Kuan Yew Senior Fellow in Public Service and an Executive Fellow of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy in Switzerland. He is also a United Nations

Sasakawa and The Outstanding Filipino Laureate, as well as an Asia Leaders for Sustainability awardee.

“I am thankful for the trust and faith that Governor Cua and the people of Quirino have put in me,” Banaguas said.

“The size of my gratitude is exceeded only by my determination to see this beloved province rise up to its full climate-smart potential.”

Short films on climate, native trees, daily life top 6th Indie-Siyensya

Moments of excitement and anticipation filled the halls of the Philippine International Convention Center (PICC) recently as the sixth Indie-Siyensya Filmmaking Competition, organized by the Department of Science and Technology-Science Education Institute marked its first physical awarding ceremony after almost three years and two seasons of virtual runs, said DOST-SEI in a news release.

“K5: Katutubong Kahoy Kontra Krisis sa Klima,” directed by Celine Murillo bagged the best film award in the open category.

The mini-documentary film discusses how planting native trees, while limited, is an important nature-based solution for mitigating the climate crisis.

Second best film in the open category went to “Climacts” by DOST-SEI scholar and De La Salle University student Kyle Carlo Lasala.

“Climacts,” a documentary, highlights the root cause and drastic effects of climate change. It features the existing and developing actions with emphasis on systemic change.

Meanwhile, “Marka ng Pawikan,” directed by Humphrey Mark Gian Francesco Torcuator, a captivating film which shows how climate change directly affects pawikan’s brooding and survival, causing detrimental effects to their species, received the third best film award for the open category.

For the Youth category, “Tanaw Juan,” directed by Yashmen A. Gerez of Quezon Science High School, won the Best Film Award.

The movie was praised for its powerful storytelling, compelling character, and its ability to raise awareness on the impacts of climate change in everyday life.

It follows the story of Juan, who goes through his normal daily routine and casually explains scientific concepts and phenomena surrounding climate change with various encounters throughout his errand journey.

The team’s concept of climate change expression and communication is delivered through an interactive, engaging and fun way, transitioning into a motivational mood for a call to action as the film’s ending statement.

The power duo of sisters Frances Sophia and Felizia Shayn of De La Salle University and Marcelo H. del Pilar won the second best film for their entry “Marvels of Science: Climate Change.” Their explainer tackled climate change’s impacts to life, environment and the entire world.

The film, “Sirak,” by Charles Joshua Uy of Philippine Science High School-Eastern Visayas Campus snatched the third-best film award for the youth category.

“Sirak,” a Waray word which means “sunny,” communicates climate change through the greatest common denominator, which is heat felt by humans.

Also bagging trophies and cash grants were crowd favorites “Climacts” and “Tanaw Juan” for winning the Viewers’ Choice Award for the Open and Youth category, DOST-SEI said.

The two films garnered the most number of votes gathered during the physical voting held at Cinematheque Centres on January 21 and 22 and online voting held from January 28 to February 6.

All top three films for each category received a clapperback-designed 3D trophy, a certificate and cash grants.

The best films were given P100,000, while the second and third best films received P50,000 and P30,000, respectively.

The finalists won consolation prizes of P5,000 each, while the Viewers’ Choice Awardees claimed a cash grant of P20,000, a certificate and a trophy.

Science Secretary Renato U. Solidum Jr., emphasized the importance of science communication in national development, anchored in research that is impactful, useful and relevant to society, DOST-SEI said.

“Through the Indie-Siyensya Science Filmmaking Competition, we hope to highlight the important role of science for national development, encourage our students to pursue meaningful STEM [science, technology, engineering and mathematics] careers, and contribute to forwarding important causes and moving people into positive action,” Solidum said.

DOST-SEI Director Josette T. Biyo thanked all the filmmakers for making this year's Indie-Siyensya run a special one as it gathered 267 film entries, a record high since the competition was launched.

She also thanked DOST-SEI's partner, the Film Development Council of the Philippines (FDCP), for being instrumental in popularizing the science films through film screenings in Cinematheque Centres and online viewing platform JuanFlix.

"We give thanks to our young Filipino filmmakers, who were brave enough to participate and take the challenge to be part of Indie-Siyensya's movement to use films to communicate science and forward social and scientific advocacy," Biyo said.

Indie-Siyensya, which aims to promote science communication and provide a platform for young filmmakers to highlight their work, featured thought-provoking films that tackle encompassing topics on climate change, from its threatening impacts to helping mitigate its effects and offering solutions all related to the theme "Communicating Climate Change Action," DOST-SEI said.

The next season for the Indie-Siyensya Film Festival is expected to return in the second quarter of the year.

BUSINESS WORLD

Sustainability certification gains favor with fisherfolk

By: Patricia B. Mirasol

FISHERFOLK said they are working towards a Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification following initiatives being pursued by the tuna industry to ensure that its operations adhere to international best practices.

“Kami ngayon is nasa proseso pa lang (We’re still in the process of getting the certification),” Suzette B. Villano, an official of the Sagnay Tuna Fishers Association in Sagnay, Camarines Sur, said.

The Philippines Tuna Handline Partnership (PTHP) was granted a 5-year certification in October 2021. PTHP is composed of the Gulf of Lagonoy Tuna Fishers Federation, Inc., the Occidental Mindoro Federation of Tuna Fishers Association, and the Philippine Association of Tuna Processors, Inc.

What they are all shooting for is the blue MSC label applied to wild fish or seafood from fisheries that meet international norms for sustainable fishing. The label signals to consumers the fish they purchase comes from a sustainable source.

Ms. Villano told BusinessWorld via Zoom that one of the certification requirements is the use of handlining, a method that involves a handheld line with one or more baited hooks attached to the end.

The requirements for fisherfolk participating in the initiative include registration with the Department of Agriculture and the licensing of their equipment.

“Marami pa kaming inaasikaso [We’re still working on the requirements],” added Ms. Villano. “Bawat huling isda, dapat naka-record (Each catch has to be recorded).”

Ms. Villano said the changes in fishing conditions, possibly the result of climate change, include Sagnay’s receding shoreline and the growing difficulty of finding fish.

“Dati sa lugar namin, kahit hindi ka na pumunta sa malayo, may isda (You didn’t have to venture far to fish before),” she said. “Ngayon hinahanap na ang isda (Nowadays, you have to look for the fish).”

Handline fishing is sustainable, she said, because it does not negatively affect the ecosystem.

STRINGENT PROCESS

“Our partner small-scale fisherfolk are already able to export their products to the international market,” said Raisa D. Pandan, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)-Philippines’s technical operation manager of Sustainable Tuna Partnership (STP) 2.

“WWF-Philippines works closely with the PTHP to ensure that fisherfolk are represented at the negotiating table with processors and exporters,” she said via Messenger.

The global conservation group facilitates the tuna fishery improvement project (FIP), a program that aims to establish sustainable fishing practices and improve the livelihoods of fisherfolk, such as Ms. Villano’s group and others in the PTHP.

The fisherfolk have decided to shoot for MSC certification on their own, with guidance from the WWF-Philippines, which runs the STP.

It took PTHP ten years to get its MSC certification, according to Joann P. Binondo, WWF-Philippines’ overall program manager for STP 2. “We started in 2011 with the Tuna FIP.”

“MSC is really difficult and expensive to obtain and maintain, especially for small-scale handline fisheries from a developing country,” Ms. Binondo said via Messenger.

“I salute the tuna fishers from Lagonoy and Mindoro (who) committed to continue over the years despite the stringent process,” she said.

REIGNITED INTEREST

The Lagonoy Gulf and Mindoro Strait fisherfolk MSC certification has “reignited the interest” of securing the certification among General Santos City’s tuna fishing industry, Ms. Pandan said.

In 2021, she added, the Fresh Frozen Seafood Association of the Philippines and the Socskargen Federation of Fishing and Allied Industries, Inc. signed a partnership with the SARGEN Fish Port Tuna Handline Fishing Association, Inc. with the aim of establishing a Fisheries Improvement Project (FIP) in General Santos.

“The FIP is a precursor to their goal to achieve an MSC certification, an undertaking we support and welcome,” she told BusinessWorld.

Ms. Pandan added that it’s “not only about how to make our fishers more competitive, but also how to ensure that they reap the benefits that they should rightly be receiving as producers of export commodities at the international scale.”

Tuna and tuna-like species account for 20% of the entire value of the world’s marine capture fisheries, per the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Worldwide demand for sustainably sourced fish has been rising in recent years, including in the UK and US.

Ms. Villano, who estimates that it might take her group five more years to get MSC-certified, says they expect their catch to command higher prices at the conclusion of the process.

The current price of tuna, she said, is P280-P300 per kilo during the lean months of April to July.

“Sana mabigyan pansin ‘yung mga maliliit na mangingisda, para matanggal ang mindset na ang mga fisherfolk poorest among the poor (I hope small-scale fisherfolks get more attention, to eliminate the mindset that fisherfolk are among the poorest of the poor),” she added.

CNA

[The Climate Conversations: How Asia's great frontier lands grapple with climate change](#)

Samzdong, an isolated Himalayan village near the snow-capped mountains of Nepal, is running dry. In recent years, its longtime residents are making the exodus, leaving behind the elderly. Only nine people remain, including 65-year-old Bakki, who refuses to leave her longtime home.

Her daughter and grandchildren, unencumbered by the emotional grip of the beautiful mountain village, have started a new life in another village where there's a better chance of making a living.

Bakki's daughter, Sangmo Gurung, laments the separation: "I keep worrying if my mother is ill or how she is doing. So I suggested she sell her goats and move here with us. But she said that she will live there as long as she's alive."

Bakki's family is one of millions of people in Asia, whose lives are deeply affected by climate change. To hear their stories, CNA climate change correspondent Jack Board travelled across the continent to five different ecosystems – desert, mountain, river, coral reefs, and rainforest.

In this podcast series, he tells us what is at stake for local communities whose lives are inextricably intertwined with the land, and the solutions required to tackle the climate crisis.

Here are some highlights of Jack's journey:

IN MONGOLIA, NOMADIC HERDERS CANNOT OUTFIGHT CLIMATE CHANGE

Nergui Narantsetseg, a traditional nomadic herder who lives in the Gobi Desert, has to keep moving to find more plentiful grasslands.

In the Gobi, it is difficult to be a herder; no rain and with too many mines. It is becoming difficult to herd animals.

Munkhtuul Banzragc, Narantsetseg's wife: "None of our three kids want to be a herder. These are very difficult times. How can a kid think it is okay to live in the countryside when they have seen drought for two consecutive years?"

VILLAGERS IN NEPAL ARE LEAVING THE HIMALAYAS

Bakki, an elderly villager living in a remote region of Nepal's mountainous terrain: "Look at our fields, they're all dry now ... We used to keep a lot of animals. The horses had their stables in the village, the cows used to graze all over the fields and now there are fewer and fewer animals."

I'm 65 now, so you can tell how long I have lived here. Others have moved ... Now our families are split between the two villages ... It used to be nice. We are quite lonely now.

RICE FARMERS IN VIETNAM ADAPT TO CHANGES IN THE MEKONG DELTA

Hoang Phuong Thao, the country director of ActionAid Vietnam: "This is a home to more than 23 million people. Due to climate change and a very wrong way of using resources from the Mekong, people here have lost a lot of their livelihoods, they are losing their shelter, they are losing their own water."

Nguyen Van Chon is a rice farmer and he is struggling as he depends on the Mekong to grow the thirsty crop.

In general, the water comes unpredictably ... If I can't grow rice in the future, I'll go find something else to do ... If you can't do rice, what can you do here?

IN THE PHILIPPINES, CORAL REEFS NEED URGENT PROTECTION

Apo Island barangay captain Mario Pascobello: "In the old days, nobody cared about what happened after you fish ... I was involved specifically in dynamite fishing (using explosives to stun or kill fish), muro-ami (pounding and crushing coral reefs to scare fish into a large waiting net) and poisoning (using toxins to catch fish)."

For so many years fishermen here had been doing this bad practice or way of fishing until such time that there's almost no fish to catch.

Leader of the traditional fishing village of Depla, Dante Jabelo Jr: "I was once sceptical over the sanctuary myself. We saw it as a threat to our livelihood. After hearing the importance of the sanctuary, I immediately campaigned for it because I want to leave something behind when the new generation takes over."

HOW ECOTOURISM IS SAVING RAINFORESTS IN THAILAND

Khao Sok National Park is the largest area of virgin rainforest in southern Thailand, an ancient system that is older and more diverse than the Amazon rainforest. In a country where deforestation was once rife, Thailand is now aiming...see more

Terdthai Kwanthong, chief of Khao Sok National Park: "When former poachers saw that there were a lot of tourists coming, they switched from wildlife hunting to become tour guides and boat operators. They also opened restaurants or shops."

This means they can earn a direct income and it isn't illegal. This makes people help with conservation of nature.

Regan Pairojmahakij, a senior programme officer at RECOFTC, an international not-for-profit organisation: "I personally see great promise (in) recognising these historically impoverished groups for the absolutely vital role that they play in protecting the remaining shreds of ecosystems that we rely on as a global community for our survival."

MANILA BULLETIN

The agricultural landscape of the Philippines

By: Brian Trias

I had the pleasure of attending a lecture recently by the former Department of Agriculture (DA) Assistant Secretary Leandro Gazmin regarding the economics of agriculture. Somewhere in the beginning of his lecture, he asked us if we thought the Philippines was an agricultural country. Some said yes, some said no. After giving his lecture, which included statistics from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), he asked us that same question again, and some of us still came to that same conclusion that we are not. If you make it to the end of this article, perhaps, you can decide for yourself whether we are or are not. I will let you be the judge.

Just to give an overview, the Philippines' agriculture industry is diverse and includes crops such as coconut, banana, rice, corn, sugarcane, pineapple, and mangoes, among others. It also includes poultry, swine, and cattle. The agriculture industry provided employment to around a quarter of the country's workforce and accounted for 9.5% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2022. While 9.5% of GDP is significant, looking at the rest of our GDP, a much more significant 61% comes from services. Looking at our agricultural trade balance, in 2021, agricultural imports were a little more than double the value of exports. Agricultural imports and exports were recorded at US\$15.71 billion and US\$6.79 billion, respectively.

Just like any business or industry, the agriculture industry has its challenges. It is mainly comprised of small-scale farmers who rely on traditional methods of farming, which can be time-consuming and inefficient. If we compare ourselves to other countries like Vietnam or Thailand for instance, we yield less per hectare than they do.

Philippine farmers also struggle to access markets and often sell their produce at low prices due to a lack of bargaining power. They also typically lack modern equipment and infrastructure. Another challenge faced by farmers is the limited access to financing. It is often difficult for them to obtain loans to invest in their farms and improve their productivity. Climate change is another factor that affects their productivity.

While there are government initiatives in place to improve our agriculture and the income of farmers, these challenges, the trade deficit in agriculture, and our GDP suggest to me that we are not an agricultural country. At least not yet. The good news is that the government's eight-point socioeconomic agenda includes a budget allocation of P174.0 billion to ensure food security. The Department of Agriculture (DA) will

receive the highest share of that allocation in the amount of P156.6 billion to support banner programs that cover rice, corn, livestock, and fisheries.

[US, EU pledge billions in ocean aid at int'l conference](#)

By: Agence-France-Presse

PANAMA CITY, Panama — A global conference to save the world's oceans kicked off Thursday in Panama with urgent calls to adopt an international protection treaty, along with billions of dollars in US and EU pledges for research, monitoring and conservation.

Political and business leaders, environmental activists and academics at the two-day conference are grappling with how best to address a multitude of threats facing the oceans — from climate change and pollution to overfishing and mining.

The Our Ocean Conference is “so incredibly important because it is a conference that is focused on action, not on talk. It's about real commitments and real solutions,” White House climate envoy John Kerry said at the meeting's opening.

The former secretary of state announced US commitments of nearly \$6 billion across 77 projects to protect the high seas in 2023, including technical cooperation to facilitate “green shipping corridors”.

In a similar spirit, the European Union announced it would dedicate 816.5 million euros (\$865 million) to ocean-related projects this year.

A large slice of the EU money — 320 million euros — will go towards research to protect marine biodiversity and address the impacts of climate change on the seas, while another 250 million euros will help launch the Sentinel-1C satellite to observe ice melt and monitor climate change effects.

“The ocean is part of who we are, and it is our shared responsibility,” EU environment, oceans and fisheries commissioner Virginijus Sinkevicius said in a statement.

Panama President Laurentino Cortizo on Thursday signed a decree to enlarge the Banco Volcan Marine Protected Area (MPA) from 14,000 to 93,000 square kilometers (about 5,400 to 36,000 square miles).

Panama will now conserve more than 54 percent of the ocean that falls inside its exclusive economic zone, said the country's environment minister, Milciades Concepcion.

Ocean ‘under pressure’

On the eve of the conference, representatives of the European Union, the United States, Latin America and the Pacific Islands called for a treaty on the high seas, which has been under discussion at the United Nations for more than 15 years, to be signed as soon as possible.

Delegates have been meeting in New York since February 20 to conclude a text in the latest round of talks due to end Friday.

The high seas, which are not under the jurisdiction of any country, represent more than 60 percent of the oceans and nearly half of the planet.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres called Wednesday for negotiators to conclude a “robust and ambitious” treaty on the high seas.

“Our ocean has been under pressure for decades. We can no longer ignore the ocean emergency,” he said.

Other topics on the Our Ocean agenda include expanding Marine Protected Areas and developing a sustainable ocean-derived “blue economy.”

Covering three-quarters of the Earth, the oceans are home to 80 percent of all life on the planet, and provide nourishment for more than three billion people.

Mining, overfishing

Since the first Our Ocean conference in 2014, participating nations have committed more than \$108 billion and protected five million square miles of ocean, according to organizers.

Observers say Our Ocean is the only conference to address all ocean-related issues under one roof.

It also serves as a public stage for governments to show their political will.

Conference delegates do not adopt agreements but rather announce voluntary “commitments” to ocean protection.

The meeting occurs as multinational companies eye minerals on the ocean floor.

These include so-called manganese nodules, settled on the seabed, that contain metals critical in battery production.

Environmentalists say harvesting them could devastate deep-sea ecosystems.

NGOs are also concerned about overfishing, pushing at the conference for satellites to monitor fishing fleets.

“A third of commercial (maritime) species are over-exploited,” said Monica Espinoza of the NGO Global Fishing Watch.

Governments must “require that their fishing fleets... are traceable full-time by satellite so that we know that they are fishing honestly,” Andrew Sharpless, executive director of the NGO Oceana, told AFP.

Kerry announced that the United States, Panama and Fiji are in talks to create “green shipping corridors.”

These would be reserved for low-carbon or zero-carbon vessels, according to experts, while also combating illegal catches and overfishing.

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

[How local food systems ensure sufficient supply and help the planet](#)

The global food system — which encompasses the journey of food production from the farms to our plates — is exerting enormous pressure on our environment.

By 2050, with a projected increased global population of 9.8 billion, we would need the equivalent of almost three planets worth of resources to sustain our way of living, if our current consumption and production patterns remain the same.

A 2021 study published in *Nature* said that 34 percent of global human-caused greenhouse emissions, which exacerbate climate change, are driven by the global food system, from production, land-use change, to packaging and transporting our food.

Climate change also threatens our food security. Changes in weather patterns can reduce crop yields, diminish the nutritive value of some foods and, as we know too well, the greater frequency of extreme weather events destroy farmlands, coastal areas, and transport infrastructure.

While there are many challenges, there are also plenty of solutions at every scale. We need to be, not just ordinary consumers, but food citizens. For one, we must strengthen our local food systems.

One example of a local food system that works is the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF)-Philippines' food shed farming enterprise that was first developed in 2016 for sugarcane smallholder farms in Negros Occidental.

The sugarcane workers and their families had poor access to the variety of nutrients needed to be healthy. They are also among the poorest sectors in the country and were in need of additional sources of livelihood.

Each food shed is a greenhouse made of locally available materials. Food sheds are a sustainable system as they optimize the use of limited space for food production, while improving the health of the soil through regenerative practices. It requires a land area of about 60 square meters, including open space and access pathways. The actual production area is 42 sq m.

Communities benefit from proximity to a healthy variety of crops and from financial literacy training and organizing as a community enterprise. The system uses green and natural farming technologies such as composting, rainwater harvesting, and natural pest and disease control, among others, to produce healthy and quality crops and poultry (e.g., chicken meat and egg) products.

From the initial two food sheds in Negros, WWF-Philippines with the support of donors and the communities themselves, have now built 60 food sheds all over the country, including Palawan and Donsol. Our goal for the food shed program is to replicate the model toward the holistic improvement of communities and the environment. Food sheds have proven to be a successful vehicle for communities to visualize an effective local food system within their own neighborhood.

Community-based efforts such as the food shed farming enterprise play an important part in the overall effort to address food security, but they need to be coupled with national and local initiatives and policy support. The National Land Use Act is a good example of legislation that will strategically address food security because it designates areas for food production all over the country. Local government ordinances promoting urban/compact agriculture will also encourage more people to be engaged in productive initiatives.

Addressing food security requires a whole of society approach. Local efforts are part of the solution.

Manila Water plants 1.4 million trees under its watershed protection and management program

By: Dennis Guterrez

Manila, Philippines — Since the launch of East Zone concessionaire Manila Water's watershed management program in 2006, Manila Water has partnered with the public and private sector, such as the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System, various local government units, indigenous people residing in watershed communities, and other stakeholders for the implementation of its watershed management program.

Manila Water, as a water and wastewater service provider, recognizes the need for water security for the current and future generations, and at the same time, care of the environment where water comes from. The Company anchors on nature-based, sustainable solutions and environmental stewardship of key watersheds that it depends on, such as watershed protection and rehabilitation.

"We also move to protect life on land through watershed protection and management programs. The company's watershed management can help improve biodiversity and contribute to carbon sequestration that can mitigate the effects of climate change." says Jocot De Dios, Manila Water President and CEO.

As of December 2022, a total of 1,462,945 trees were planted and nurtured by Manila Water in different parts of the Philippines. In the East Zone, the Company's watershed protection efforts focus on the Ipo Watershed, La Mesa Watershed, Upper Marikina Watershed, and General Nakar Watershed. The Company has also been supporting the MWSS' Annual Million Trees Challenge (AMTC) since its launch in 2017.

Through its business units in the Non-East Zone, Manila Water has also pursued its watershed management and protection programs outside the East Zone: in the Nabaoy Watershed in Malay, Aklan through Boracay Water, in Villa Maria, Porac, Pampanga through Clark Water, watershed and forest areas in Laguna through Laguna Water, in Pan-As Hayiban Watershed in Calbayog, Samar through Calbayog Water, and Luyang Watershed in Carmen, Cebu through Cebu Water.

Among the tree species planted under the Company's tree planting activities are Narra, Mahogany, Yakal, Kamagong, Ipil, Sandalwood, Maguilomboy, Agohoy, and fruit-bearing trees that can also provide source of food and livelihood to the residents of watershed areas such as langka, rambutan, guyabano, santol, cacao and coffee trees. In Laguna, the Company has also planted fishpole bamboos.

In total, Manila Water has covered reforestation of 2,739.27 hectares of land across the Philippines.

Manila Water's intensified watershed management program is also part of the company's response to calls for action, aligning to the United Nations' Sustainability Development Goals (SDG), under SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 14 (Life below Water) and SDG 15 (Life on Land).

Masungi Georeserve denies agreeing to BuCor plan to develop area

MANILA, Philippines — The private caretaker of the Masungi Georeserve in Rizal province has denied conceding to the plan of the Bureau of Corrections (BuCor) to develop 270 hectares of the 400-ha protected area as the new site for its headquarters.

In a statement on Saturday, BuCor said the Masungi Georeserve Foundation had agreed to its five-year development plan after a “fruitful” meeting on Wednesday between BuCor acting Director General Gregorio Catapang Jr. and Foundation trustees Ann and her sister Billie Dumaliang, together with their lawyers and officials of the Department of Justice and the Land Registration Authority (LRA), among others.

“The Masungi Georeserve Foundation Inc. acknowledged and recognized that the subject land belongs to the BuCor,” the statement said, adding that the foundation “came to a mutual agreement and understanding [with the agency] that BuCor and Masungi Georeserve adheres [sic] to safeguarding the land’s biodiversity and geological structures which led to a fruitful discussion of creating linkages toward environment protection.”

The foundation, however, denied BuCor’s claim. In its statement on its Facebook page posted on Saturday, the foundation said it “stands firm and continues to urge the government to reconsider plans to build Bureau of Corrections facilities inside the georeserve.”

In a text message to the Inquirer, Ann Dumaliang said: “It was a good first touch base and we are happy we finally met the BuCor leadership — but no such conclusions were agreed on.”

“We stand by our position and that of other environmental groups that BuCor should not build in this area,” she said.

Proclamations

According to the BuCor statement, lawyer Teodoro Bonifacio Jr. of the LRA “enlightened [the Masungi caretakers about] the history of the claimants and clearly emphasized that the 270 hectares [are] solely owned by BuCor, [which] has all the right to develop any activities in accordance with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) guidelines [on] preserving [the] environment.”

BuCor said it acquired the right to the 270-ha portion of the conservation site when President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo issued Proclamation No. 1158 on Sept. 9, 2006, reserving that area as a new site for the bureau.

That portion was designated as “Lot 10,” the same area where armed men had set up camp in September last year, reviving public attention to the endangered conservation site.

But Arroyo’s proclamation makes no reference to Proclamation No. 1636 of 1977 and Proclamation No. 573 of 1969, issued by then President Ferdinand Marcos Sr. reserving the Masungi area as a national park and wildlife sanctuary.

Another statute before Arroyo’s order is the National Integrated Protected Areas System Act of 1992 (Republic Act No. 7586), which further establishes the legal mechanism for the preservation of protected areas.

In 2009, then-Environment Secretary Lito Atienza issued a memorandum ordering his agency’s Calabarzon office to present an alternative relocation site for BuCor.

In 2017, the foundation entered into an agreement with DENR (then on the watch of Environment Secretary Gina Lopez) regarding Masungi’s preservation and maintenance.

BuCor’s visit

It was only in September last year that BuCor was able to receive the transfer of certificate title of the property.

Catapang had said earlier that “BuCor will always protect and continue to support the advocacy of environmental preservation.”

But he also has other plans, saying that he is considering the area as a potential site for its Corrections National Training Institute as well as for the housing of the bureau’s current and retired officials, among other purposes.

He and other BuCor officials are scheduled to visit Masungi on March 12, Ann Dumaliang said.

She said she hoped that BuCor would realize “that it would not be fiscally sound or feasible to implement their plans without destroying the environment.”

PHILIPPINE NEWS AGENCY

Scotland becomes 1st country to ban climate-harming anesthetic

LONDON – Scotland has become the first country in the world to ban the use of the anesthetic desflurane due to its harmful impact on the environment.

"Desflurane, used as an anaesthetic during surgery, has a global warming potential 2,500 times greater than carbon dioxide," the Scottish government said in statement.

"Removing it from use in hospital theatres across NHS Scotland saves emissions equivalent to powering 1,700 homes every year," it added.

Meanwhile, more than 40 hospital trusts in England and a number of hospitals in Wales are cutting down the usage.

The work was led by clinicians who have moved away from using desflurane to clinically appropriate and safe alternatives that have less impact on the environment.

Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care Humza Yousaf said: "I am immensely proud that we have become the first nation in the UK to stop using environmentally harmful anaesthetics in our NHS."

"Programmes like this are key to our transition to become a net-zero health service, whilst ensuring patient safety remains at the heart of every clinical decision," he added.

Kenneth Barker, clinical lead for the National Green Theatres Programme, also commented on the issue, saying: "Theatres are high carbon and energy intensive areas that produce high volumes of waste, so reducing the environmental impact of theatres will make a positive difference toward achieving Scotland's net zero targets."

"NHS Scotland has assigned an ambitious target to be net-zero for anaesthetic gases by 2027, and removal of Desflurane is just the first step towards this," he added.

RAPPLER

[\[Opinion\] Wanted: A just transition for the jeepney sector amid the climate crisis](#)

By: Tony La Viña, Kaloi Zarate, Jayvy Gamboa

The impending weeklong jeepney strike on March 6 to 12 has resurfaced the heated and spirited debate on the Public Utility Vehicle Modernization Program (PUVMP) and the issues that come with it. Among these issues are the lack of available financial support and safety nets for jeepney modernization and the decreased accessibility of public transport caused by the consolidation of franchises and fleet management.

While the program started in 2017 under the Duterte administration, the COVID-19 pandemic had postponed this government's push for its implementation.

Now, the PUVMP is apparently gaining traction under the present administration. The government has recently enacted the Electric Vehicle Industry Development Act or EVIDA. Private sector investment and interest have signaled the viability of electric vehicles in the Philippines, not only for private but also for public transportation. Electric mobility has been taking space in the development agenda of international organizations and international financial institutions.

Government policy and private sector outlooks, and even the international agenda, have adapted. However, small-scale operators, drivers, and those dependent on the traditional jeepney industry (whether manufacturing, assembly, maintenance, and other related support services) have obviously not (owing to the heavy losses from the pandemic and high fuel prices in the past year), and will continue to be left behind should the PUVMP be implemented in its current form.

Electric vehicles and the climate

The transport sector remains to be one of the fastest growing greenhouse gas-emitting sectors. With the increasing demand for vehicles in the post-COVID world, especially in low-income and developing countries, and without any vehicle demand reduction through public transportation reform or a shift to more sustainable vehicle options, the reliance of the transport sector on fossil fuel and non-renewable energy sources is alarming globally.

From the point of view of climate change mitigation, carbon emissions must be minimized, if not net-zero, in order to prevent irreversible global warming that leads to extreme climate and slow onset events. According to the United Nations Environment

Program, “[t]o achieve a cleaner transport sector, a combination of measures needs to be implemented world-wide: better-designed cities; safe and comfortable walking and cycling facilities; more public transport; and cleaner and more efficient on-road fleets, including electric vehicles.”

One of the ways to achieve this is through the shift to electric mobility. While there are demand generation strategies and incentives to increase electric vehicle market for Philippine households and consumers, in the Philippine public transport parlance, it is what we know as jeepney modernization or PUVMP. However, it begs the question, does climate action really have to be at odds with the livelihood and economic security of those affected by the shift?

Just transition in jeepney modernization

In climate change policy and action, the concept of just transition directly tackles the question posed above. Just transition, briefly put, refers to the following concern. In the shift from a largely fossil fuel-dependent society to a sustainable society with ready access to renewable energy sources and technologies, workers and frontline communities who depend on fossil fuel-dependent industries must not inequitably carry the burden and costs of such shift.

Otherwise stated, just transition asks, how must the costs of the shift to a sustainable society be equitably shared across stakeholders?

Recognizing that climate action must indeed be shared by all and carried by all, although differently, everyone — from governments, to business enterprises, to private citizens — has to make a sacrifice to realize a sustainable society.

However, that burden must not only be shared. It must be equitably shared.

Just transition and the equitable sharing tied to the former are viewed differently as well.

For instance, the Just Transition Research Collaborative, a global consortium of researchers studying the concept of just transition and how it can be better developed for climate change policy, recognizes that just transition may have different meanings.

For some, just transition is satisfied by merely transitioning to a green(er) economy while retaining affected workers, but without institutional changes that address local and global inequities. As applied to the proposed PUVMP, this may refer to the mere change

or transition of traditional jeepneys to electric jeepneys, without addressing the wider and more complex issues of the transport and urban planning sectors.

For others, just transition is met only when distributive and procedural justice are considered in the shift to a sustainable society, which means that existing inequities, discrimination, and lack of access to opportunities across stakeholders are simultaneously targeted and addressed as well – not only the “greening” per se. Consequently, as applied to the proposed PUVMP, it begs the question of whether the program has mechanisms to safeguard the interests of jeepney operators – the small and medium ones, especially – and the drivers, and of whether the program is partnered with a public transportation reform that increases its accessibility to commuters.

This is how we should assess and influence the PUVMP. All of these are to ensure that just transition is established, and further, that such just transition is what can truly, equitably share the costs among stakeholders.

A sneak peek into climate action

The global community is on the same page that climate action must be done at the soonest possible time. Although there are differences on the desired timeline for when fossil fuel energy sources and technologies must be phased out, there is a common understanding that at one point, we must all shift to a sustainable society. The problem, however, is we cannot consume all the time that we need, because irreversible global warming has a tight deadline.

The matter of just transition, when viewed incorrectly, may be perceived as delaying any positive action that governments and non-state actors are doing. Some may think that the matter of equitable sharing of costs among stakeholders is not at all essential in shifting away from fossil fuels. However, just transition must not be viewed as something optional or merely supplementary. Instead, it must be considered as part and parcel of whatever kind of shift to a sustainable society the world wants to achieve.

While we recognize that global climate action must be done immediately, it should not be railroaded at the expense – again – of the marginalized and most vulnerable of society.

In the context of the PUVMP, although the government has announced last March 1 the extension for the phaseout of traditional jeepneys, the program apparently is still bound to happen, if the present bureaucrats running the transport sector are to be believed —

definitely not by June 2023, but by December 2023, or if postponed again, at an indefinite later time.

Indeed, the matter of just transition should not be a reason to delay the PUVMP. On the contrary, just transition should be at the core of the PUVMP. Just transition not only ensures that that we, as a country, are taking the first step correctly toward a sustainable future, but also in the long term ensures a public transport program that is socially just, democratic, and public service-oriented.

We must hold the line and ensure that there is accountability from the government in designing and implementing the modernization program. It might not yet occur to us at this point, but whatever outcome this program has shall set the precedent for future government efforts “in the name of sustainability and climate action.” If we let injustice prevail in the name of sustainability, then have we really taken a step toward a sustainable future?

The authors are all strong advocates of addressing climate change. We are also champions of climate justice.

Just transition must be placed at the core of any sustainability effort. If disregarded, we are in danger of rebuilding a “new society” that, although “green,” is not any less inequitable for our people.

THE MANILA TIMES

[\[Opinion\] Treat the climate emergency as an emergency](#)

Two pieces of news in the past week provided a shocking assessment of the impact of climate change and an alarming forecast of where things are headed. The term "climate emergency" is frequently, and sometimes glibly used, but the recent news item adds near real-time dimensions to it, confirming in a stark way that it is indeed an emergency, and that the country should respond to it as such.

The first piece of news was a review of the 2022 Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID), an annual report published some months ago by the Geneva-based Internal Displacement Monitoring Center, but only recently highlighted. The GRID report tracks the internal displacement of people due to conflict, natural disasters or other causes; as it is a rather challenging task to accurately gather the data and separate the numbers according to cause. The data is for the year 2021.

In 2021, the Philippines distinguished itself by having the second-highest number of internally displaced persons out of 141 countries, surpassed only by China, and then only by a marginal amount. A total of 5,821,000 Filipinos were displaced in 2021, while China, which dwarfs the Philippines in both land area and population, saw 6,037,000 people displaced.

Of the number of persons affected in the Philippines, 97.6 percent were displaced due to weather-related disasters. Typhoon "Odette" was the biggest natural disaster in terms of displaced persons anywhere in the world in 2021 (3.9 million), while another 478,000 Filipinos were displaced by floods associated with the southwest monsoon season. The GRID report noted that at the end of 2021, more than 700,000 people across the country were still in evacuation centers or temporary shelters.

All that information is better understood in the context of the second piece of news of the week, the announcement by the International Energy Agency on Thursday that carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions in 2022 increased by 0.9 gigatons (1 gigaton equals 1 billion metric tons) to 36.8 gigatons, the highest level of CO₂ emissions ever recorded. The previous highest level recorded was in 2021; the annual and cumulative data goes back to the year 1900, the earliest year for which reliable emissions data can be calculated.

The increase in CO₂ emissions was ascribed to several causes. Increased economic activity, particularly a significant increase in air travel, was one cause. Russia's war in

Ukraine, and the resulting constriction of gas supplies causing more coal and oil to be used to meet electricity demand also contributed, although not as much as was first feared.

A third, and more worrisome cause was the warming effect of the emissions themselves; a hotter atmosphere leads to more extreme weather, which was evident in last year's seemingly endless string of severe storms, droughts and heat waves across the planet. Extreme heat or cold increases energy demand for cooling or heating which, in turn, causes higher emissions from power plants. Likewise, areas that are usually dependent on hydroelectric power are forced to switch to coal or gas plants in periods of extreme drought.

Worrisome prognosis for the Philippines

This makes for a worrisome prognosis for the Philippines. If, in a year when greenhouse gas emissions are measured as the highest in history, the Philippines suffers the most social disruption among all the world's countries from climate-related impacts, what can we expect in the following year, or the years after, when greenhouse gas emissions are progressively higher still?

The climate emergency is indeed an emergency; not one that will befall us 10, 20 or 50 years in the future if we do not "do something now," but instead one that real, immediate, large-scale impacts show in no uncertain terms is already happening. And just as with any other sort of immediate emergency, the government must respond immediately. That means taking steps to relocate the most vulnerable populations, providing weather-secure housing for those who need it and ensuring that other basic needs can be met by building up reserves of food, water, and other relief goods. Having up to 5 percent of the country's population turned into refugees on an annual basis is socially and economically catastrophic, and measures must be taken to reduce the risk.

Quirino Province aims for Philippines's Net Zero Emissions leadership

QUIRINO Province is aiming to become the country's first leader in Net Zero Emissions in just a few short years, thanks to a newly-forged partnership with local resilience advocacy Climate Smart Philippines, under the stewardship of internationally-acclaimed science diplomat Glenn Banaguas. The bid aims to see Quirino achieving net zero emissions by 2050.

Banaguas will share Climate Smart Philippines' knowledge and experience with the people and local government of Quirino. By establishing mutually-reinforcing community-to-community learning networks and partnerships, the leadership of the province has expressed optimism about avoiding the worst impacts of climate change by committing to achieving net zero emissions within the next three decades.

"We are deeply honored to have Banaguas' expertise and guidance as we set ourselves on the path to this ambitious but worthy goal," said Quirino Gov. Dakila "Dax" Cua, who is also the president of the Union Leagues of Authorities of the Philippines (ULAP).

"Building on the actions in Quirino's strengthened climate change plan, this provides a roadmap to how Quirino will meet the enhanced Paris and Glasgow Agreement targets to reduce emission before 2040," he mentioned.

A fellow of the UK-based Royal Society for the Arts, Sc. Dpl. Banaguas is one of Asia's leading experts in environment, climate change, and disaster risk. He is the chairman of the Asean Science Diplomats and the US-Asean Fellows for Science and Technology, and the Climate Diplomat of the EU-Asia Expert Panel for Climate Diplomacy and Environmental Security. He was also Lee Kuan Yew Senior Fellow in Public Service and an executive fellow of the Geneva Center for Security Policy in Switzerland. He is also a United Nations Sasakawa and The Outstanding Filipino (ToFil) Laureate, as well as an Asia Leaders for Sustainability awardee.

THE STAR

[Philippines and Vietnam agree to work together and keep their sea safe from outsiders](#)

TOKYO/MANILA, March 5 (Vietnam News/ANN): Vietnam Deputy Prime Minister Tran Hong Ha received Philippine Secretary of Energy Raphael Perpetuo M. Lotilla on the sidelines of the Asia Zero Emission Community (AZEC) Ministerial Meeting in Tokyo, Japan on Saturday (March 4).

In the context that the two countries are responding to challenges related to the East Sea, energy security, climate change and natural disasters, Ha reiterated Vietnam's backing of the Philippines' stance on climate change response as stated at the AZEC Ministerial Meeting.

He proposed the two nations promote bilateral cooperation and cooperation within the AZEC framework, such as the building of a research centre on renewable energy or a disaster warning centre in Vietnam or the Philippines, adding that those cooperation programmes give practical benefits for both sides.

Raphael Lotilla assessed Vietnam as one of countries leading South-East Asia in terms of energy transition.

Agreeing with Vietnam's stance that initiatives within the AZEC framework need to be concretised by practical and effective projects, he suggested the two sides focus efforts on the field of renewable energy in the coming time.

Through the current success of a joint venture between Vietnam and the Philippines in a solar energy project, the two sides can expand cooperation in building an electricity transmission network or production of energy storage batteries which are now major barriers for most countries in the transition to clean and green energy.

The two sides also agreed to continue sharing experience, further promote bilateral cooperation mechanisms in various fields, and closely coordinate in regional and international cooperation mechanisms, especially those related to sustainable development goals.

On the same day, Deputy PM Ha met with officials and staff of the Vietnamese Embassy and prominent Vietnamese intellectuals in Japan.

At the meeting, Vietnamese scientists in Japan gave reports on several topics such as Japan's green growth and carbon neutral strategies and some technologies helping reduce CO2 emissions and ensuring energy security in the country.

CCC IN THE NEWS:

RAPPLER

[\[Opinion\] Years later, Department of Disaster Resilience still the wrong solution](#)

By: John Leo C. Algo

New administration, same faces, same shortsighted proposals. Motions have reemerged in the 19th Philippine Congress for establishing a Department of Disaster Resilience (DDR). Despite being named a priority of the previous leadership, bills proposing its creation ultimately failed to be passed in both houses of the legislature.

Its proponents keep insisting that the DDR should be the institution that strengthens our country's capacity to address disasters. Per the current set of nearly 30 bills in the House of Representatives, it would be equipped with a more centralized authority and more resources to implement policies and programs to deal with "natural disasters" and enhance coordination between local government units (LGUs) and non-government stakeholders.

However, a closer look shows that the DDR as currently constituted has many flaws that would not result in the improvement of disaster risk reduction management (DRRM) in the Philippines.

The 'climate' picture

In some of the DDR bills, the Climate Change Commission (CCC) would be abolished, and its functions would be transferred to the department. While the version that was passed in the lower House two-plus years ago removed its dissolution, the reemergence of this provision in recently-filed bills is nevertheless concerning.

The climate crisis is more than just about disasters. It is not just about responding to the loss and damage that typhoons, droughts, flashfloods, and other extreme weather events inflict on communities around the country.

It is also foolish to simply let climate change adaptation be subsumed into the paradigm of DRRM through this proposal, especially when DRRM itself can be considered as being within the adaptation context. This makes another provision of the bills, to transfer the jurisdiction of the adaptation-oriented People's Survival Fund to the DDR, an ill-advised one.

Just as important to consider in this equation is climate change mitigation, or reducing the pollution emitted from the burning of fossil fuels (i.e., coal, gas) that causes the climate crisis. This is quite different from disaster mitigation, which refers to reducing risk to peoples and properties from the impacts of natural hazards.

Should CCC be absorbed into the DDR, this key aspect of climate action would likely not receive the focus that it should get. This is a timely reminder that six years after ratifying the Paris Agreement, the government still has not publicized a comprehensive decarbonization plan aligned with the self-determined goal of reducing pollution by 75% within the current decade.

The 'local' picture

Once again, the current DDR bills propose the abolishment of the Local DRRM Councils (LDRRMCs), which effectively eliminates the right of non-government stakeholders to have direct influence in local decision-making processes. These would be replaced instead by offices that would merely consult these groups that are not only among those at highest risk to potential disasters, but also whose voices are not always accounted for by other policymakers.

It must be reiterated that a strong localized approach is at the heart of any effective disaster management, as reflected in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and existing national laws. LGUs and communities are the first line of defense and responders against potential impacts that will vary in each community, so building their capacities to address disaster risk is needed to avoid or minimize costs and impacts.

Given this context, LDRRMCs are truly essential for empowering communities to become more active participants in every step of DRRM, from prevention to rehabilitation and recovery. Its removal is actually detrimental to the very same "whole-of-society" approach that proponents claim the DDR would exemplify.

DRRM should not be the mandate of just one department or any other entity. Instead of centralizing disaster-related functions that would simply be impractical in an archipelagic nation, the government should instead focus on improving existing community-based DRRM systems and practices that are suitable to the local context to which they are situated.

Without strong evidence-based policymaking, consistent political will, proper use of available funds and resources, and a truly inclusive approach, whatever system is designed to address disasters would end up being ineffective.

The 'resilience' picture

It is no secret that the term “resilience” is now receiving a more negative reaction within the nation, especially when politicians themselves are over-glorifying it. Millions of Filipinos deserve so much better than to be expected to simply withstand any problem or threat thrown their way.

Always remember that this toxic culture of resilience must be ended quickly for the sake of current and future generations of Filipinos. For so long, it has been an excuse by many policymakers to evade accountability for their failures to properly address disasters, among many other governance and development issues.

We are all stakeholders in dealing with disasters. We have the right to demand from our leaders to enforce solutions that reduce the effects of disasters of all kinds and aid our pursuit of sustainable development. We also have the right to directly participate in decision-making processes to protect our well-being and ensure a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment.

Instead of consolidating power even more, it should be LGUs that would be further empowered through financial and technical support from the national government agencies and other sectors. Capacity-building measures must also be implemented for the benefit of local stakeholders in reducing disaster risks and enhancing preparedness.

This November marks the 10th anniversary since Super Typhoon Yolanda made landfall on Philippine soil. That incident triggered the calls for improving the nation’s DRRM and climate strategies, with some leaning into scrapping the National DRRM Council for a department. Yet these proponents of the DDR are still missing the point.

This has been said before, and it is worth repeating: there is no such thing as “natural disaster.” At its core, a disaster only occurs when we fail to properly avoid or prepare for a potential hazard that inflicts significant loss and damage that disrupts the normal living in an area.

All these years, the same words of wisdom remain true: “Prevention is better than cure.”

THE MANILA TIMES

[Opinion] Pricing catastrophe insurance

By: Herminia Jacinto

PRICING products is always a difficult task to do. Vehicles, goods and even food products can put together the cost of raw materials, labor and other items to arrive at the total cost. But pricing services and other intangible products is a big challenge.

How does one price the cost of an airline ticket, franchise fees, honoraria and other services? How do you price protection? How do insurance companies compute the price of a fire policy which will protect properties from basic dangers like fire, lightning and allied perils? The process is long and tedious. So many factors are considered like the structure and location of the property to be insured, wind conditions, loss experience and other relevant factors. An insurance-property-underwriter-friend of mine said that they wish they could be like fortune tellers who can predict when and where typhoons, floods and other calamities will happen.

The Philippine insurance industry has existed for a very long time already and should be considered experts in pricing property and casualty insurance. But there is no such claim. Changes happen everyday, especially climate change. The Philippines is visited by about 15 typhoons every year and the number seems to be increasing. We have had the storm surges, the big typhoons which cause a lot of flooding in several places in the country. Earthquakes have occurred in several places in Mindanao, Quezon and even the Bicol provinces! Our weather experts have warned us about stronger ones so we can prepare just in case they indeed happen. We hope and pray though that we will be spared from what they call the "Big One."

The price of protection has increased tremendously all over the world and the supply has started to dwindle due to climate change. Our own government has recognized the importance of this issue and has created our own Climate Change Commission under the Office of the President. The commission is tasked with coming up with policies and measures to combat the disastrous effects of climate change. Among those identified are rising sea levels, extreme rainfall, coastal erosion, increasing frequency and severity of tropical cyclones, among others.

It is under this scenario by which the insurance industry has decided to form and implement the Philippine Insurance Catastrophe Insurance Facility (PCIF). The insurance industry and the regulator want to provide maximum protection for catastrophic perils like typhoons, floods and earthquakes, ideally for the entire

population of the country. This is the reason why the rates have to be reviewed to make them more risk-appropriate and sustainable. Minimum rates have to be imposed so competition in pricing will be controlled and acceptable to the world reinsurance market. Considering the risks and the frequency of their occurrence, reinsurance is not going to be cheap.

Referring now to House Resolution 632 introduced by Rep. Wilbert T. Lee in the 19th Congress which directs the House committee concerned "to conduct an inquiry, in aid of legislation, into the abrupt, unreasonable and untimely increase of catastrophe insurance premium rates,"... (italics mine). It is not fair to accuse the Insurance Commission, the PCIF, and the insurance industry in general that this regulation is abrupt and unreasonable. The industry association, the Philippine Insurers and Reinsurers Association, has conducted a long and serious review and study of these rates with the assistance of experts in the actuarial field and global reinsurers. Understandably, consultations with consumer groups and the insuring public are difficult because of the technical issues involved. Insurance pricing cannot be compared to pricing of goods like sugar, onions and agricultural products.

We hope there will be another hearing that will be scheduled by Congress with experts on catastrophe risks who will be invited. We also suggest that representatives from the Climate Change Commission and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources be invited to provide the data based on their research findings and experience. This will be a good opportunity for our lawmakers to appreciate the role of insurance in protecting our people and their properties.

=END=