



NEWS ROUNDUP

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- Women hit hardest by climate change: ASEAN Outlook 2024
- The woman fighting to save the Philippines' last rainforests
- AIIB-backed fund eyes Philippine climate investments
- [Opinion] Dark sky communities crucial to fight vs. climate change
- NDRRMC: More than 77K people affected by 'Julian'
- [Opinion] Triple COPs: Biodiversity, Climate and Desertification

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MANILA STANDARD

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By: Dr. Selva Ramachandran

In an unexpected convergence, the three major environmental Conference of the Parties (COPs) — Biodiversity COP16, Climate COP29 and Desertification COP16 — are occurring in the last three months of 2024. This presents a unique opportunity to underscore the interconnectedness of the crises they address. Climate instability, biodiversity loss, land degradation, desertification and drought are not isolated issues; they are deeply intertwined facets of a single planetary crisis.

Information and Knowledge Management Division

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These factors primarily impact women and girls, further burdening their unpaid work responsibilities. Currently, only three ASEAN countries have incorporated gender-sensitive approaches into their climate plans.

Gender data hole

The report highlighted that while 47% of official development assistance in the region targets gender equality, increased investment is needed to gather, analyse, and utilise gender-specific data across all SDGs.

This includes traditionally gender-neutral areas like environmental statistics. With just six years remaining to achieve the 2030 SDG Agenda, continuous investment in gender equality remains essential to ensure sustainable development and leave no one behind, the report said.

“Data impacts our decisions about how best to respond, and with better data, we can count women in,” said Australia Foreign Minister Penny Wong.

Her Thai counterpart, Maris Sangiampongsa, added: “Gender equality and women empowerment are also central to the ASEAN Community Vision.”

“Let me highlight three key areas where women can make a difference and contribute to a more future-ready and sustainable world: climate action and disaster response; digital transformation; and global supply chains,” he stated.

Hajah Nancy Shukri, Malaysia’s Minister of Women, Family and Community Development, emphasised: “Integrating gender perspectives into every facet of our development agenda is not only essential but urgent, as we work towards realising the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 and shaping the Strategic Plans beyond 2025. The insights from this outlook should ignite real, transformative change across ASEAN, driving us toward a more inclusive future.”

Food insecurity

The report recorded a tenfold decrease in ASEAN poverty over the past two decades, but said women remain more susceptible to poverty, particularly during peak childbearing years.

Additionally, 38% of pregnant women in the region suffer from anaemia. The report emphasises the crucial role of women in environmental decision-making.

Yet despite an increase in women's political participation, they remain underrepresented in key environmental ministries. This highlights the need for inclusive solutions to address disease spread, build farmer resilience, reduce unpaid women's labour burdens, and ensure healthy ecosystems, the report said.

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[The woman fighting to save the Philippines' last rainforests](#)

By: Nell Lewis and John Lewis

Palawan, a cluster of islands in the Philippines, is breathtakingly beautiful. Home to underground rivers, turquoise coastlines and lush mountain peaks, it has earned the name of the country's "last ecological frontier."

The paradise archipelago has not gone unrecognized. The entire area of Palawan, covering more than 1,700 islands, has been designated a biosphere reserve by UNESCO, and it also hosts two world heritage sites, the Puerto-Princesa Subterranean River National Park and Tubbataha Reefs.

But despite these designations, threats still remain from mining, the illegal wildlife trade, climate change and deforestation. According to Global Forest Watch, Palawan had the most tree cover loss in the country between 2001 and 2023.

Conservationist Karina May Reyes, who refers to herself as KM for short, is on a mission to protect the archipelago, alongside a small team of people that form the nonprofit Centre for Sustainability PH (CS).

"Palawan is super special because from ridge to reef, you have pristine landscapes – mountains that still retain old growth canopy cover all the way to coral reefs that still have incredible biodiversity, whether you're after manta rays or whale sharks or tiger sharks or turtles," she tells CNN.

Rainforests once covered around 90% of the Philippines, she explains, but now less than 3% of intact old growth forest remains – the majority of which is in Palawan. "Our mission is to conserve the Philippines' last remaining 3% of pristine rainforest through the establishment of national parks," she says.

Pristine peaks

The team's first project began in 2014, targeting Cleopatra's Needle, one of the mystical mountains on the main island of Palawan outside the province's capital city of Puerto Princesa. Named after the obelisk-shaped natural stone on its highest peak, it's one of the oldest and most diverse forests in all of the Philippines and is a safe haven for the island's threatened and endemic species, such as the Palawan hornbill, bearcat and pangolin.

It is also the ancestral domain of the indigenous Batak tribe, who rely on the natural resources of the surrounding forest to sustain their livelihoods.

“If we didn’t have indigenous Batak still here on (the) land, we wouldn’t continue to have the forests that we do. It’s as a result and as a blessing of their stewardship of the area that we still have access to these forests and they haven’t been destroyed,” says Reyes.

Working closely with the Batak people, CS gathered data on the area, building a case for why it should be protected, and in 2017, the hard work paid off, with the entire area of Cleopatra’s Needle – more than 41,000 hectares – declared a critical habitat. The designation includes a ban on the extraction of minerals, logging, quarrying and wildlife trading.

Now, their attention has turned to Sultan Peak, a mountain in the southern half of Palawan island, which has no formal protection. Rich in nickel, an essential component in clean energy technologies like electric vehicles, wind turbines and solar panels, the area is under threat from mining.

“The area that we’re trying to protect is about 8,000 hectares, pristine rainforest, also this incredible watershed system, and it’s completely unstudied,” says Reyes.

The CS team is looking to document the region’s flora and fauna to help justify its protection, and for this it has mobilized a network of citizen scientists to take photos of plants and animals, which can be uploaded to a database on the platform iNaturalist, an open-source tool that identifies species.

“We’re building up a database for biodiversity of this area,” says Aubrey Jayne Padilla, research program coordinator for CS. “The local community (are) involved in compiling the data ... We take and document everything that we see on the trail.”

Reyes hopes that they will be able to protect the area within three years. But even after getting community buy-in and gathering an array of scientific data, challenges remain.

“At the end of the day, if you don’t have politicians and decision makers on board, then there’s no one there to sign off that law,” she says.

Reyes sees part of her role as communicating the area’s wider value. “Protecting these areas is so important, not just for biodiversity, but also for protecting vulnerable communities from climate change,” she says.

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A \$100-million financing backed by the China-based Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is eyeing climate transition investments in the Philippines and other Asia-Pacific countries.

In a Sept. 30 statement, the AIIB noted that three-fourths of the total commitment, or \$75 million, is for the Actis Asia Climate Transition Fund. The remaining \$25 million is a co-investment sleeve alongside this fund.

The AIIB's commitment was signed during its ninth annual meeting held in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, last week.

"This marks the AIIB's first climate transition-themed fund dedicated to emerging Asia and highlights the bank's commitment to sustainable development and climate change mitigation in the region," it said.

In particular, the fund would be invested in energy solutions, renewable energy infrastructure, and sustainable transportation projects in the region, the AIIB said.

"Our commitment to the Actis Asia Climate Transition Fund underscores the AIIB's dedication to financing sustainable infrastructure and fostering low-carbon solutions in Asia. This partnership aligns with our climate strategy and sets a precedent for future investments aimed at achieving net-zero emissions while promoting gender equality in the energy sector," AIIB acting vice president Rajat Misra said.

According to earlier AIIB documents, the Actis Asia Climate Transition Fund's investment strategy "mainly targets opportunities that are operating in countries in Asia and the Pacific including India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the People's Republic of China, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam."

Non-sovereign financing for this fund, which is being managed by global sustainable infrastructure investor Actis GP LLP, was approved by the AIIB in January of this year.

In September, Actis announced its investment partnership with Manila Electric Co. and Meralco subsidiary Solar Philippines New Energy Corp. for the Terra Solar Project, which they said would likely be the world's biggest integrated renewables and energy storage project.

"The transaction represents the largest foreign direct investment for a greenfield infrastructure project in the Philippines and will see Actis bring its rich experience in contracting, building and operating infrastructure assets to the project," the company said on its website.

MANILA STANDARD

[\[Opinion\] Dark sky communities crucial to fight vs. climate change](#)

By: Honor Blanco Cabie

Perched nearly 7,900 feet above sea level is a dark sky community in the adjoining town of Westcliffe, one of 34 across the United States recognized by the Arizona-based International Dark-Sky Association or IDA.

The IDA is the leading organization in the world that works to combat light pollution and has been granting Dark Sky designations to parks, reserves, sanctuaries, and communities since 1998.

The Westcliffe dark sky community, which averages 2.7 degrees Celsius to 22.7 degrees Celsius temperature during the fall or autumn, is just one of seven in Colorado, known for rocky mountains, great plains, high plains, mesas, canyons, plateaus, rivers and desert lands.

One weekend in September, we had the privilege to be in this dark sky community during the three-day annual activity of the Philippine American Chamber of Commerce of Southern Colorado, Philippine American Chamber of Commerce of Northern Colorado, and the Colorado State Philippine American Chamber of Commerce.

The event, which tackled strategic planning for 2025; board governance, ethics and leadership training; and team building, was held at the Hillside Colorado Vacation Cottages managed by spouses Myron and Rizza Edelman.

Facilitators were Ayana Garcia, Boards and Commissions Program Administrator for the City of Colorado Springs, and May Joyce Vertido, a nurse and a retired Lieutenant Colonel of the US Army.

Relatively young, Westcliffe was recognized as an International Dark Sky Community only nine years ago, in March 2015, by the IDA, along with its neighboring town of Silver Cliff.

The IDA awards this designation to communities that reduce light pollution and enforce outdoor lighting ordinances, according to officials.

Westcliffe and Silver Cliff raised funds and replaced their street and government lighting with lower light polluting fixtures.

Both communities are in the Wet Mountain Valley, between the West Mountain and Sangre de Cristo mountain ranges, an area in the mainland noted for its spectacular views of the Milky Way, something we experienced while we were here.

It is during fall or autumn when stargazing can be, as residents say, a celebration of the return of dark nights, with first rate constellations, planets and galaxies to see in the Colorado sky.

Westcliffe during that weekend, with no light pollution and pristine skies, allowed visitors like us to see uncountable thousands of stars — the stars being bright including the smaller ones visible to the naked eye.

Westcliffe and Silver Cliff, according to our hosts, are among the highest in the world, known for their views of the Milky Way, even from the Main Street.

The Smokey Jack Observatory in Westcliff has a powerful telescope and hosts star parties in the summer, official sources say.

Why are dark sky communities germinating following the first certification of Flagstaff, Arizona as the First International Dark Sky City in 2001?

Climatologists say dark sky communities are important for climate change because they help lessen light pollution which can raise several negative consequences.

According to experts, light pollution can disrupt the body's natural 24-hour cycle, which can lead to sleep disorders like insomnia and delayed sleep-phase syndrome.

It can also impact the production of melatonin, a hormone that helps regulate metabolism and immune responses.

Experts add outdoor lighting in the United States consumes a lot of energy, equivalent to driving 49 million passenger vehicles per year and switching to LED lights in every home could save about 38 million tons of carbon dioxide emissions per year.

Light pollution can also affect animals active at night, like bats, owls and frogs which can make it more difficult for them to hunt, feed and mate.

Light pollution can also interfere, experts say, with the natural rhythms of the night, which can impact the health of the ecosystem.

According to www.darksky.org, the worldwide Dark-Sky Movement aims to reduce light pollution and preserve the night sky with the IDA working to protect communities from light pollution through outreach, advocacy and conservation.

There are those who ask: Is it really worth having dark sky communities?

Many climatologists say yes, and argue the conservation benefits include reducing deaths of migratory birds, turtles and other species who interact with the natural night sky, support the pollination of plants and the recovery of plant and tree species.

THE MANILA TIMES

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By: Francis Earl Cueto

More than 77,000 individuals were affected by Super Typhoon "Julian," the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council said on Tuesday.

According to their initial situational report, some 22,645 families or 77,249 individuals were affected by the storm as of 8 a.m.

Of the number 762 individuals were temporarily housed at evacuation centers, while 1,031 were living with their relatives.

Some eight areas in Region 1 (Ilocos) were flooded with only one subsiding. A total of 38 houses were partially damaged as well.

Meanwhile, a total of P987,732.98 in assistance were provided to 11,674 individuals affected by the storm.

Julian has intensified into a super typhoon. It is moving slowly in the west-northwest direction.

The center of the eye of Julian was estimated at 4 a.m. to be located 205 kilometers west of Itbayat, Batanes packing maximum sustained winds of 185 kilometers per hour near the center and gustiness of up to 230 kph.

Julian was moving west-northwestward slowly.

[Opinion] Triple COPs: Biodiversity, Climate and Desertification

By: Dr. Selva Ramachandran

In an unexpected convergence, the three major environmental Conference of the Parties (COPs) — Biodiversity COP16, Climate COP29 and Desertification COP16 — are occurring in the last three months of 2024. This presents a unique opportunity to underscore the interconnectedness of the crises they address. Climate instability, biodiversity loss, land degradation, desertification and drought are not isolated issues; they are deeply intertwined facets of a single planetary crisis.

As we navigate the convergence of these COPs, it is critical to emphasize that success in addressing climate change, biodiversity loss and land degradation is directly tied to our ability to get the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) back on track by 2030. The integrated solutions we promote through the Tri-COPs will be pivotal in advancing key SDGs.

Biodiversity

The Biodiversity COP16 is the first one, taking place in Colombia in October.

The COP16 isn't expected to break new ground but is more a stocktake of progress since the last summit secured historic assurances for biodiversity. In 2022 in Montreal, nations agreed to place 30 percent of the planet under environmental protection by 2030 in a landmark pact aimed at arresting biodiversity loss and restoring ecosystems to health.

Described as the "first implementation COP" since the adoption of the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) in December 2022, governments will review the progress made in implementing the GBF, the number of updated National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans, and the alignment of national targets with the framework.

Climate

The COP29 on Climate Change, which will take place in Azerbaijan in November, is a pivotal opportunity to accelerate action to tackle the climate crisis. With global temperatures hitting record highs and extreme weather events affecting people around the globe, COP29 will bring together leaders from governments, businesses and civil society to find concrete solutions to the defining issue of our time.

While the last summit in Dubai in 2023 delivered a commitment to transition the world away from fossil fuels, a key focus of COP29 will be on finance, as trillions of dollars are required for countries to drastically reduce greenhouse gas emissions and protect lives and livelihoods from the worsening impacts of climate change. Current financial flows for climate change mitigation need to increase at least three times if we are to limit global warming to 2 degrees Celsius or below and achieve the Paris Agreement targets.

COP29 offers an opportunity to unlock more climate investments from a wider range of public and private sources and to improve the quality of this finance.

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