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AL JAZEERA

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DAILY TRIBUNE

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GULF TIMES

[Opinion] Preparing for a future of extreme heat waves
By: Renzo R. Guinto

People across Asia have eagerly awaited the end of heat-wave season, which now appears to be drawing to a close. In my home country, the Philippines, the first typhoon of the year arrived in late May, lowering temperatures that had climbed to nearly 50° Celsius (122° Fahrenheit). Over the previous few months, the record-breaking heat led to school closures, a spike in emergency-room visits, reduced productivity, and a return to remote work.

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By: Marita Moaje

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RAPPLER

Marcos Year 2: Status of the administration's promises, progress, and backlogs

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THE MANILA TIMES

Parametric insurance: A strategic tool for disaster management
By: Ludwig Federigan

The Philippines has experienced the top 10 costliest typhoons in the past 15 years, with two super typhoons (STs) occurring just eight years apart: "Haiyan" (2013), also known as "Yolanda," and "Rai" (2021), also known as "Odette." Both were Category 5 typhoons with sustained winds of 252 kilometers per hour or higher, causing significant damage in the Visayas and Mindanao regions. The destruction of homes, infrastructure and agriculture resulting from these typhoons amounted to P95.5 billion (Haiyan) and P51.8 billion (Rai).

CCC IN THE NEWS:

DAILY TRIBUNE

CCC urges nature-based solutions in disaster risk prevention, reduction and management

The Climate Change Commission (CCC) underscored the importance of nature-based solutions (NbS) in disaster risk prevention, reduction and management to prepare for extreme weather events brought by climate change and build a climate-resilient country.

What makes tidal forests so important?
by: Secretary Robert EA Borje

Tidal forests, more commonly known as mangrove forests, have perhaps one of the most peculiar plants in the world. Mangroves' unique ability to live in muddy and brackish water gives them a very special and distinct identity among all plants on our planet. Beyond their uniqueness, however, mangroves offer more than what meets the eye. They form vital ecosystems that provide a plethora of services, not just only to the environment, but also to people. Unfortunately, these ecosystems are at risk due to human and natural causes, including climate change.

Information and Knowledge Management Division

AL JAZEERA

In the Andes, glaciers are shrinking fast, endangering millions

On a clear day, Chile's towering 5,400-metre (17,700-foot) El Plomo mountain can be seen from the capital, Santiago. The glacier-capped Andean peak has been climbed and revered for centuries, with the Incas carrying out human sacrifices at the summit.

The route to the top is still the same path paved by the Incas, with archaeological remnants scattered along the way. An Incan mummy was found near the summit in 1954, perfectly preserved due to the mountain's dry and cold conditions.

Now the mountain is crumbling. Rising global temperatures due to climate change have led the glacier to retreat and the permafrost to melt. New lagoons have formed and ruptured, landslides have injured climbers and massive sinkholes have opened up, breaking up the ancient path to the summit.

"Every year things are changing more. Every year there's more sadness," said Francisco Gallardo, a 60-year-old muleteer who has worked on the mountain since he was 14, at the Federacion base camp, about 1,300m (4,265ft) below the summit.

Gallardo said his family has been working at El Plomo for generations, but he thinks they have about a decade left before they are forced to move.

"We're going have to go somewhere else, see what we can do, maybe head south," he said.

Just a few years ago, the last push to the summit required a glacier traverse. Now, the final ascent is a rocky hillside. Gallardo said mules used to be able to reach another camp about 500m (1,640ft) further up, and he remembers mules feasting on grass around the base camp.

"The changes we're seeing are unprecedented in recent human history," said Pablo Wainstein, a civil engineer who has studied Andean and Arctic glaciers and permafrost for more than two decades.

The Andes present different types of frozen formations, including covered and uncovered glaciers as well as rock glaciers, with the latter composed of a mix of debris and ground ice. Covered glaciers react more slowly to changes in climate than uncovered glaciers where the ice is exposed.

At high altitudes, the mountains may also have a layer of permafrost, defined as ground with temperatures below freezing for more than two years. Where ice is present in permafrost, it may bond soil, gravel and sand together.

“If permafrost degrades, it’s not ‘cementing’ anymore the ground and it leads to more rockfalls in mountainous terrain,” Wainstein said, adding that permafrost change is harder to study since it involves the thermal state of the ground and is not visible on the surface.

The Andes are home to approximately 99 percent of the world’s tropical glaciers, which are more susceptible to climate change because they’re consistently near or at freezing point. Data from the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) shows global temperatures have increased 0.06 Celsius (0.11 degrees Fahrenheit) per decade since 1850, accelerating to 0.20 C (0.36 F) per decade since 1982.

The Andes are an essential part of the region’s water cycle. The mountains store water as snow and ice during the winter, and it slowly melts during warmer months. They supply millions across the region with water, not only for drinking but also for agriculture, hydroelectricity and mining.

Glacial retreat has led to acidic rocks being exposed for the first time in centuries, leading meltwater to acidify and get contaminated with heavy metals that then leach into other water supplies in the region, which are already dwindling.

Erratic and heavy rainfall has degraded the ecosystems, making them more susceptible to erosion, landslides and severe floods.

Temperatures are rising faster at higher altitudes, with one multinational study published in the International Journal of Applied Earth Observation and Geoinformation showing that daytime winter surface temperatures in the Andes rose by 0.50 C (0.9 F) per decade since 2000 at an elevation of 1,000 to 1,500m (3,280 to 4,900ft), but by 1.7C (3.06F) above 5,000m (16,400ft).

Octavio Salazar made his first ascent of the season of Peru’s Yanapaccha mountain in early May. “It shouldn’t be raining,” he said at base camp. At this time of year, rains would normally have passed; and at an altitude of 5,000m (16,400 ft), any precipitation should be snow.

Salazar and his brother, Eloy, are Indigenous Quechua brothers who have spent decades climbing mountains in Peru’s Cordillera Blanca, the largest glacier-covered area in the tropics and home to multiple 6,000m (19,685ft) peaks, including the country’s tallest mountain.

“We feel like the climate has had such drastic changes that they often put everything you knew in doubt,” said Edson Ramirez, a park ranger and risk assessor for the Huascaran National Park, which comprises 90 percent of the Cordillera Blanca.

“Having raindrops at 5,000 metres [16,400ft] isn’t common or natural. It’s an indicator that pressure, temperature are completely altered,” Ramirez said.

Rain also means that there’s no new snowpack to replace glacier mass as it slowly moves down the mountain.

“When there’s no more glacier to cover up crevasses, it becomes a difficult maze,” Ramirez said.

“Anything humans do has some level of risk, but we’re not going to stop enjoying our mountains because of that,” said Cristian Ramirez, the head of Chile’s mountain rescue unit in Santiago.

“The Andes are the backbone of this territory,” he said. “In some way, they modulate our life because they collect ice, they collect water and we use that water to live. So mountains are life and we’re privileged to have this mountain range here.”

DAILY TRIBUNE

Beneath the tides and behind timbers: Marvels of Philippine mangroves

Mangroves provide a wide variety of services, not just to the environment, but also to people. Their submerged roots serve as a haven for a plethora of marine animals. Likewise, their trunks, leaves and branches provide a home for tree-dwelling mammals, reptiles, amphibians and birds. Furthermore, the closely knit roots of mangroves prevent coastal soil erosion just as their branches and leaves form a natural wind-barrier that protects coastal communities from strong gusts of winds, especially during storms.

Apart from their capacity as natural barriers and biodiversity hubs, the most impeccable feature of mangroves is their ability to capture and store carbon. Like most plants, mangroves capture carbon from the atmosphere. What makes them special, however, is the fact that the sediments where they are usually located also have the capacity to act as carbon sinks. This makes mangroves effective in carbon sequestration, making them highly valuable assets in climate change mitigation.

In the Philippines, mangroves are recognized as highly protected nature-based solutions to climate change. This prompted the development of several mechanisms aimed at the protection, preservation and rehabilitation of Philippine mangrove systems, which includes legislations and key documents.

Initial statistics estimate that the Philippines had 450,000 hectares of mangrove forests in 1920. By 1990, this decreased to 317,500 hectares and in most recent statistics it decreased further to 311,400 hectares.

GULF TIMES

[Opinion] Preparing for a future of extreme heat waves

By: Renzo R. Guinto

People across Asia have eagerly awaited the end of heat-wave season, which now appears to be drawing to a close. In my home country, the Philippines, the first typhoon of the year arrived in late May, lowering temperatures that had climbed to nearly 50° Celsius (122° Fahrenheit). Over the previous few months, the record-breaking heat led to school closures, a spike in emergency-room visits, reduced productivity, and a return to remote work.

While the public-health effects and economic impact of extreme heat waves can be difficult to measure, the speed at which they are forgotten is alarming. This mirrors the cycle of panic and neglect that often follows pandemics: societies forget the lessons of past health crises and are caught unprepared when the next one arrives.

Just as we must improve pandemic preparedness, we must mitigate the health risks posed by life-threatening temperatures. As climate change accelerates, heat waves are expected to become increasingly frequent and intense, especially in Asia.

To survive this “new normal,” we cannot rely on inadequate public-health guidelines like drinking more water and staying in air-conditioned spaces, as if the vast majority of the world’s population has access to air conditioning or even clean water. Nor is it acceptable to suggest that women should cope with extreme heat by not wearing underwear, as a former Philippine health minister recently suggested.

Instead, governments must adopt a more proactive approach and accelerate efforts to build heat resilience. By the time the next historic heat wave hits, all countries should have a national plan to address it, along with adaptation measures for local communities. In fact, every aspect of policymaking should be viewed through the lens of resilience. Beyond the health sector, the top priorities should be housing, transportation, and water – which are all targets under the Sustainable Development Goals.

Housing should come first. Many of Asia’s most vulnerable people live in poorly ventilated public housing or densely populated slums. Globally, an estimated 1.6bn people suffer from inadequate living conditions. Given that such surveys do not usually account for ventilation, this could well be an underestimate.

There are more viable options for adaptation than advising poor people to live in air-conditioned buildings. In addition to being costly, air conditioners consume vast amounts of electricity, with researchers estimating that they are responsible for 3.9% of

global greenhouse-gas emissions. Instead of burning more fossil fuels to meet this increased energy demand, policymakers must reimagine urban development to protect both the planet and public health. For example, some countries in Asia, including Indonesia and Singapore, have begun using low-cost “cool roof” paint to lower indoor temperatures without air conditioners.

Transportation is another heat-sensitive sector. Whether riding in overcrowded buses or waiting for extended periods on sweltering train platforms, commuters in low- and middle-income countries are often exposed to extreme temperatures. Investing in sustainable transportation systems that also provide comfort during heat waves is crucial to achieving vital climate and public-health goals.

To build heat resilience, governments must also address the global water crisis. Although hydration is crucial for protection against extreme heat, nearly one-third of the world’s population does not have access to safe drinking water. Single-use plastic water bottles are not the answer; like air conditioning, they are costly, carbon-intensive, and polluting.

Heat-preparedness programmes must focus on highly vulnerable groups, such as farmers and fisherfolk, construction and factory workers, the elderly, and people with comorbidities. This effort must also be extended to prisoners, detained migrants, and psychiatric patients, all of whom are often confined to extremely hot, cramped spaces.

Like storm and pandemic-response protocols, heat preparedness must be embedded in health policies. To this end, Asian countries’ disease-surveillance systems should be updated to account for heat-related illnesses before the region endures another historic heat wave. Maintaining adequate supplies of medical equipment, from basic items like intravenous fluids to cooling vests, is also crucial.

Moreover, the potential effects of extreme heat must be integrated into the education and training of emergency doctors, community-health workers, and primary-care providers, who are often the first point of contact for underprivileged patients. Regrettably, the clinical management of heat-related illnesses like heatstroke was mentioned only in passing when I was a medical student.

Lastly, researchers must focus not only on the epidemiology of heat, but also the effectiveness of our policies and interventions. The National University of Singapore, for example, launched a research centre dedicated to heat resilience in 2023; my institute will complement this with a new initiative on planetary health that will help health systems and communities across Asia build climate resilience.

With global temperatures rising at an alarming rate, we have no choice but to adapt to a warmer world. At the same time, accelerating decarbonisation could enable us to reduce the frequency and intensity of extreme heat waves. By pressuring governments and corporations to stop burning fossil fuels, we can build true heat resilience and improve planetary health.

PHILIPPINE NEWS AGENCY

PH to host Asia-Pacific conference on disaster risk reduction in Oct.

By: Marita Moaje

The Philippine government is now gearing up for the country's hosting of the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (APMCDRR) this October.

In a press release, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) said Friday that registration for the October 14-18 conference at the Philippine International Convention Center in Pasay City is now open.

The Philippines' hosting of the APMCDRR is in collaboration with the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR).

"It is a critical opportunity for the Philippines and the Asia-Pacific region to advance efforts to build resilient communities," the release said.

More than 3,000 high-level international and local delegates are expected to attend the conference.

The DENR said the event will facilitate the exchange of practical solutions, promote inclusive disaster risk governance, and enhance resilience across Asia and the Pacific.

The conference, themed "Surge to 2030: Enhancing Ambition in Asia-Pacific to Accelerate Disaster Risk Reduction," underscores the urgent need to review current risk reduction efforts, share innovative solutions, and adjust policies and actions to accelerate disaster risk reduction in the face of climate change and other uncertainties.

Research says climate change making days slightly longer

Climate change is causing Earth's days to lengthen slightly, according to research published recently in the journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

As ice sheets melt at the Earth's poles, the redistribution of mass, leading to sea-level rise, is accelerating the length of the day at an unprecedented rate.

Researchers from the Jet Propulsion Laboratory and ETH Zurich found that the length of day increased by approximately 0.3 to 1.0 milliseconds per century due to climate change throughout the 20th century.

However, since 2000, this rate has sharply risen to 1.33 milliseconds per century.

RAPPLER

Marcos Year 2: Status of the administration's promises, progress, and backlogs

Two years since his election, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has yet to deliver on a number of promises and plans he made to woo voters, from lowering rice prices to a fostering genuine national unity.

As the President delivers his 3rd State of the Nation Address on Monday, July 22, Rappler's community partners — the #FactsFirstPH, #AtinAngPilipinas, and #CourageON: No Lockdown on Rights coalitions — collaborated to identify compile the promises made by Marcos and his administration, and key issues in their sectors.

Bookmark this list to track the status of these promises and plans going into the President's third year in office.

Addressing housing backlog

In 2022, the Department of Human Settlements and Urban Development (DHSUD) aimed to build 1 million houses per year or 6 million housing units by 2028. In 2024, the government slashed the goal to 3 million houses by the end of the Marcos presidency, citing funding concerns.

Marcos requested Pag-IBIG to make home loans more accessible. DHSUD Secretary Jose Rizalino "Jerry" Acuzar mentioned that P20.17 billion was approved to aid the Pambansang Pabahay Para sa Pilipino (4PH) program for the construction of 17,791 houses.

In June, DHSUD sought for funding guarantees for the project and to certify as urgent the bill seeking to institutionalize the 4PH program.

For fiscal year 2024, the General Appropriations Act (GAA) allocated P750.81 million for the 4PH interest subsidy. Senate bills 2409 and 2108 by Senators JV Ejercito and Christopher Lawrence Go, respectively, seek to institutionalize the 4PH program. Both bills are pending at the committee level.

Adhering to climate agreements

The Marcos administration allocated over P541 million from the People's Survival Fund for six new climate adaptation initiatives in 2024.

In February, President Marcos facilitated a deal with the Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI) for the Philippines to receive international aid for climate adaptation. On July 9, the country was selected to host the board of the Loss and Damage Fund, a global fund that will help vulnerable nations deal with the adverse effects of climate change.

The Department of Energy (DOE) reported that, as of April, it was on track to add 1,984.775 megawatts of solar energy to the nation's grid this year.

Boosting agriculture

According to the United States' Department of Agriculture January 2024 Rice Outlook, the Philippines is projected to overtake China as the world's top rice importer.

Projects of the Philippines' Department of Agriculture intended to boost the farming sector include the introduction of D4AgPH, an online platform for optimizing agriculture practices, and rice irrigation strategies called "Alternate Wetting and Drying" and "Quick Turn Around" to help farmers conserve water for continuous crop production during El Niño.

In the first quarter of 2024, crop production volume reached 25.07 million metric tons from 23.89 million metric tons in the same period of 2023. This increase was driven by the 17.2% increase in sugarcane production.

Bringing in tourism and investments

Based on government figures, 5.45 million international visitors arrived in the Philippines in 2023, significantly surpassing the 4.8 million visitors targeted by the Department of Tourism (DOT). They brought in P480 billion.

The country's tourism receipts from January 1 to March 31, 2024, added up to around P157.62 billion, which is an estimated 120.70% recovery rate from the revenue gained from the same period in 2019.

As of April 24, 2024, a total of 2,010,522 international visitors entered the country, 15.11% higher than the international arrivals recorded in the same period last year.

The President's many foreign trips brought in a reported P4 trillion in investments to the country, as of December 2023, according to the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI). However, about a third of this money was still in the planning stage, the department said at the time. In February, Malacañang said that $14 billion of these investments had been "actualized."

Clark International Airport remains underutilized.

Bringing medical services to the people

The national government has allotted P22.98 billion to improve health facilities in 2024.

In June, Health Secretary Ted Herbosa and the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth) board approved the increase of Konsulta Package's financial assistance for the dialysis of diabetic patients from P2,600 to P4,000 per treatment.

The increase still falls short of PhilHealth's initial aim of providing P5,200 per dialysis session.

Complying with tax laws

The Department of Finance (DOF) is on track to meet its three medium-term fiscal framework (MTFF) goals:

Bring down the debt-to-gross domestic product (GDP) ratio to less than 60% by 2025
Reduce deficit-to-GDP ratio to 3% by 2028
Maintain investment in infrastructure at 5% to 6% of GDP annually
In September 2023, the Philippines' House of Representatives approved a bill seeking to reform the military and uniformed personnel pension system with the following improvements:

- New military members will contribute 9% of their salaries to their pension fund, and the government will contribute 12%.
- Guaranteed annual salary increase of 3% over 10 years
- Compulsory retirement age raised from 56 to 57 years, or as soon as military members accumulate 30 years of active service, whichever is later
- Countering disinformation

The Presidential Communication Office (PCO) launched a Media and Information Literacy (MIL) campaign on August 14, 2023.

The campaign features an MIL summit and a community campus caravan, but fact-checking is not part of its focus.

Based on recent update, the PCO met with New Zealand journalists to discuss the MIL campaign, the Philippine media landscape, and combating disinformation.

Ensuring a people-centric Pasig River rehabilitation program

According to Ilog Pasiglahin, the Inter-Agency Council for the Pasig River Urban Development (IAC-PRUD) or any related government agency has yet to hold a community consultation on the Pasig River rehabilitation project.

There is also no community member or local government unit representative in the IAC-PRUD to ensure that the Pasig River rehabilitation will be people-centric.

Aside from the garbage clean-ups and Pasig River Esplanade (PARES) phases 1 and 2 in Ermita and Intramuros, respectively, there are no other specific projects lined up as of yet for the river's improvement.

The master plan submitted by Housing Secretary Acuzar, who chairs the IAC-PRUD, has been approved by Marcos. Acuzar unveiled the plan in August 2023, months after the creation of the inter-agency council.

Expanding the Food Stamp Program

Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) Undersecretary Edu Punay said preparations for the full implementation of the Food Stamp Program (FSP) are underway after a successful six-month pilot implementation in several parts of the country.

Punay said FSP will be implemented in 10 regions and 21 provinces with an initial target of 300,000 families who were validated and registered in June.

Beneficiaries will use Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards to purchase select food commodities from eligible partner merchant stores.

Improving power supply

In April, Energy Secretary Raphael Lotilla described the country's electricity situation as a disaster after the national power grid successively went under red and yellow alerts.

Full electrification is estimated to require P72 billion in funding.

Meanwhile, the Mindanao-Visayas Interconnection and the Cebu-Negros Panay Link are aimed at improving power distribution and accessibility across regions, ensuring a more stable power supply.

Improving internet access nationwide

In April 2024, the Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT) launched the National Fiber Backbone (NFB) Phase 1 Project, which will expand the internet capacity of 14 provinces across Northern Luzon and Central Luzon.

During the Build Better Infrastructure Forum in New Clark City, Tarlac, last July 14, DICT Secretary Ivan John Uy said that the country now has an overall Internet penetration of 73.6% after their implementation of the Common Tower Policy.

The Broadband ng Masa Program, which establishes the national fiber backbone and middle-mile connectivity, and the Free Public Internet Access Program provide free, secure internet at 13,462 sites nationwide, according to Uy.

The Marcos administration is hopeful that a total of 9.8 million users can benefit from free internet services in 125,000 sites nationwide by 2028.

Improving the quality of education

The classroom shortage figures nationwide are at 165,444, Tara Rama, director III of the Department of Education (DepEd) Government Assistance and Subsidies Office, confirmed during a hearing by the Senate panel on basic education last March 20.

Students from Kinder to Grade 12 in Calabarzon, National Capital Region, BARMM, Central Luzon, and Central Visayas are among those most affected.

Meanwhile, the MATATAG Curriculum has been rolled out in 35 schools out of 47,678 schools in the Philippines. DepEd reported that 267,900 teachers and personnel had been trained for its implementation.

Senator Sherwin Gatchalian said this new curriculum is focused on improving both coverage of competencies and student confidence.

This year, Marcos ordered that skills development be integrated into the K-12 curriculum, and vowed to remain committed to providing free education in state universities and colleges.

Maintaining an independent foreign policy

In March, Marcos assured the public that the Philippines would maintain its independent foreign policy.

In the context of the West Philippine Sea dispute, he clarified that the Philippines will act according to its own interest, making foreign policy decisions that prioritize the wellbeing of the nation.

“We continue to chart an independent foreign policy in keeping with our constitutional mandate. We pursue [this] through international engagements that seek to strengthen existing alliances [and] build new partnerships with like-minded states,” Marcos told diplomatic corps in a vin d’honneur in Malacañang last June 12.

Protecting OFWs

The main office of the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO) moved to The Upper Class Towers along Quezon Avenue corner Scout Reyes in Quezon City for a more accessible location and to enhance bureaucratic efficiency.

The office offers the Pre-Departure Orientation Seminar (PDOS) for Filipino emigrants and the Guidance Counseling Program (GCP) for partners and spouses of foreign nationals.

In a press release, the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) announced that it allocated P15.3 billion for the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW), which includes the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration Emergency Repatriation Program to assist forcibly repatriated overseas Filipino workers.

Protecting the environment

According to LILAK, a collective of women advocates for indigenous women’s rights, indigenous women farmers and small food producers in different parts of the Philippines continue to experience hunger while lacking response and support from the Marcos administration.

“As they face the challenges of climate change and rising commodity prices, the influx of applications for corporate-driven projects such as in the extractive industries that will destroy the environment and the entry of energy projects within agricultural and ancestral lands.” LILAK said.

According to the June 2024 Mines & Geosciences Bureau report, 38 mines across the country have been approved and registered since 2021, and 148 more applications are being processed.

Protecting the LGBTQ+ community

President Marcos issued Executive Order No. 51, creating a special committee on LGBTQIA+ affairs.

In a statement on December 23, 2023, Malacañang said the President saw the need to "reinforce the Diversity and Inclusion Program (DIP) and reconstitute its Inter-Agency Committee to ensure the country's continuous compliance with its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights."

The SOGIESC equality bill remains excluded from the updated priority measures in the Legislative Executive Development Advisory Council as of June 25, 2024.

Providing decent job and wages

Many Filipinos continue to face challenges due to low wages. As of June 2024, the average daily nominal minimum wage across all regions stands at P442, while a family of five should receive a living wage of P1,210 per day to live decently. The scarcity of decent work and sustainable livelihoods are also driving more Filipinos into hunger and poverty.

According to IBON Foundation, the informal employment population estimate is at 20.4 million workers.

When it comes to health workers' Health Emergency Allowance, the DBM said that it would release the remaining P27.4 billion and COVID-19 sickness and death claims of healthcare workers on July 5, 2024.

By July 9, the Department of Health received the sub-allotment release order, and the allowance will soon be received by the healthcare workers who served the country during the pandemic.

Providing safe, clean, and affordable water

Marcos ordered the completion of water projects countrywide to mitigate the impacts of the drought and improve water security, acknowledging that water scarcity is now a constant threat due to climate change.

Last July 10, President Marcos celebrated the completion of the construction of the Upper Wawa Dam, which, as a part of the Wawa Bulk Water Supply Project, will fill the needs of Metro Manila residents that the Angat Dam is not capable of.

The President continuously calls on leaders of both public and private sectors to work together to make clean water available to the 40 million Filipinos who currently do not have access.

Regulating the price of rice

Under Executive Order 62, Marcos cuts the tariff on imported rice to 15% to lower the rice prices. However, several farmer groups reject the proposal since reduced rice tariffs only lead to more rice imports.

As of the first phase of April 2024, the average retail price of rice was at P51.39, higher than the rice prices during the first and second phase of March, at P51.14 and P51.21, respectively.

In September 2023, Marcos imposed a price ceiling on rice. Under Executive Order No. 39, the price ceiling of rice is P41 for regular milled rice, P45 for well-milled rice, and P52 for imported rice. The price ceiling remains unless lifted by the President.

Supporting commuters and the transport industry

Since the original deadline of June 2020 for the Public Utility Vehicle Modernization Program (PUVMP), the deadline for consolidation was extended six times following multiple transport strikes. No extension was given after April 30, 2024.

July 2024 figures provided by the Department of Transportation (DOTr) show that 159,914 out of 191,730 (83.41%) public utility vehicles (PUVs) consolidated before the deadline.

Meanwhile, 1,749 transport cooperatives with around 262,870 members, and 1,088 corporations have been formed. Additionally, only 24% of local public transport route plans (LPTRPs) in all LGUs have been approved, which are needed before fleets are modernized.

The DOTr estimates it may take until 2030 before the majority of jeepney fleets (150,000 vehicles) are modernized. Transport groups are still hoping for the program to be scrapped.

Since the deadline, fewer jeepneys have been operating in Cagayan de Oro.

In Bacolod, Undoc-Piston said at least 1,700 of its members could no longer operate and drive jeepneys legally, and Bacod-Manibela said around 10,000 of their dependents were suffering from the “negative economic impact” of the PUVMP.

The jeepney operators forced to consolidate have not received any proper training and support from the government to navigate the complexities of operating within consolidated transport service entity (TSE).

Meanwhile, Marcos held a public town hall about traffic concerns. He talked about alternatives to alleviate the traffic situation.

To improve mass transport in Metro Manila, the administration thinks of improving commuter railways and highways. Marcos also presented updates to key infrastructure projects, including railway developments and the Metro Manila Subway project.

In a meeting with stakeholders last June 5, Metro Manila train operators presented how they would address the problems of the train systems failing PWDs.

Upholding human rights

Marcos created a “super body” to enhance the protection of human rights. However, Human Rights Watch senior researcher Carlos Conde stated that he fears this special committee would only serve as propaganda to defend the administrations against human rights abuses.

According to Amnesty international, they see no progress regarding human rights issues under the Marcos administration. Dahas Project reported that about 329 people in 2023 were killed.

The Marcos administration has consistently said that it would not cooperate in the International Criminal Court’s probe into former president Rodrigo Duterte’s drug war as it does not recognize its jurisdiction over the Philippines.

THE MANILA TIMES

Parametric insurance: A strategic tool for disaster management

By: Ludwig Federigan

The Philippines has experienced the top 10 costliest typhoons in the past 15 years, with two super typhoons (STs) occurring just eight years apart: "Haiyan" (2013), also known as "Yolanda," and "Rai" (2021), also known as "Odette." Both were Category 5 typhoons with sustained winds of 252 kilometers per hour or higher, causing significant damage in the Visayas and Mindanao regions. The destruction of homes, infrastructure and agriculture resulting from these typhoons amounted to P95.5 billion (Haiyan) and P51.8 billion (Rai).

These two STs were highlighted during the 20th Asia Nat Cat and Climate Change Summit, organized by the Asia Insurance Review in Makati City, Philippines. With the theme "Forging Resilience: Building a Future-Proof Insurance Industry in the Face of Nat Cat Threats," speakers discussed the crucial role of the insurance industry in providing protection and securing the future against the growing threats of climate change and disastrous natural events. Parametric insurance was emphasized as a key strategic tool for disaster management.

So, what exactly is parametric insurance? It is an innovative type of insurance that provides predefined payouts based on specific, measurable events rather than the actual loss incurred. This approach is particularly useful for covering risks associated with natural catastrophes, like earthquakes, hurricanes, floods and droughts. It also helps protect farmers against adverse weather conditions that can impact crop yields, such as excessive rainfall or drought. It insures against weather-related disruptions that affect energy production and distribution, like wind speed variations for wind farms.

The key characteristics of parametric insurance include payouts triggered by a predefined parameter, faster payments compared to traditional insurance and parameters based on objective and easily verifiable data from trusted third-party sources. Parametric insurance can also cover indirect costs and economic losses that may not be easily quantified or covered under traditional insurance policies. For example, it can provide immediate liquidity to businesses for operational continuity post-disaster.

Parametric insurance has been implemented in the Philippines as part of its disaster risk management strategy. The Philippine Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility (PCRIF) was launched in December 2017 in collaboration with the World Bank and the Government Service Insurance System. It provides coverage against typhoons and

earthquakes, offering quick financial support in the aftermath of natural disasters and facilitating faster recovery and resilience. The PCRIF was designed to provide immediate liquidity to the national government and local government units based on predefined parametric triggers.

In 2019, the city of Manila obtained a parametric insurance policy to safeguard against the financial consequences of typhoons. The initiative aimed to improve urban resilience and ensure swift financial assistance after natural catastrophes. The Asian Development Bank supported this endeavor, as they actively promote disaster risk financing solutions in the region.

Advantages

Regrettably, the Philippines did not have parametric insurance when STs Haiyan and Rai struck the Visayas and Mindanao regions. Had the Philippines had parametric insurance before STs Haiyan and Rai, the management of financial losses, as well as recovery efforts, could have been significantly improved.

One advantage of predefined payouts is that funds can be disbursed almost immediately after an event, eliminating the need for lengthy damage assessments. This rapid disbursement would have been crucial following STs Haiyan and Rai, which caused extensive devastation, displacement and loss of life. Immediate funds could have supported emergency response efforts, including rescue operations, medical aid and temporary shelter.

Both STs Haiyan and Rai caused substantial financial losses. Parametric insurance could have provided a financial safety net, reducing the fiscal burden on the government and fostering a more stable economic environment after the disaster. The swift availability of funds could have facilitated the reconstruction of infrastructure, restoration of public services and more efficient support for affected communities.

Parametric insurance encourages better disaster preparedness and risk management practices. It can drive the development of robust early warning systems and evacuation plans. Additionally, the presence of such insurance might stimulate investments in resilient infrastructure and community education on disaster preparedness, potentially mitigating some of the impacts of catastrophic events.

While parametric insurance cannot prevent the physical destruction caused by STs Haiyan and Rai, it could have played a critical role in mitigating financial impacts and expediting response and recovery efforts. By providing immediate liquidity based on

predefined parameters, it would have enabled the government to mobilize resources more swiftly and address the urgent needs of affected communities more effectively.

CCC IN THE NEWS:

DAILY TRIBUNE

CCC urges nature-based solutions in disaster risk prevention, reduction and management

The Climate Change Commission (CCC) underscored the importance of nature-based solutions (NbS) in disaster risk prevention, reduction and management to prepare for extreme weather events brought by climate change and build a climate-resilient country.

The CCC believes in the critical role of NbS and ridge to reef approach in managing climate risks and adapting to disasters. These solutions strengthen the livelihood of coastal communities, ensure food security and enhance the protection for vulnerable communities, leading to a more sustainable and resilient future for the next generations.

These solutions are vital to address ecological challenges such as climate change, disasters, food security, and climate resiliency. The solutions are anchored on the Philippine National Adaptation Plan and draft National Determined Contribution Implementation Plan, aligned with the guidelines set by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Key aspects of NbS and ridge to reef approach include protecting and restoring coral reefs, protecting peatlands and growing and restoring forests. These actions sustainably manage and restore ecosystems that support in addressing planetary concerns.

“Nature-based solutions are one of the easiest ways to maximize and utilize the roles of our forests, mangroves, and other natural resources in protecting and sustaining our communities. This step creates long-term benefits for future generations and addresses the urgent concerns of the planet,” Secretary Robert E.A. Borje, vice chairperson and executive director of the CCC, said.

Integrating these solutions helps our natural resources function more effectively in critical ways. Forests and peatlands serve as carbon sinks, storing carbon dioxide, reducing the average global temperature, and lessening the emissions of greenhouse gasses.

Meanwhile, coral reefs play a vital role in protecting coastal communities by reducing the height and energy of waves during tropical cyclones.

The CCC is committed to the pursuit of different strategies to address disaster risk prevention, reduction and management, by a variety of approaches such as nature-

based solutions and ridge to reef approach aimed to enhance resilience and preparedness of the country.

What makes tidal forests so important?

by: Secretary Robert EA Borje

Tidal forests, more commonly known as mangrove forests, have perhaps one of the most peculiar plants in the world. Mangroves' unique ability to live in muddy and brackish water gives them a very special and distinct identity among all plants on our planet. Beyond their uniqueness, however, mangroves offer more than what meets the eye. They form vital ecosystems that provide a plethora of services, not just only to the environment, but also to people. Unfortunately, these ecosystems are at risk due to human and natural causes, including climate change.

On July 23, we celebrate the World International Day for Mangrove Conservation. Adopted by the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization in 2015, this commemoration aims to raise awareness of the importance of mangroves as nature-based solutions to climate change. This brings us to the question, what are mangroves? And why are they important?

According to a Philippine Institute of Development Studies Policy Note titled "Mitigating climate change through mangrove forests," mangrove forests are a group of salt-tolerant shrubs and trees usually found along sheltered coastlines in the tropics and sub-tropics.

To be able to survive in both salt and fresh waters, mangroves have adapted to filter out up to 90 percent of salt that enters through their roots. At the same time, they have the ability to store fresh water through their leaves. They use this stored water to survive amid the changing tides of their geological location.

Mangroves offer plenty of ecological services that are essential for sustaining marine life both within their own habitat and in adjacent ecosystems. Their often submerged roots house a variety of marine species. Similarly, their stems, leaves, and branches provide a safe haven for birds, reptiles, and tree-dwelling mammals. These make mangroves effective biodiversity centers. Mangroves serve as nursery grounds for a diverse array of marine species, including fish, crustaceans, and mollusks. Many species that begin their life cycles in mangrove forests eventually migrate to adjacent seagrass beds and coral reefs as they mature, creating a crucial ecological connectivity between these ecosystems.

Mangroves, with their closely knit roots, also act as a natural-based solution to coastal erosion. With their intertwining roots that can expand up to 5 meters long, mangroves form a barrier that locks in sediments and prevents erosion. Similarly, its thick and lush

canopies act as wind barriers that prevent destructive gusts of winds from reaching nearby coastal communities, especially during storms.

One of the most powerful features of mangroves is their ability to act as carbon sinks. Like other trees, mangroves capture carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and produce oxygen. However, the sediments in which they grow also serve as effective carbon storage. A study done under the PDS revealed that a hectare of mangrove forest in Pangasinan was found to sequester 564.7 tons of carbon. This illustrates the capacity of mangroves to capture and store carbon. Unfortunately, mangroves face a serious threat from deforestation and forest loss due to human developmental activities.

The mapping data released by the Global Mangrove Watch in 2020 estimated a net loss of 5,245 km2 from the 152,604 km2 in 1996. Mangrove forests have been and continue to be subjected to degradation, pollution, and biodiversity loss. The United Nations Environment Program's "Decades of Mangrove Forests Change: What does it mean for nature, people, and the climate?" suggests that half of mangrove-thriving mammals, 22 percent of fishes, 16 percent of plants, 13 percent of reptiles and amphibians, and 8 percent of birds living in mangrove forests are threatened with extinction.

In the Philippines, mangroves are in a very precarious situation. Available data on mangrove populations show that the Philippines had an estimated 450,000 hectares of mangrove forests in 1920, which decreased to 317,500 hectares by 1990. According to the 2021 Philippine Statistics Report by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, this number has further decreased to 311,400 hectares. Half of mangrove forest loss can be attributed directly to brackish-water pond development, clearing and pollution.

Known mangrove forests in the Philippines are found in Palawan, Siargao, Malampaya Sound, Biri Island, El Nido, Tanon Strait, Northern Sierra Madre, Dumanquilas Bay, Sibuyan Island, and Calauit Island. Moreover, five out of the eight Ramsar protected sites in the Philippines are home to stretches of mangrove forests. These include the Sasmuan Pampanga Coastal Wetlands, Las Piñas-Parañaque Critical Habitat and Ecotourism Area, Negros Occidental Coastal Wetlands Conservation Area, Olango Island Wildlife Sanctuary, and Puerta Princesa Subterreanean River National Park. These mangrove forests play a critical part in sustaining Philippine biodiversity and reducing the impacts of climate change.

Recognizing the importance of mangroves, the Philippine government has taken strong actions to protect, preserve, and rehabilitate them. In the National Adaptation Plan and the draft Nationally Distributed Contribution Implementation Plan, mangroves were

identified as nature-based solutions to climate change. This prompts the establishment of mechanisms to ensure the health and protection of these vital ecosystems. Furthermore, legislation such as the Philippine Clean Water Act, the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act, and the National Integrated Protected System Act indirectly support the protection of our mangroves.

Beyond government actions, the involvement of local communities is key to ensure that these ecosystems thrive far into the future. Community-based management programs that promote sustainable practices and raise awareness about the importance of mangroves are essential.

To further improve mangrove conservation, we must invest in research to better understand mangrove ecosystems and the impacts of climate change; utilize the ecological knowledge of local communities to develop effective conservation strategies; enforce laws protecting mangrove areas, with stringent penalties for violations; and promote global cooperation for mangrove conservation through knowledge exchange and funding support.

Mangroves are irreplaceable ecosystems that provide extensive benefits, from protecting our coastlines to combating climate change. The ongoing threats they face make their conservation an urgent priority. By adopting comprehensive strategies involving scientific research, community participation, and strong legal frameworks, we can ensure that these vital ecosystems continue to thrive for generations to come.

Protecting mangroves is not just an ecological issue; it is essential for the resilience of our coastal communities and the health of our planet. Let us act now to safeguard our mangroves and secure a sustainable future.

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