NEWS ROUNDUP
10 DECEMBER 2024 [08:30 am]

- To save climate, tax carbon at $75 per ton: IMF
- EU climate monitor says 2024 ‘certain’ to be hottest year on record
- PHL seeks $1-B World Bank loan for resilient agri
- Philippines eyes biggest-ever World Bank loan to make rice farming climate-resilient
- Climate change, unsustainable land practices intensify droughts
- PH ranked 2nd most attractive developing economy for RE investment
- Drylands now make up 40% of land on Earth, excluding Antarctica, study says

CCC IN THE NEWS:

- Amid the reality of climate change, ‘No way but net zero’

ABS CBN

To save climate, tax carbon at $75 per ton: IMF

The world's biggest carbon polluting nations should jointly agree to tax emissions at $75 per ton in the next decade to keep climate change at safe levels, the International Monetary Fund said Thursday.

AL JAZEERA

EU climate monitor says 2024 ‘certain’ to be hottest year on record

Europe’s climate monitor says 2024 is “effectively certain” to be the hottest on record and the first year above the 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7F) climate benchmark, a critical threshold to protect the Earth from dangerously overheating.

BUSINESS WORLD

PHL seeks $1-B World Bank loan for resilient agri
By: Aubrey Rose A. Inosante

The Philippines is seeking a $1-billion World Bank loan to boost agrifood productivity and resiliency in the face of challenges posed by climate change.

MANILA BULLETIN

[Philippines eyes biggest-ever World Bank loan to make rice farming climate-resilient]
By: Ben Arnold De Vera

Next year, the World Bank will extend to the Philippines its largest-ever loan aimed at promoting climate-resilient agri-food systems, especially of the Filipino staple food rice.

MANILA STANDARD

[Climate change, unsustainable land practices intensify droughts]

Droughts across the world are intensifying and have become a "slow onset, silent killer" to which no country is immune, according to the UN's most senior official working on desertification, drought and land restoration issues.

PHILIPPINE NEWS AGENCY

[PH ranked 2nd most attractive developing economy for RE investment]
By: Anna Leah Gonzales

The Philippines is the second most attractive developing economy for renewable energy investment, the 2024 Climatescope report by BloombergNEF (BNEF) said.

THE DAILY GUARDIAN

[Drylands now make up 40% of land on Earth, excluding Antarctica, study says]

An area nearly a third larger than India turned permanently arid in past three decades, research shows.

CCC IN THE NEWS:

BUSINESS WORLD

[Amid the reality of climate change, 'No way but net zero']

Amid the undeniable reality of climate change, "there is no other way to go but net zero," emphasized one of the leading movers of climate action in the Philippine private sector at the country's first-ever annual conference on net zero, which was attended by an estimated 400 participants from businesses, policy-making bodies, financial institutions and other stakeholders.

Information and Knowledge Management Division

ABS CBN

To save climate, tax carbon at $75 per ton: IMF

The world's biggest carbon polluting nations should jointly agree to tax emissions at $75 per ton in the next decade to keep climate change at safe levels, the International Monetary Fund said Thursday.

The global crisis lender's call for immediate action confronts a policy dilemma that has left major economies rife with discord in recent years as they battle to prevent catastrophic warming of the planet.

"Carbon taxes are the most powerful and efficient tools but only if they are implemented in a fair and growth-friendly way," IMF researchers said in a blog post.

After violent protests last year, France suspended plans to raise carbon taxes beyond $50 per ton. Meanwhile, US President Donald Trump has moved to withdraw the United States from the 2015 Paris Agreement and some American lawmakers have advanced a "Green New Deal" to invest in de-carbonizing the economy.

The report was released ahead of next week's annual meetings of the IMF and World Bank at which newly installed IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva is expected to urge member countries to action.

A COMMON APPROACH

Taxing emissions -- raising the cost of carbon-intensive energy for electricity, travel, manufacturing, shipping and food -- is the most efficient way to prevent global average temperatures from rising more than 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels, the goal set in the Paris accord, according to the IMF research published Thursday.

While the current global average cost is $2 per ton, a coordinated increase to $75 by 2030 among the largest emitters in the Group of 20 economies would be the most likely to succeed.

A common approach would prevent "free-rider" countries from benefiting from reforms made by other nations and allow industries within countries to remain competitive with those in other nations, the report said.

But IMF researchers acknowledge the daunting and unequal costs this could impose.

Coal prices would more than triple. Electricity would shoot up by more than 30 percent in Canada and by between 70 and 90 percent in Australia. Gasoline prices would rise by between five and 15 percent in most countries, according to the report.

But environmental benefits would more than offset such costs -- by 2030, a $75 per ton tax would prevent an estimated 725,000 premature air pollution deaths, mainly in China, according to the report.

And consumers and firms eager to keep costs will have an immediate incentive to avoid emissions and invest in cleaner energy.

Tax revenues could be used to make such changes politically acceptable: targeted assistance to poor and vulnerable households, displaced workers and regions hit disproportionately by the transition.

Offsetting cuts to payroll and income taxes, combined with dividends to the public, could make the transition more politically palatable, the report said.

AL JAZEERA

EU climate monitor says 2024 ‘certain’ to be hottest year on record

Europe’s climate monitor says 2024 is “effectively certain” to be the hottest on record and the first year above the 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7F) climate benchmark, a critical threshold to protect the Earth from dangerously overheating.

The Copernicus Climate Change Service said on Monday an unprecedented spell of extraordinary heat had pushed average global temperatures so high between January and November that this year was sure to eclipse 2023 as the hottest yet.

“At this point, it is effectively certain that 2024 is going to be the warmest year on record,” the European Union agency said in its monthly bulletin.

Copernicus uses billions of measurements from satellites, ships, aircraft and weather stations to aid its climate calculations.

Its records go back to 1940, but other sources of climate data – such as ice cores, tree rings, and coral skeletons – allow scientists to expand their conclusions using evidence from much further in the past.

Scientists say the period being lived through right now is likely the warmest the planet has been for the last 125,000 years.

Last month ranked as the second-warmest November on record after November 2023. Portugal experienced its hottest-ever November, the country’s meteorological agency said on Thursday, with the average air temperature 2.69C (4.84F) higher than the average for 1981-2010.

Temperature rises above critical 1.5C threshold
In another grim milestone, 2024 will be the first calendar year more than 1.5C hotter than pre-industrial times before humanity started burning large volumes of fossil fuels.

Scientists warn that exceeding 1.5C over a decades-long period would greatly imperil the planet, and the international community agreed under the Paris climate accord to strive to limit warming to this safer threshold.

Yet, the world is nowhere near on track to meeting the 1.5C target. In October, the United Nations said the current direction of climate action would result in a catastrophic 3.1C (5.6F) of warming.

Carbon dioxide emissions from burning fossil fuels are the main cause of climate change. Emissions from fossil fuels keep rising despite a global pledge to move the world away from coal, oil and gas.

Scientists say global warming is making extreme weather events more frequent and ferocious, and even at present levels climate change is taking its toll.

This year saw deadly flooding in Spain and Kenya, violent tropical storms in the United States and the Philippines, and severe drought and wildfires across South America.

At UN climate talks in November, wealthy countries committed $300bn annually by 2035, an amount decried as woefully inadequate.

BUSINESS WORLD

PHL seeks $1-B World Bank loan for resilient agri
By: Aubrey Rose A. Inosante

The Philippines is seeking a $1-billion World Bank loan to boost agrifood productivity and resiliency in the face of challenges posed by climate change.
The proposed Philippine Sustainable Agriculture Transformation program aims to boost "agriculture and fisheries development by enhancing agrifood system resilience through climate-responsive strategies, diversification, supportive policies, and improved fiscal performance," according to a World Bank loan document.

The project cost is expected to amount to $12.90 billion over 2025-2029. The World Bank will finance $1 billion while the government will provide P11.90 billion.

The Department of Agriculture (DA) hopes to begin the procurement process by July 2025.

The cost to the economy is estimated at P26 billion a year due to climate change, according to a report from the International Center for Tropical Agriculture and DA. The study had been commissioned by the World Bank.

The bank said climate change will decrease agricultural productivity in the Philippines by 9% to 21% by 2050.

During the three months to September, the value of production in agriculture and fisheries at constant 2018 prices fell 3.7% to P397.43 billion, the Philippine Statistics Authority said.

Tropical cyclones Kristine and Leon caused P9.81 billion in damage across 183,877 hectares of farmland, on lost production of 380,704 metric tons, according to the DA.

This was the first project undertaken by the government under the bank's Program-for-Results (PforR) financing scheme. The World Bank said the PforR scheme uses a country's institutions and processes and links the disbursement of funds directly to the achievement of specific program results.

"The PforR would particularly focus on the country's rice-based cropping systems. This encompasses 1.9 million hectares and some 3 million farmers, which represent 37% of the country's farmers and fisherfolk," it said.

The DA's plan to carry out the program is known as the Para sa Masaganang Bagong Pilipinas (MBP) 2024-2027 framework, it said.

Expected MBP outcomes are higher incomes for farmers through enhanced productivity growth and resilient natural resource and input use.

It also seeks to attract a “new generation of agri-entrepreneurs to invest in post-harvest agri-logistic activities and increase and diversify agri-food production across value chains.”

“The PforR would particularly focus on the country’s rice-based cropping systems,” the bank said, adding that this sector encompasses 1.9 million hectares and some three million farmers that represent 37% of all farmers and fisherfolk.

MANILA BULLETIN

[Philippines eyes biggest-ever World Bank loan to make rice farming climate-resilient]
By: Ben Arnold De Vera

Next year, the World Bank will extend to the Philippines its largest-ever loan aimed at promoting climate-resilient agri-food systems, especially of the Filipino staple food rice.

Now with a total of eight pending loans up for approval by the Washington-based multilateral lender, the Philippines' borrowing pipeline rose to over $4.169 billion--equivalent to more than P242 billion—for the current as well as the next World Bank fiscal years.

The World Bank disclosed on Dec. 6 that its board is scheduled to approve on June 5, 2025, the $1-billion (over P58-billion) program-for-results financing (PforR) for the Philippines Sustainable Agriculture Transformation project.

The Department of Finance (DOF) shall borrow on behalf of the Department of Agriculture (DA), the project's implementing agency.

The World Bank document indicated that this DA-led project would entail a total cost of $20 billion (more than P1.16 trillion), of which the government shall shoulder $11.895 billion (almost P691 billion) out of the $12.897.5-billion (over P749-billion) operation cost.

The World Bank loan will augment the financing requirement for program operation, even as there remains a $2.5-million financing gap.

This forthcoming loan's objective of fostering food and nutrition security plus climate change-resiliency will target efficient government resource use, enhanced diversification, as well as increased productivity in the agriculture sector.

This financing shall be a PforR instrument, "a natural progression to elevate [the World Bank's] support to the next level of sectoral transformation in the Philippines by strengthening the government’s own programs and institutional delivery mechanisms," the document read.

"The PforR would particularly focus on the country's rice-based cropping systems. This encompasses 1.9 million hectares (ha) and some three million farmers, which represent 37 percent of the country's farmers and fisherfolk," the World Bank said.

As a PforR, this upcoming loan sets itself apart from the usual development policy financing (DPF) and investment project financing (IPF) schemes that the Philippines avails from the World Bank.

In particular, this program aims to achieve the following specific goals: diversify crops; hike the number of farmers who use climate-smart practices and technologies; increase productivity; and jack up volumes of agricultural products sold at farmgate (as a proxy for farmers' incomes) as well as of select perishable goods that benefit from improved post-harvest handling and storage, the World Bank document said.

"The agricultural sector in the Philippines has high potential for contributing to the country's socioeconomic development agenda... However, the country has not been able to develop its full agricultural potential," the World Bank lamented, citing that "ineffective and inefficient sector policies and spending decisions have hindered agricultural growth."

Also, "a complex, fragmented institutional and regulatory system has further stymied sector development and disincentivized private-sector investments in the country's agri-food systems," the World Bank said, such that "the sector suffers high levels of farm and post-harvest losses that have significant implications for food and nutrition security and incomes."

It did not help that "climate change poses considerable challenges to the development" of the domestic agriculture sector, while the local agri-food industry itself is "also a potential contributor to the effects" of climate risks.

As such, the upcoming World Bank loan shall be aligned with the Philippines' commitments under the Paris Agreement of 2015 as well as its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) in 2021, alongside the DA's own centerpiece four-year agriculture -sector transformation plan under the "Para sa Masaganang Bagong Pilipinas" 2024-2027.

Based on the latest updated documents reviewed by Manila Bulletin, the World Bank is expected to approve five other Philippine loans during the current 2025 fiscal year, which began last July 1, 2024, and will end on June 30, 2025.

The World Bank would green-light in February of next year the $496-million Health System Resilience Project, $456-million Mindanao Transport Connectivity Improvement Project, as well as $67.34-million Civil Service Modernization Project.

In March 2025, the World Bank will approve the $600-million First Energy Transition and Climate Resilience Development Policy Loan (DPL).

The Philippines shall also borrow $250 million for the Water Supply and Sanitation Project in June next year.

At the onset of the World Bank's fiscal year 2026 that starts on July 1, 2025, the Philippines is set to borrow $600 million for its Project for Learning Upgrade Support and Decentralization, on top of $700 million for the Community Resilience Project.

As Manila Bulletin earlier reported, the Philippines was the fifth-biggest borrower among the World Bank's International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) developing country-clients in fiscal year 2024, during which the country secured a total of $2.35 billion in concessional loans.

If poorer country-borrowers part of the International Development Association (IDA) are included, the Philippines ranked as the seventh-largest overall World Bank borrower of the previous fiscal year, just behind war-torn Ukraine, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, Türkiye, Indonesia and India.

Next year, the World Bank will extend to the Philippines its largest-ever loan aimed at promoting climate-resilient agri-food systems, especially of the Filipino staple food rice.

Now with a total of eight pending loans up for approval by the Washington-based multilateral lender, the Philippines' borrowing pipeline rose to over $4.169 billion--equivalent to more than P242 billion—for the current as well as the next World Bank fiscal years.

The World Bank disclosed on Dec. 6 that its board is scheduled to approve on June 5, 2025, the $1-billion (over P58-billion) program-for-results financing (PforR) for the Philippines Sustainable Agriculture Transformation project.

The Department of Finance (DOF) shall borrow on behalf of the Department of Agriculture (DA), the project's implementing agency.

The World Bank document indicated that this DA-led project would entail a total cost of $20 billion (more than P1.16 trillion), of which the government shall shoulder $11.895 billion (almost P691 billion) out of the $12.897.5-billion (over P749-billion) operation cost.

The World Bank loan will augment the financing requirement for program operation, even as there remains a $2.5-million financing gap.

This forthcoming loan's objective of fostering food and nutrition security plus climate change-resiliency will target efficient government resource use, enhanced diversification, as well as increased productivity in the agriculture sector.

This financing shall be a PforR instrument, "a natural progression to elevate [the World Bank's] support to the next level of sectoral transformation in the Philippines by strengthening the government’s own programs and institutional delivery mechanisms," the document read.

"The PforR would particularly focus on the country's rice-based cropping systems. This encompasses 1.9 million hectares (ha) and some three million farmers, which represent 37 percent of the country's farmers and fisherfolk," the World Bank said.

As a PforR, this upcoming loan sets itself apart from the usual development policy financing (DPF) and investment project financing (IPF) schemes that the Philippines avails from the World Bank.

In particular, this program aims to achieve the following specific goals: diversify crops; hike the number of farmers who use climate-smart practices and technologies; increase productivity; and jack up volumes of agricultural products sold at farmgate (as a proxy for farmers' incomes) as well as of select perishable goods that benefit from improved post-harvest handling and storage, the World Bank document said.

"The agricultural sector in the Philippines has high potential for contributing to the country's socioeconomic development agenda... However, the country has not been able to develop its full agricultural potential," the World Bank lamented, citing that "ineffective and inefficient sector policies and spending decisions have hindered agricultural growth."

Also, "a complex, fragmented institutional and regulatory system has further stymied sector development and disincentivized private-sector investments in the country's agri-food systems," the World Bank said, such that "the sector suffers high levels of farm and post-harvest losses that have significant implications for food and nutrition security and incomes."

It did not help that "climate change poses considerable challenges to the development" of the domestic agriculture sector, while the local agri-food industry itself is "also a potential contributor to the effects" of climate risks.

As such, the upcoming World Bank loan shall be aligned with the Philippines' commitments under the Paris Agreement of 2015 as well as its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) in 2021, alongside the DA's own centerpiece four-year agriculture -sector transformation plan under the "Para sa Masaganang Bagong Pilipinas" 2024-2027.

Based on the latest updated documents reviewed by Manila Bulletin, the World Bank is expected to approve five other Philippine loans during the current 2025 fiscal year, which began last July 1, 2024, and will end on June 30, 2025.

The World Bank would green-light in February of next year the $496-million Health System Resilience Project, $456-million Mindanao Transport Connectivity Improvement Project, as well as $67.34-million Civil Service Modernization Project.

In March 2025, the World Bank will approve the $600-million First Energy Transition and Climate Resilience Development Policy Loan (DPL).

The Philippines shall also borrow $250 million for the Water Supply and Sanitation Project in June next year.

At the onset of the World Bank's fiscal year 2026 that starts on July 1, 2025, the Philippines is set to borrow $600 million for its Project for Learning Upgrade Support and Decentralization, on top of $700 million for the Community Resilience Project.

As Manila Bulletin earlier reported, the Philippines was the fifth-biggest borrower among the World Bank's International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) developing country-clients in fiscal year 2024, during which the country secured a total of $2.35 billion in concessional loans.

If poorer country-borrowers part of the International Development Association (IDA) are included, the Philippines ranked as the seventh-largest overall World Bank borrower of the previous fiscal year, just behind war-torn Ukraine, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, Türkiye, Indonesia and India.

MANILA STANDARD

Climate change, unsustainable land practices intensify droughts

Droughts across the world are intensifying and have become a “slow onset, silent killer” to which no country is immune, according to the UN’s most senior official working on desertification, drought and land restoration issues.

Ibrahim Thiaw, executive secretary of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) was speaking at the opening of COP16 a major global conference taking place in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, where a new global drought regime is expected to be agreed which will promote the shift from reactive relief response to proactive preparedness.

Droughts are a natural phenomenon, but in recent decades have been intensified by climate change and unsustainable land practices. Their number has surged by nearly 30 percent in frequency and intensity since 2000, threatening agriculture, water security, and the livelihoods of 1.8 billion people, with the poorest nations bearing the brunt.

They can also lead to conflict over dwindling resources, including water, and the widespread displacement of people as they migrate towards more productive lands.

More than 30 countries declared drought emergencies in the past three years alone, from India and China, to high-income nations such as the US, Canada and Spain, as well as Uruguay, Southern Africa and even Indonesia.

Droughts impeded grain transportation in the Rhine River in Europe, disrupted international trade via the Panama Canal in Central America, and led to hydropower cuts in the South America country, Brazil, which depends on water for more than 60 percent of its electricity supply.

Firefighters were even called to an urban park in New York City, in the United States in wintry November 2024 to tackle a bush fire after weeks of no rainfall.

“Droughts have expanded into new territories. No country is immune,” said UNCCD’s Ibrahim Thiaw adding that “by 2050, three in four people globally, up to seven and half billion people, will feel the impact of drought.”

Domino effects

Droughts are rarely confined to a specific place and time and are not simply due to a lack of rainfall but are often the result of a complicated set of events driven or amplified by climate change, as well as sometimes the mismanagement of land.

For example, a hillside which is deforested is immediately degraded. The land will lose its resilience to extreme weather and will become more susceptible to both drought and flooding.

And, once they strike, they can trigger a series of cataclysmic domino effects, supercharging heat waves and even floods, multiplying the risks to people’ s lives and livelihoods with long-lasting human, social and economic costs.

As communities, economies, and ecosystems suffer the damaging effects of drought, their vulnerability is increased to the next one, feeding a vicious cycle of land degradation and underdevelopment.

Around 70 percent of the world’s available freshwater is in the hands of people living off the land, most of them subsistence farmers in low-income countries with limited livelihood alternatives. Around 2.5 billion of them are youth.

Without water there is no food and no land-based jobs, which can lead to forced migration, instability, and conflict.

“Drought is not merely an environmental matter,” said Andrea Meza, UNCCD deputy executive secretary. “Drought is a development and human security matter that we must urgently tackle from across all sectors and governance levels.”

Droughts are also becoming harsher and faster due to human-induced climate change as well as land mismanagement and typically the global response to it is still reactive. More planning and adaption is required to build resilience to the extreme conditions created by dwindling supplies of water and this often happens at a local level.

PHILIPPINE NEWS AGENCY

PH ranked 2nd most attractive developing economy for RE investment
By: Anna Leah Gonzales

The Philippines is the second most attractive developing economy for renewable energy investment, the 2024 Climatescope report by BloombergNEF (BNEF) said.

The Climatescope report evaluates clean energy progress and market attractiveness across 110 developing countries using 100 indicators.

These nations account for nearly two-thirds of global clean energy output and 82 percent of the world's population.

The country's latest ranking was an improvement from fourth place in 2023.

BNEF's report said the Philippines has a power score of 2.65, surpassing the Asia-Pacific regional average of 1.94.

In a statement Monday, the Department of Energy (DOE) said the improvement in ranking "reflects the growing confidence of the global community in our country's commitment to clean energy transition and sustainable growth."

"This achievement underscores the effectiveness of the Philippines' comprehensive renewable energy policies, which include auctions, net metering schemes, tax incentives, and an aggressive clean energy target of 35% renewable energy in the power mix by 2030," the DOE said.

"As the only emerging market in the Asia-Pacific region with all these mechanisms in place, we are paving the way for a more sustainable energy future, not only for our nation but as a model for the region," it added.

However, the DOE said there is a need to further accelerate renewable energy development to address the needs of the country.

"Significantly, while most of the renewable energy investment is domestic, we look forward to realizing the potential of increased foreign participation through recent reforms that allow 100 percent foreign equity in renewable energy projects," it said.

The DOE said the administration of President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. is committed to driving renewable energy development, fostering innovation and creating an enabling environment for both local and international investors.

It added that the government will continue to harness the potential of the country's natural resources.

"This recognition inspires the DOE to further intensify its efforts in achieving our renewable energy goals, ensuring that our nation remains a global beacon of progress in the energy transition," the DOE said.

THE DAILY GUARDIAN

Drylands now make up 40% of land on Earth, excluding Antarctica, study says

An area nearly a third larger than India turned permanently arid in past three decades, research shows.

An area of land nearly a third larger than India has turned from humid conditions to dryland – arid areas where agriculture is difficult – in the past three decades, research has found.

Drylands now make up 40% of all land on Earth, excluding Antarctica. Three-quarters of the world's land suffered drier conditions in the past 30 years, which is likely to be permanent, according to the study by the UN Science Policy Interface, a body of scientists convened by the United Nations.

Africa lost about 12% of its GDP owing to the increasing aridity between 1990 and 2015, the report found. Even worse losses are forecast: Africa will lose about 16% of its GDP, and Asia close to 7%, in the next half decade.

Ibrahim Thiaw, executive secretary of the UN convention to combat desertification (UNCCD), said: "Unlike droughts – temporary periods of low rainfall – aridity represents a permanent, unrelenting transformation.

"Droughts end. When an area's climate becomes drier, however, the ability to return to previous conditions is lost. The drier climates now affecting vast lands across the globe will not return to how they were, and this change is redefining life on Earth."

Some crops will be particularly at risk: maize yields are projected to halve in Kenya by 2050, if current trends continue. Drylands are areas where 90% of the rainfall is lost to evaporation, leaving only 10% for vegetation. Two-thirds of land globally will store less water by mid-century, according to the report published on Monday.

Governments are more than halfway through a global conference in Riyadh, which concludes this Friday, under the UNCCD. Saudi Arabia is one of the world's most arid countries, and is anxious to use the fortnight of talks to gain global agreement on halting the degradation of the world's lands, and begin restoring affected areas.

Despite hosting the conference, Saudi Arabia has appeared reluctant to talk about the climate crisis, which is the key driver of desertification around the world. Saudi Arabia played an obstructive role at a key climate summit, the UN framework convention on climate change conference of the parties (Cop) in Azerbaijan last month.

The world's water problems are fast growing more acute as a result of global failure to tackle greenhouse gas emissions. According to the UN SPI (science-policy interface) study, as of 2020, about 30% of the population – 2.3 billion people globally – lived in drylands, up from about 22.5% in 1990.

By 2100, this is projected to double, if too little is done to reduce carbon emissions. Nearly half of Africa's people already live in drylands.

Barron Orr, chief scientist at UNCCD, said: "For the first time, a UN scientific body is warning that burning fossil fuels is causing permanent drying across much of the world, with potentially catastrophic impacts affecting access to water that could push people and nature even closer to disastrous tipping points."

Climate breakdown is "inextricably linked" to the world's water crisis, multiple studies have shown, but poor farming practices, overextraction of water, the erosion of soil and destruction of natural vegetation are also factors.

Praveena Sridhar, chief technical officer of the Save Soil campaign group, said: "Healthy soils are the foundation of life. Drying lands signify degraded soils, and the cause is clear: human activity.

"Intensive agriculture is the leading driver of land and soil degradation, fuelling biodiversity loss, carbon sequestration decline, and worsening floods, droughts and wildfires – issues rapidly increasing across the globe."

Experts called on governments to act. Mark Maslin, professor of earth system science at University College London, who was not involved with the study, warned: "This is the land we rely on to produce food. [This] is not only a warning but a call to politicians that there are solutions.

"First: we can curb greenhouse gas emissions, which will reduce climate change and global aridification. Second, we can acknowledge the world is drying and take measures to slow it down and to adapt to it.

"We now have so many solutions: sustainable agriculture, water management, reforestation and rewilding to education and awareness building. Ultimately good local and national governance is required to deal with the desertification of our precious life-giving planet."

Kate Gannon, research fellow at the Grantham Institute, London School of Economics, told the Guardian: "Rising aridity deepens poverty, forces over-exploitation of fragile resources and accelerates land degradation, creating a vicious cycle of resource scarcity, water insecurity and diminished agricultural potential.

"These communities, with the least capacity to adapt, face dire consequences to health, nutrition and wellbeing from risks of food shortages, displacement, and forced migration. This is not only a profound injustice, but also a global challenge."

CCC IN THE NEWS:

BUSINESS WORLD

Amid the reality of climate change, 'No way but net zero'

Amid the undeniable reality of climate change, "there is no other way to go but net zero," emphasized one of the leading movers of climate action in the Philippine private sector at the country's first-ever annual conference on net zero, which was attended by an estimated 400 participants from businesses, policy-making bodies, financial institutions and other stakeholders.

Federico Lopez, chairman and chief executive of Energy Development Corp. (EDC) parent First Philippine Holdings Corp., opened the event with a keynote message that underscored a multi-sectoral approach of policy, funding and innovation in tackling the country's decarbonization goals.

"While addressing the climate crisis feels such a daunting task, we remain optimistic and encouraged as we see a myriad of sectors of society coming together and taking collective action," he remarked.

One such vital effort is the Net Zero Carbon Alliance (NZCA), the pioneering consortium of Philippine businesses and enterprises convened by EDC, the all-renewable energy arm of the Lopez Group's First Gen Corp. The launch of the Net Zero Conference coincided with NZCA's third anniversary.

"Our mission [at the Lopez Group] to forge collaborative pathways to a decarbonized and regenerative future continues to guide our path, and we reaffirm our commitment to work together with all stakeholders, including the Net Zero Carbon Alliance to rally more businesses and organizations across all sectors to achieve our net zero ambition," added Mr. Lopez.

The conference conducted plenary sessions that focused on policy, finance and technological innovations as critical climate action strategies in order to achieve the country's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to the global mission of attaining net zero by 2050.

Representative Jose Manuel F. Alba of the 1st District of Bukidnon was one of the special guests at the event, being a member of the House Committee on Climate Change and co-author of House Bill 7705 or the Low-Carbon Economy Bill. The legislation aims to engage the private sector toward decarbonization through viable and cost-competitive, low-carbon investments.

In terms of financing, "the transition to net zero represents one of the largest economic shifts of our time," said Orkhan Mustafayev, Senior Advisor to the High-Level Champion on Business Engagement for COP29. He cited the International Energy Agency (IEA) in estimating that the global net zero journey will require clean energy investments to grow to US$4 trillion annually by 2030.

In the Philippines, implementing the NDC will require an estimated total investment of around USD 72 billion, according to Secretary Robert E.A. Borje, vice-chairperson and executive director of the Climate Change Commission. Thus, he urged the private sector to see this as an opportunity to invest in opportunities in a green economy.

“Our country is well-positioned to benefit from the transition to a low-carbon economy, and the private sector has a crucial role to play in driving this transformation,” said Mr. Borje. “The private sector possesses the capital, technology and innovation necessary to drive low-carbon and climate-resilient development pathways.”

The event also included activities that marked NZCA’s third anniversary, such as signing the new partners’ pledge of commitment toward net zero, launching its Net Zero Stages of Progress, and the release of its current partners’ decarbonization accomplishments.

As of the conference, NZCA has counted 34 partner-members from various industries and enterprises such as manufacturing, real estate, hospitality, information technology, mobility, finance, and the academe, as well as five partner-enabler organizations.

Its new partners include Calibr8 Systems, Coca-Cola Beverages Philippines, Inc., Container Living PH, Control Union, De La Salle-College of Saint Benilde, Inc.,First Philec, Fluor Daniel Inc., GHD Pty. Ltd., Hocheng Philippines Corporation, InterCharge Corporation, OCS Philippines, SLB, and Weave Solutions Inc.

=END=