



NEWS ROUNDUP

27 MARCH 2024 [08:00 am]

- Planting trees in wrong places heats the planet: study
- New report says climate indices broke marks in '23
- Warm, humid weather to prevail
- This year's cherry blossom peak bloom was a warning sign
- Philippines to face more cyclones in 2024 with La Niña's return
- Philippines joins biggest case vs climate change, tells court 'polluters must pay'

CCC IN THE NEWS:

- NAP 'Critical Enabler' To Achieve Global Climate Resilience Goals

FRANCE 24

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By: Arlie O. Calalo

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NATIONAL GEOGRAPHICS

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By: Ayurella Horn-Muller

A 1,200-year record of cherry blossoms shows our current climate is historically unprecedented

PHILIPPINE STAR

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By: Gaea Katreena Cabico

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PAGEONE

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Information and Knowledge Management Division

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Paris (AFP) – Planting trees in the wrong places can actually contribute to global warming, scientists said on Tuesday, but a new map identifies the best locations to regrow forests and cool the planet.

Trees soak up carbon dioxide and restoring areas of degraded woodlands or planting saplings to boost forest cover is one tool in the fight against climate change.

But in some cases, more trees means less sunlight is reflected back from the earth's surface and more heat is absorbed by the planet, according to a study in the journal *Nature Communications*.

"There are some places where putting trees back leads to net climate negative outcomes," Susan Cook-Patton, one of the study's co-authors, told AFP.

Scientists had already understood that restoring tree cover led to changes in albedo -- the amount of solar radiation bounced back off the planet's surface -- but didn't have the tools to account for it, she said.

Using new maps, researchers were able to consider, for the first time, the cooling effect from trees and the warming caused by decreased albedo.

They found that projects that didn't factor albedo into the equation overestimated the climate benefit of additional trees by between 20 to 80 percent.

But the maps also provide the tools to help policymakers identify where best to funnel scarce resources for maximum climate impact, said Cook-Patton, senior forest restoration scientist at The Nature Conservancy.

"There's also lots of places still where restoring tree cover is a great idea for climate change. We're just trying to help people find those spots," she said.

Return on investment

Albedo is highest in the frozen areas of the world, and mirror-like clean snow and ice with high levels of albedo reflect up to 90 percent of the sun's energy.

It is one of Earth's major cooling agents, along with lands and oceans that absorb excess heat and planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions.

Many countries have promised to plant billions of trees as a bulwark against global warming but not all efforts deliver for the planet equally, this study showed.

Moist, tropical environments like the Amazon and Congo Basin boasted high carbon storage and low changes in albedo, making them ideal locations for restoring forest cover.

The opposite was true in temperate grasslands and savanna, Cook-Patton said.

Even projects in the best locations were probably delivering 20 percent less cooling than estimated when changes to albedo were taken into account, she said.

But she stressed that restoring forests delivered undeniable benefits for people and the planet, such as supporting ecosystems and providing clean air and water, among many.

"We really don't want our work to be a critique of the movement writ large," she said.

"(But) we can't put trees everywhere. We don't have enough money or time or resources or people or seedlings.

"And so it's really about making the most of limited investments and getting the greatest climate return per hectare of investment," she added.

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Records were once again broken for greenhouse gas levels, surface temperatures, ocean heat and acidification, sea level rise, ice cover and glacier retreat, a new global report issued by the UN weather agency (WMO) last week showed.

Heatwaves, floods, droughts, wildfires and rapidly intensifying tropical cyclones caused misery and mayhem, upending everyday life for millions and inflicting many billions of dollars in economic losses, according to the WMO State of the Global Climate 2023 report.

“Sirens are blaring across all major indicators... Some records aren’t just chart-topping, they’re chart-busting. And changes are speeding up,” said UN Secretary-General António Guterres in a video message for the launch.

Based on data from multiple agencies, the study confirmed that 2023 was the warmest year on record, with the global average near-surface temperature at 1.45°C above the pre-industrial baseline. It crowned the warmest 10-year period on record.

“The scientific knowledge about climate change has existed for more than five decades, and yet we missed an entire generation of opportunity,” WMO Secretary-General Celeste Saulo said presenting the report to the media in Geneva. She urged the climate change response to be governed by the “welfare of future generations, but not the short-term economic interests.”

“As Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organization, I am now sounding the red alert about the state of the global climate,” she said.

However, climate change is about much more than air temperatures, the WMO experts explain. The unprecedented ocean warmth and sea level rise, glacier retreat and Antarctic sea ice loss are also part of the grim picture.

On an average day in 2023, nearly one third of the ocean surface was gripped by a marine heatwave, harming vital ecosystems and food systems, the report found.

The glaciers observed suffered the largest loss of ice on record—since 1950—with extreme melt in both western North America and Europe, according to preliminary data.

Alpine ice caps experienced an extreme melting season, for instance, with those in Switzerland losing around 10 percent of their remaining volume in the past two years.

The Antarctic sea ice loss was by far the lowest on record—at one million square kilometers below the previous record year—equivalent to the size of France and Germany combined.

Observed concentrations of the three main greenhouse gases—carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide—reached record levels in 2022 and continued increase in 2023, preliminary data shows.

According to the report, weather and climate extremes are either the root cause or serious aggravating factors that in 2023 triggered displacement, food insecurity, biodiversity loss, health issues and more.

The report, for example, cites figures that the number of people who are acutely food insecure worldwide has more than doubled, from 149 million before the COVID-19 pandemic to 333 million in 2023 in 78 countries monitored by the World Food Program (WFP).

“The climate crisis is the defining challenge that humanity faces. It is closely intertwined with the inequality crisis—as witnessed by growing food insecurity and population displacement, and biodiversity loss,” said Ms. Saulo.

A glimmer of hope

The WMO report not only raises alarm but also offers reasons for optimism. In 2023, renewable capacity additions soared by almost 50 per cent, totaling 510 gigawatts (GW)—the highest observed rate in two decades.

The surge in renewable energy generation, primarily fueled by solar radiation, wind and the water cycle, has positioned it as a leading force in climate action for achieving decarbonization goals.

Effective multi-hazard early warning systems are crucial for mitigating the impact of disasters. The Early Warnings for All initiative aims to ensure universal protection through early warning systems by 2027.

Since the adoption of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, there has been an increase in the development and implementation of local disaster risk reduction strategies.

From 2021 to 2022, global climate-related finance flows nearly doubled compared to 2019-2020 levels, reaching nearly \$1.3 trillion.

However, this amounts to only about one percent of global GDP, underscoring a significant financing gap. To achieve the objectives of a 1.5°C pathway, annual climate finance investments must increase more than sixfold, reaching almost \$9 trillion by 2030, with an additional \$10 trillion needed by 2050.

Cost of inaction

The cost of inaction is staggering, the report warns. Between 2025 and 2100, it may reach \$1,266 trillion, representing the difference in losses between a business-as-usual scenario and a 1.5° C pathway. Noting that this figure is likely a significant underestimate, the UN weather experts call for immediate climate action.

The report is launched ahead of the Copenhagen Climate Ministerial meeting, where climate leaders and ministers from around the world will gather for the first time since COP28 in Dubai to push for accelerated climate action, including delivering an ambitious agreement on financing at COP29 in Baku later this year—to turn national plans into action.

MANILA TIMES

Warm, humid weather to prevail

By: Arlie O. Calalo

MANILA, Philippines: The entire country will have warm and humid weather caused by the easterlies, the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (Pagasa) said Tuesday.

Forecaster Benison Estareja said the easterlies, winds coming from the east that pass through the Pacific Ocean and carry warm and humid weather, are particularly affecting the Bicol region, Northern Samar, Samar, Eastern Samar and Quezon.

Metro Manila residents warned vs scorching heat

"It would be another generally fair weather in most parts of the country but we could expect scattered rain showers and thunderstorms especially in the afternoon or at night in some areas," Estareja said.

Pagasa said in its 5 a.m. advisory that temperatures will soar until Easter Sunday due to the easterlies.

It added that the easterlies, along with localized thunderstorms, will bring partly cloudy to overcast skies with isolated downpours or thunderstorms in Metro Manila and the rest of the country.

PHILIPPINE STAR

[Philippines to face more cyclones in 2024 with La Niña's return](#)

By: Gaea Katreena Cabico

MANILA, Philippines — The Philippines is likely to experience more tropical cyclones in 2024 than last year due to the potential return of La Niña, the state weather bureau PAGASA said on Tuesday.

PAGASA projected 13 to 16 cyclones this year, marking an increase from 11 storms in 2023, an El Niño year. However, the figures are still below the average of 19 to 20 storms the country typically sees annually.

Ana Liza Solis, PAGASA's climate monitoring chief, said there are usually more cyclones during La Niña because of warmer ocean temperatures. There is a 62% chance that La Niña will develop during June to August.

"Since the warming of the ocean temperature is closer to us, it is possible that tropical cyclones may develop closer to our seas," Solis said partly in Filipino.

"We will experience the possible effects of La Niña during the last quarter of the year," she added.

La Niña brings stronger trade winds, pushing warm surface water in the western Pacific, where the Philippines is located, and drawing up cool water in the eastern Pacific. Warm water creates more rain.

Science Secretary Renato Solidum noted that since warm water is closer to the Philippines during La Niña, cyclones could reach land faster.

"It means the lead time is shorter. For cyclones closer to land, there is less time to prepare," he said in Filipino.

Early this March, PAGASA issued a La Niña Watch. Historically, pre-developing La Niña events are characterized by below-normal rainfall. The weather bureau said this suggests a possible slight delay in the onset of the rainy season "likely with the confirmed effects of the ongoing El Niño."

El Niño, the climate pattern associated with extreme heat and drought, is gradually weakening, but its effects will persist in the coming months.

Solidum said drought will affect 48 provinces, while dry spells will impact 24 provinces by April. By May, 54 provinces will experience drought and 10 will face dry spells.

The number of drought-stricken provinces will decrease over the next months: 25 by June, 23 by July, and 10 by August.

RAPPLER

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By: Lian Buan

MANILA, Philippines – The Philippine government stands with the Pacific island nations in their bid to get the world court's opinion that would provide a legal framework to compel the biggest polluters to pay those suffering from the adverse effects of climate change.

“Philippines proffers that prompt reliefs should be given and made available to affected States and peoples so as to immediately cease or mitigate any environmental damage,” the Philippine government wrote in its 45-page submission, filed by the Office of the Solicitor General to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague on Thursday, March 21.

Last week was the deadline of the ICJ, or the United Nations (UN) court also known as the world court, for UN member states to file their submissions, or make their positions known about the current request for an advisory opinion.

Lee-Anne Sackett, the legal manager of the Vanuatu Climate Diplomacy Program, said on Friday, March 22, during a panel at The Hague, that this is “the biggest case in history in terms of participation in the ICJ.”

Vanuatu initiated the resolution, which the UN General Assembly later adopted, to request the ICJ for an advisory opinion. Essentially, the resolution wanted the ICJ to answer these questions:

1. What are the obligation of States to protect climate systems?
2. What are the legal consequences for States that have caused significant harm to the climate system through their acts or omissions?

Climate change treaties have been around since at least the 1997 Kyoto protocol, but the years after have been filled with frustration on the lack of meaningful results that came out of it. This led the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) to say in 2023 that “there is a rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a liveable and sustainable future for all.”

The latest high-level negotiations in the Conference of Parties (COP) are focusing on the loss and damage fund, a mechanism by which polluter states must pay up.

“[The loss and damage fund] is still more or less an empty bucket, there's no recognized obligation on States to pay into that fund,” said Margaretha Wewerinke-Singh, Vanuatu's counsel to the ICJ, during Friday's panel at The Hague.

The desperation has led to Vanuatu's effort, an initiative that was started by the youth group Pacific Islands Students Fighting Climate Change (PISFCC), to bring this case to court.

The hope, foremost, is that ICJ agrees to issue an advisory opinion, which the Philippines supports. But meaningfully, that the ICJ's opinion supports the stance that States who cause significant harm to climate systems must be held accountable.

Philippines invoked the 'polluters must pay' principle, and said "while the principle is not explicitly referred to in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Kyoto Protocol, and the Paris Agreement, many of the provisions and obligations stated therein point to the evidence that said principle is being applied."

"When a State – by itself or through State actors or other entities whose actions or omissions may be attributable to the State – commits acts or omissions that do not faithfully conform to its international obligations, the same constitute a breach of an obligation and, under international law, is an internationally wrongful act," said the Philippines team, led by Solicitor General Menardo Guevarra, with inputs from the University of the Philippines (UP) Institute of International Legal Studies.

"[This] marks the welcomed return of the country in the proceedings of the ICJ, the last one having been decades ago," said Philippine Ambassador to the Netherlands J. Eduardo Malaya, who personally filed the submission at the Hague with OSG solicitors.

Who will block this

Because UN member states are authorized to forward their submissions, advocates are now watching which countries will block this accountability mechanism.

For example during the negotiations to adopt Vanuatu's resolution to go to the ICJ, United States was among the few countries which expressed that a judicial process was not "the most conducive to supporting diplomatic processes."

The US is a key Philippine ally. But in this regard, the Philippines disagreed that climate change is a purely a diplomatic issue that one can only resolve through political means.

"Regardless of the political aspects and dimensions of climate change, this Court cannot refuse to admit the legal character of a question and has the duty to discharge an essentially judicial task, which pertains to the determination of the obligations of States as imposed upon them and the consequences of their acts or omissions as sanctioned by international law," said the Philippines.

Alyn Ware, who was a campaigner during the nuclear weapons advisory opinion process at the ICJ, said that when the ICJ decides to hold an oral hearing, or when the time comes that states can respond to the submission of other states, those who support a legal mechanism must be ready to "cut into the 'yes-but' arguments."

“You have governments who say ‘oh yes we agree, we have to cut emissions, but we can’t do it too fast, it will destroy our economy, we will lose our jobs, there’d be many other excuses,” said Ware.

“We have to demonstrate that green economies are job creators, green economies are good for the economy, they can stimulate economic development,” Ware added.

Outlook

Experts predict that if the ICJ decides an oral hearing, it will be by the end of this year or next year. The best case scenario is the ICJ issuing an advisory opinion that States can be legally held accountable for their acts or omissions that destroy climate system.

The worst case scenario is the ICJ decides it will not issue the opinion at all, or if the opinion merely refers to existing treaties.

“[That] doesn’t add anything, so then you shall have gone through all of this processes to be left with empty hands, that’s really completely useless, [but] that’s quite an extreme scenario,” said Singh.

“[That] would not only be disappointing for the purpose of climate justice, but it would be quite disastrous for international law and institutions because it would undermine the ability of the court...to address a problem of civilizational proportion,” said Singh.

Ware believes that the ICJ’s decision would not be that extreme, saying that “the court could only be going from moderate to fantastic, how close we get to the fantastic is what we’re looking at.”

ICJ’s advisory opinions have been criticized before as not having significantly changed things. That’s generally the main criticism of international law – when its orders are not enforced by countries who claim sovereignty, or just by countries who are powerful enough to ignore orders, and opinions.

The Philippines said “nevertheless, the issuance of an advisory opinion is not without ‘moral consequences which are inherent in the dignity of the organ delivering the opinion, or even of its legal consequences’.”

Ware advised stakeholders to, as early as now, assume the best case scenario and “think about how are we going to implement the decision that will come out.”

The Philippines proposed a version of the Writ of Kalikasan. The writ, which was a unique innovation for Philippine law and a first of its kind in the world, is a legal instrument that compels actors to fulfill a duty for the environment. Locally, it can also come in the form of protection orders that could stop projects that are seen to destroy environment.

Victims of climate change

The case is a storybook narrative of bringing people – the victims – to the court, as states and other groups can submit testimonies from those whose lives have been impacted by the adverse effects of climate change.

The Philippines told the court it had incurred P497.45 billion in damages from 2012 to 2022 “due to natural extreme events and major disasters.”

In the island nations, “communities that had to relocate because of sea level rise [had] tendencies that they will lose their identity because in the Pacific, we are connected to our environment, to our land,” said Ilan Kiloe, the political and legal adviser of the Melanesian Spearhead Group.

Sackett said getting testimonies from Vanuatu communities have been a challenge because of logistics and connectivity.

Currently, there are requests for advisory opinions from other bodies, namely the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS), expected to touch on the human rights component and the marine environment aspect of climate change.

The hope is to get good opinions from the two bodies, to lay the ground for the ICJ.

“If the advisory opinion comes out to be positive, it will assist the COP negotiations moving forward,” said Kiloe.

“The road will still be longer...I’m sure there are going to be testing moments, but it’s really worthwhile,” said Cristelle Pratt, assistant secretary general of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States (OACPS). – Rappler.com

CCC IN THE NEWS

PAGEONE

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Following its 25th meeting in Bonn, Germany on March 12-15, the Adaptation Committee of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) brought together countries and stakeholders in the Adaptation Forum 2024 to address opportunities for action and collaboration across the NAP process, promoting solutions towards achieving the global goal on adaptation.

As a member of the Adaptation Committee, Secretary Robert E.A. Borje of the Philippines' Climate Change Commission (CCC) served as facilitator and rapporteur on the sessions regarding impact, vulnerability and risk assessment for NAPs, and adaptation planning.

Borje recognized the urgent need for accelerated support in terms of finance, capacity, and technology, and emphasized enhanced collaboration and cooperation to enable developing countries and particularly vulnerable nations to formulate and implement their NAPs.

"National Adaptation Plans are critical baselines for individual and collective efforts of Parties. Towards the achievement of the global goal on adaptation and the new global climate resilience objectives, we must drive developing nations towards NAP formulation and implementation. In this case, support for the whole NAP process must be provided, with least to no conditionalities, and in the most urgent manner," Borje said.

The NAP process includes risk assessment, planning and development, implementation, and monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning.

According to the NAP Central, 53 developing countries have submitted their NAPs, which accounts for only 25 percent of all developing country Parties under the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement.

The Philippines is in the course of finalizing its first NAP, developed based on a whole-of-nation and whole-of-society approach, in collaboration with bilateral partners,

government agencies and institutions, civil society and non-government organizations, private sector, and other stakeholders.

Primary challenges in NAP formulation are data availability and accessibility, data quality and quantity, and local capacity to analyze these towards determination of national priorities and strategies.

“We must make data and information more available and accessible, and ensure that developing nations are provided with the capacity to analyze data to determine fit-for-purpose adaptation measures. Support must be provided to enable developing nations to formulate NAPs with least domestic budget and resource implication as possible,” Borje said.

“Developed states must exert more and ramp up cooperation with and assistance for developing states to address key data challenges. In this regard, Annex 1 Parties must ensure that Means of Implementation are provided urgently,” he added.

While there are support windows such as through the Green Climate Fund (GCF), Adaptation Fund, and UN4NAPs, among others, participants said accessing these remains a challenge due to stringent procedures.

Consistent with the directives of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., the Philippines actively participates in international climate change negotiation process, and has been calling for simplified and streamlined processes in accessing means of implementation and support, and need to further strengthen collaboration, such as through south-south, north-south, and triangular cooperation for both climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Under the leadership of the President, and consistent with the Philippine Development Plan, the CCC, in coordination with relevant agencies and stakeholders, is finalizing the Philippines’ first NAP, outlining country’s priorities and strategies towards national climate resilience.

The Adaptation Forum 2024 held in Bonn will be followed by the NAP Expo in Dhaka, Bangladesh where a series of knowledge-sharing activities and experts training on adaptation planning and implementation will take place. (PNA)

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