



NEWS ROUNDUP

11 DECEMBER 2024 [08:30 am]

- World Bank lowers PH growth forecast as storms take toll
- Balance and transition in the Philippine energy sector
- New loss and damage fund boss urged to keep costs down
- PAGASA: Cloudy skies, rains over parts of PH due to 3 weather systems
- Legarda: 'Soft power' needed to address global climate change challenges, widen Philippines' cultural influence
- Philippines, Japan commit to climate-resilient infrastructure development
- PH gets 10.7-M euro funding for climate resilience projects
- U.S. peace corps hosts climate leadership training for PSHS students
- World Cup sparks climate concerns

ABS CBN

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By: Benise Balaoing and Andrea Taguines

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BUSINESS WORLD

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By: Victor Andres C. Manhit

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MANILA BULLETIN

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By: Hannah L. Torregoza

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By: Trixee Rosel

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PHILIPPINE NEWS AGENCY

[PH gets 10.7-M euro funding for climate resilience projects](#)

By: Kris Crismundo

The Philippines is getting 10.7 million euros, or about PHP655 million, from the European Union (EU) to support climate mitigation and adaptation initiatives in the country.

SUNSTAR

[U.S. peace corps hosts climate leadership training for PSHS students](#)

From November 18 to 22 in Iloilo City, the U.S. Peace Corps organized a workshop that trained students from the Philippine Science High School System (PSHS System) to plan and implement sustainable, science-driven climate solutions in their schools and communities.

THE MANILA TIMES

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Information and Knowledge Management Division

ABS CBN

World Bank lowers PH growth forecast as storms take toll

By: Benise Balaoing and Andrea Taguines

The World Bank lowered its 2024 growth forecast for the Philippines to 5.9 percent from 6 percent as severe weather disturbances took their toll on the economy.

In its latest Philippine economic update, the multilateral lender said the country should also see more robust growth in 2025 and 2026.

In its latest Philippine economic update, the multilateral lender said the country should also see more robust growth in 2025 and 2026.

The World Bank said the country saw sustained growth momentum over the past three quarters. But it also noted how several typhoons have affected millions of people, destroyed crops and property, damaged infrastructure, and disrupted economic activity, particularly in tourism and construction.

Growth came in at a disappointing 5.2 percent in the third quarter due to a series of storms which affected government spending and agricultural output.

The World Bank, however, noted that growth will pick up to 6.1 percent in 2025, then 6 percent in 2026. The multilateral lender said growth will average 6 percent from 2024 to 2026, depending on the government's ability to rein in inflation, implement a more supportive monetary policy to foster business growth, and sustain government spending on infrastructure.

Private consumption--or how much Filipinos spend on food, clothing, and entertainment--will be the main driver of the Philippine economy in the next two years, the World Bank said.

It noted that low and stable inflation, a steady inflow of remittances, higher employment, more credit, and falling interest rates will increase consumption.

Robust growth will speed up poverty reduction because of improvements in household incomes and strong job creation, the World Bank said.

But the Philippines remains vulnerable to extreme weather events like typhoons and heavy monsoon rains, said Country Director for the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam Zafer Mustafaoğlu.

World Bank senior economist Jaffar Al-Rikabi said the Philippines must boost its digital transformation while working on resilience to climate change and strengthening social protection for the vulnerable.

“Increased digitalization could provide expanded market access, build resilience to economic shocks, and increase the country’s productivity, efficiency, and competitiveness,” he said.

Al-Rikabi also urged the Philippines to boost its human capital by improving Filipinos’ health, education, and job skills.

“Our projections around growth tell a story that soon enough, I won’t say which month or year, the Philippines should achieve upper middle income status,” said Al-Rikabi.

But he also noted that their outlook is much more tilted to the downside, citing risks such as global trade policy uncertainty and geopolitical tensions.

He said this is also one of the reasons why the World Bank’s growth projections for 2024 and 2025 both fall at the lower end of the Philippine government’s own targets.

The Philippine growth target has been narrowed to 6 to 6.5 percent from the initial target of 6 to 7 percent.

“The growth projection we have is a baseline projection so, of course, more reform, faster, deeper, well implemented reforms could result in higher growth,” he said.

“But also the global environment matters right? If you have increased tariffs, this could drag on growth,” Al-Rikabi added, in light of the expected protectionist trade policies that will take effect under US President-elect Donald Trump.

So how should the Philippine government act?

World Bank Lead Economist Gonzalo Varela said the obvious response is to continue implementing investment-friendly initiatives and reforms that will make the country more competitive, especially considering regional neighbors like Vietnam, which has already greatly benefited from the trade rerouting that resulted from the US-China trade war.

“One has to do with advanced reforms to decrease trade costs. On this area, the government of the Philippines has an agenda on free trade agreements,” he said.

“What are reforms we can do at home to attract more investment? This has to do with better regulation, streamlining regulations, reducing investment cost, increasing competition and upskilling the labor force that will help the Philippines seize opportunities,” he added.

Varela also said that the ongoing feud between Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and Vice President Sara Duterte, as well as the upcoming 2025 elections should not be too concerning since “what matters for growth is policy stability.”

“Policy stability can be insulated from the political side. The PSA (Public Services Act) amendment, the DOE (Department of Energy) resolution to have majority stakeholder for foreign investments in renewable energy— these are important reforms that were initiated in one administration and were continued in another administration that contribute to policy stability,” he said.

THE CATCHUP CHALLENGE

But while on track to become an upper-middle-income country, the World Bank’s latest assessment also noted that the Philippines’ ability to catch up to the advanced economies has been slowing down.

It said this “rut” is actually common for many countries undergoing a similar transition.

Al-Rikabi said more investments in human capital, rather than just capital formation, is key to addressing this.

“It is relatively easy to learn to build bridges, roads, connect your cities and villages. That gives you a lot of growth. But then if you want to grow even more, you need to be selling more and more to the world’s economy. You need to be selling goods and services of higher quality. That requires more investment in your people,” he said.

He also does not worry too much about the possible repercussions of the Philippines losing Official Development Assistance benefits once it achieves an upper middle income economy status.

“With good fiscal management, we shouldn’t be worried too much about the interest expense bill. The key is to focus on, over the medium term, narrowing the fiscal deficit and ensuring efficient expenditure and tax policies,” he said.

He said this risk could also be minimized should interest rates continue to decline, which would reduce the interest expense on loans over time.

BUSINESS WORLD

Balance and transition in the Philippine energy sector

By: Victor Andres C. Manhit

It is tempting to say that transitioning to renewable energy must be done at the soonest possible time, for the sake of the environment. There is no argument with this lofty goal. Dirty sources of energy, for centuries, have brought the planet the scourge of global warming. The impact has been devastating; the threats it poses, existential.

There are certain realities, however, that one must contend with. The Philippine population is growing, and its economy is rapidly expanding. Stable, sufficient, reliable, and affordable power is a requisite to our ability to respond to the needs of the people and to the demands of economic development.

Thus, a sudden shift, while environmentally desirable, is not yet realistic at the moment. Renewable energy (RE) sources are not yet as affordable and accessible as we would like them to be. At this point, these will not yet be able to provide the stability, sufficiency, reliability, and affordability that the country needs.

As a result, the Philippine Energy Plan (PEP) has identified a target balanced energy mix that the country would work towards at the start of every decade. Specifically, renewable energy sources are required to make up 35% of the total energy mix by 2030, increasing to 50% by 2040, and exceeding 50% by 2050. Having a balanced energy mix means utilizing diverse resources to reduce dependence on any single energy source.

The PEP also provides for the integration of RE and nuclear power. Nuclear power capacity is planned to increase to 1,200 megawatts (MW) by 2032, 2,400 MW by 2035, and 4,800 MW by 2050.

These goals are commendable, but ultimately the question boils down to whether they are even attainable at all. And they are — if we acknowledge that we cannot do it on our own and that we need to forge partnerships with like-minded nations. The transition requires massive investments in infrastructure, advanced technology, and policy innovation.

For instance, the Philippines' growing relationship with Canada, a nation globally acknowledged as a leader in energy transition, bolsters our chance of achieving these targets and having a truly diverse and balanced energy mix. Canada itself has successfully phased out coal while integrating RE and nuclear energy into its energy mix. Its expertise in responsible mining and grid modernization also aligns perfectly with the Philippines' needs.

Moreover, in a recent survey conducted by Pulse Asia, Canada ranked third among the most trusted partners for the Philippines' national development.

It is thus with much enthusiasm and optimism that we at the Stratbase Institute, in partnership with the Embassy of Canada to the Philippines and Natural Resources Canada, recently held a Philippines-Canada Forum on Energy Transition.

During the forum, Department of Energy Undersecretary Rowena Guevara said: “Canada’s expertise in renewable energy and nuclear power and grid modernization presents immense opportunities for knowledge sharing and economic transfer. By cooperating with Canadian entities, we can accelerate the deployment of cutting-edge solutions for the Philippines. Joint ventures in energy technologies like hydrogen production can also strengthen both nations’ decarbonization efforts.”

She added that Canada’s development assistance and commercial initiatives could provide critical support for our energy transition that includes nuclear power starting 2040, ensuring that the shift to a low-carbon future is equitable and inclusive.

Partnerships likewise unlock crucial financing. According to Department of Environment and Natural Resources Undersecretary Analiza Teh, implementing the country’s Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement will require approximately \$72 billion.

“The greatest financing needs are in the energy sector, estimated to require an investment of \$36.5 billion,” she said, adding that Canada’s stature in responsible mining would truly help the Philippines develop our own critical minerals industry to become a player in the global transition value chain.

International collaboration is also fully grasped by the private sector. Janssen Dela Cruz of Prime Infrastructure emphasized that the country’s grid is struggling to keep pace with its rapid energy expansion.

Jonathan Back, Group Chief Finance Officer and Chief Strategy Officer at ACEN, acknowledged the intermittence of renewable energy and emphasized his belief that nuclear power will play a significant role in shaping the Philippines’ energy landscape.

Canada has recently demonstrated its commitment to supporting the development of nuclear energy in the Philippines. During the inaugural Philippine International Nuclear Supply Chain Forum held last month, Canadian Ambassador to the Philippines David Hartman announced that Canada and the Philippines are nearing the conclusion of negotiations for an Administrative Arrangement, which will operationalize the 1983 Canada-Philippines Nuclear Cooperation Agreement.

Meanwhile, Jimmy Villaroman, President of Aboitiz Renewables, highlighted the challenges of integrating renewable energy into the grid. “Substantial investments in transmission and distribution infrastructure, as well as advanced energy storage solutions, are needed to ensure reliable and resilient energy systems,” he said.

Perhaps the best manifestation of Canada's willingness to partner with the Philippines is the sheer size of its delegation to the trade mission — 300 Canadians from over 190 business organizations. Paul Thoppil, the Indo-Pacific Trade Representative for the Canadian government, emphasized Canada's readiness to collaborate. Jean-Sébastien Fabry, Global Trade Policy Director at Natural Resources Canada, echoed this sentiment, affirming Canada's willingness to "work alongside the Philippines in advancing its energy transition."

Achieving a balanced and diverse energy mix according to plan is a challenge. Fortunately, for the Philippines, global leaders such as Canada are ready and willing to share its expertise and provide support. Through this, we can do right by our planet while also ensuring the economic security of the nation and our people.

CLIMATE HOME NEWS

[New loss and damage fund boss urged to keep costs down](#)

By: Joe Lo

With just \$69 million in the bank account of the fledgling loss and damage fund so far, its new executive director was urged to keep running costs as low as possible at his first board meeting this month.

Board members from 26 governments around the world questioned the fund's current and planned spending on consultants, business-class plane tickets and the need to have a deputy executive director, at the four-day meeting in the Philippines.

Harjeet Singh, a climate activist who was at the meeting, told Climate Home the fund's secretariat "must exercise the utmost caution and prudence in utilising resources intended for vulnerable communities recovering from climate impacts. It bears a profound responsibility to make decisions judiciously, particularly concerning its size and travel expenditures."

Climate survivors' fund

Governments agreed to set up the fund, which aims to help people whose lives have been shattered by extreme weather and rising seas fuelled by climate change, at the COP27 climate summit in Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt, after three decades of advocacy led by island nations.

Negotiators on the fund's board – 12 from developed and 14 from developing nations – have spent the two years since then discussing the details of how the fund will work and, in September, they chose Senegalese-American banker Ibrahima Cheikh Diong to be its first executive director.

At his first meeting with the board last week in Manila, Diong laid out his plan to get the organisation up and running so that it can start giving out money by the end of 2025.

The plan involves extensive use of external consultants – but some board members pushed back against the costs involved. Diong presented a budget that set aside nearly \$0.7m to pay consultants in the first six months of 2025, out of a total budget of \$4.3m.

Sudanese board member Sumaya Zakieldean said the organisation – whose full name is the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD) – should move towards getting in-house staff to do as much of the work as possible, as fast as possible next year.

She said she found the prospect of waiting until 2026 to get most of the staff hired "a little bit scary" because it would mean using external advisers and consultants in the interim – "and we know the cost implications of that".

Fiji's Daniel Lund, however, said he supported the use of short-term consultants so that the fund can stay on track. "We don't see any other way to deliver that substance in the time-frames that we put in place," he said.

Business-class controversy

A further \$0.6m will be spent on staff travel in the first half of 2025. As the fund is hosted by the World Bank, it has taken on the bank's human resources policy, including its travel policy which allows staff to go business class if the flight is over five hours.

Denmark's Jens Fugl said the \$0.6m was "substantial", adding that "travel should be on a need-to basis" and "not everyone from the secretariat needs to be at all board meetings, because that would really be a significant cost that we should try to avoid".

Diong replied that he wanted to develop a "bottom-up approach" by engaging with a range of groups around the world and "you can't do that from Washington DC", where the fund is based at the World Bank's headquarters.

He added that travel was necessary to persuade governments to give more money to the fund. But, he promised, "we will be extremely sensitive in making sure that we don't over-travel".

The board members are not employed by the fund, which means they are not bound by the World Bank's rules and can set their own travel policy. The board decided that developed-country governments will pay for their own representatives to travel to meetings while the fund will pay for developing-country board members, their alternate member and one adviser each.

They decided to copy the policy of the United Nations and the Green Climate Fund, which is that flights should be economy class unless they are nine hours or longer, when personnel can choose business class but are "encouraged to voluntarily downgrade".

This policy was resisted by the US and Denmark, who wanted more economy travel to reduce spending and emissions. The US's Rebecca Lawlor said that flying business class produces three times as much greenhouse gas as economy class, while Denmark's Fugl said officials' mode of travel is "something there is a lot of scrutiny about".

But the Philippines' board member Mark Dennis Y.C. Joven – whose country is the board's legal host – questioned why the fund's developing-country board members should follow a different travel policy from the fund's staff. He asked if that would cause "administrative inefficiencies and delays" and "raise the issue of unfair treatment or discrimination".

The fund plans to spend \$261,000 next year, mainly on getting its developing-country board members, alternates and advisers to a board meeting in Barbados. Several

developed-country board members called for more virtual meetings, but developing-country members largely opposed this, citing problems with internet connectivity and anti-social hours.

Late payments

Diong's proposal to hire a deputy executive director early next year was also questioned. Board members from Sudan and Honduras asked for more justification for the position, while the Democratic Republic of Congo's member said the board should not micromanage.

Diong said his deputy would focus on operations, advocacy and communications which would free up Diong to work on raising money, particularly pressuring wealthy nations to convert their pledges into actual financial transfers.

While rich nations have promised \$749m to the fund – most if it a year ago at COP28 – just \$69m has landed in its coffers to date, with the World Bank expecting this to rise to \$150m by the end of the year. The UAE, UK, France and Italy between them owe over \$350m.

In Baku last month, COP29 president Mukhtar Babayev pushed governments to pay up. "All countries that have pledged money must complete their contribution agreements," he said. On top of that, "we need more pledges so we can meet the urgent needs of climate change victims," he added.

GMA NEWS

PAGASA: Cloudy skies, rains over parts of PH due to 3 weather systems

The shear line, easterlies, and Northeast Monsoon (Amihan) will continue to bring cloudy skies with rains over parts of the country, PAGASA said on Wednesday.

In its 4 a.m. bulletin, the state weather bureau said Metro Manila, CALABARZON, Nueva Ecija, Bulacan, Aurora, Camarines Norte, Camarines Sur, and Catanduanes will have cloudy skies with scattered rains and isolated thunderstorms due to the shear line.

Residents in these areas are advised to be prepared for possible flash floods or landslides due to moderate to heavy rains.

The easterlies will bring cloudy skies with scattered rains and thunderstorms in Eastern Samar, Dinagat Islands, Surigao del Norte, and Surigao del Sur, which may trigger possible flash floods or landslides due to moderate to heavy rains.

PAGASA issued the same flash flood warning in Cagayan Valley, Apayao, Kalinga, Mountain Province, and Ifugao which will experience cloudy skies with rains brought by the Northeast Monsoon on Amihan.

Amihan will bring partly cloudy to cloudy skies with isolated light rains in Ilocos Region, and the rest of Cordillera Administrative Region and Central Luzon.

The rest of the country will have partly cloudy to cloudy skies with isolated rainshowers or thunderstorms due to the easterlies.

Sunset is at 5:28 p.m.

MANILA BULLETIN

[Legarda: 'Soft power' needed to address global climate change challenges, widen Philippines' cultural influence](#)

By: Hannah L. Torregoza

The strategic use of soft power will enable the Philippines to influence the global stage, foster international collaboration and address pressing global challenges, including climate change issues.

Senator Loren Legarda highlighted this during her speech at the Department of Foreign Affairs' Foreign Policy Address.

"Our culture and environment are intertwined wellsprings of strength. Together, they form a power that transcends boundaries, builds connections, and influences the world—not through coercion but persuasion and attraction," Legarda said in her speech.

"This is soft power, and it rests on our cultural identity, creative expression, and ecological stewardship," she stressed.

For one, Legarda cited the Philippines' historic return to the Venice Biennale in 2015 after a 51-year absence, as part of efforts at advancing the country's cultural diplomacy.

"Our reentry into the Venice Biennale redefined global engagement by centering on human stories and sparking collective action for positive change," she recalled.

The senator also highlighted the Philippines' forthcoming role as Guest of Honour at the 2025 Frankfurt Book Fair, the world's largest literary event.

Legarda said she worked tirelessly to secure this prestigious participation, driven by a vision to elevate Filipino ingenuity and storytelling on the global stage believing in the brilliance of Filipinos.

"If other nations have carved their place on this prestigious stage, why not the Philippines? Why shouldn't our luminous literary heritage be celebrated alongside the world's greatest voices?" she pointed out.

Another significant milestone in cultural diplomacy is the historic vicarage of Pastor Ullmer in Wilhelmsfeld, Germany—where Dr. Jose Rizal stayed for three months. The property will soon belong to the Philippines.

According to Legarda, upon learning that the property was placed on the market, she took decisive steps to secure it for the nation. She said the acquisition of the property is important as it is a vital connection to the country's rich heritage.

Furthermore, Legarda said the strategic role of soft power in driving urgent climate action is very important.

“Soft power is anything but soft,” asserted Legarda, the UNDRR Global Champion for Resilience.

“It reshapes perceptions, transforms societies, and fosters collaboration. When wielded with purpose, it allows us to lead by example and offer the world a model for resilience, sustainability, and harmony,” she stressed.

Philippines, Japan commit to climate-resilient infrastructure development

By: Trixee Rosel

Officials of the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) and their counterparts in Japan have strengthened their partnership to enhance climate-resilient infrastructure, particularly in road construction and tunnel operations.

DPWH Senior Undersecretary Emil K. Sadain and Japan's Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT) Assistant Vice Minister Hashimoto Masamichi led key discussions at the 3rd Workshop on Technical and Business Cooperation for Road Construction and Tunnel Operation and Maintenance, held on Dec. 6 at the Diamond Hotel in Manila.

The workshop addressed critical issues such as road construction, tunnel operations, and large-scale repairs of expressways and bridges, with a focus on mitigating climate change impacts.

Sadain emphasized Japan's pivotal role in ensuring Philippine infrastructure projects meet global standards for quality and sustainability.

Presentations from Japanese organizations, including JICA, NEXCO Central, and MLIT, shared best practices and technical solutions with DPWH officials, private contractors, and expressway concessionaires.

A highlight of the event was DPWH Secretary Manuel M. Bonoan receiving the FY2023 International Lifetime Contribution Award from the Japan Society of Civil Engineers (JSCE), marking the first time the honor was presented to a non-Japanese individual.

In his acceptance speech, Bonoan expressed gratitude, noting that the award reflected the Philippines' growing influence in global civil engineering and inspired local engineers to pursue excellence in resilient infrastructure development.

Further strengthening bilateral ties, the Philippine Institute of Civil Engineers (PICE) and JSCE signed an Agreement of Cooperation to foster innovation and collaboration in advancing the Philippines' infrastructure goals.

In closing, Hashimoto and Japanese Ambassador Kazuhiko Koshikawa reaffirmed Japan's commitment to providing technical assistance and funding for key infrastructure projects in the Philippines.

PHILIPPINE NEWS AGENCY

[PH gets 10.7-M euro funding for climate resilience projects](#)

By: Kris Crismundo

The Philippines is getting 10.7 million euros, or about PHP655 million, from the European Union (EU) to support climate mitigation and adaptation initiatives in the country.

The new funding is part of the Climate Fund Managers' (CFM) Climate Investor Two (CI2) Fund, a USD1 billion blended finance facility focusing on water, waste, and ocean infrastructure in emerging economies.

"Communities in the Philippines are amongst the most impacted by global warming. Only with public sector commitments like the EU's can we unlock private investment at a sufficient scale to drive meaningful change," CFM investment director Jeb Victorino said in a statement Tuesday.

Victorino added that the funding would mobilize private sector investment in critical sectors, such as the circular economy and green energy transition projects in the country.

A portion of the new funding, announced by the EU on Dec. 6, will support the development of the bioenergy facility in San Manuel, Isabela.

The CFM is co-developing the facility with BioAsia Energy Holdings, a joint venture of Anvirya Ventures Pte. Ltd. and La Suerte Rice Mill Corp. (LSRM), one of the largest paddy milling operators in Isabela province.

The project will start construction in the fourth quarter of 2025, building a 10-megawatt (MW) biomass plant and a 4-MW biogas plant.

The San Manuel bioenergy facility aims to contribute renewable energy and gas capacity to the grid while reducing the emission of 40,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO₂eq) annually.

"This initiative represents a significant step forward in sustainable energy development for our region, addressing the dual challenges of agricultural waste and renewable energy generation. By working together, we can create a lasting impact for the farmers and communities of Isabela, while contributing to the Philippines' broader climate resilience and renewable energy goals," LSRM president Richard Tan said.

The additional EU funding for the Philippines will be coursed through the FMO, a Dutch development bank.

“The Philippines is one of the countries most affected by climate change. But we are all experiencing its effects, also in the Netherlands. CI2 is a showcase example of how the public and private sector can work together, each optimally using its added value. Public funding will contribute to project development and de-risking where necessary, facilitating private sector investment,” Dutch Ambassador to the Philippines Marielle Geraedts said.

“The European Union is steadfast in its support for the world’s most vulnerable regions. In the Philippines, communities face extreme weather events, rising sea levels, and water scarcity on an increasing basis. This additional commitment enables essential investments in projects like the Isabela facility that mitigate these challenges, building climate resilience that will benefit the Philippines for generations,” EU Ambassador to the Philippines Massimo Santoro added.

SUNSTAR

[U.S. peace corps hosts climate leadership training for PSHS students](#)

From November 18 to 22 in Iloilo City, the U.S. Peace Corps organized a workshop that trained students from the Philippine Science High School System (PSHS System) to plan and implement sustainable, science-driven climate solutions in their schools and communities.

During the workshop titled “Building Student Volunteer Leaders for Climate Change Initiatives,” 36 students from PSHS campuses nationwide trained on conceptualizing, planning, and prototyping climate change solutions. They are expected to implement these projects following consultations with their local communities, exemplifying volunteerism and the role youth can play in the fight against climate change.

Funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development and co-facilitated by climate change expert-facilitators from SEED4COM, the training is part of the U.S. Peace Corps’ broader commitment to addressing global climate challenges by collaborating with host country partners and integrating climate change adaptation in its program and training activities.

“We are partnering with the PSHS System to tap the potential of STEM education when applied to climate action,” said Peace Corps Country Director Marguerite Roy. “I am excited to see how the participating students will build on this training, bring their projects to life, and influence others to become agents of change.”

Student participants, together with 16 PSHS System faculty members and eight Peace Corps Volunteers with their work partners, also attended discussions and field visits to local climate resilience projects such as the Leganes Integrated Katunggan EcoPark, Climate Field School, and Orchard Valley Farm to deepen their knowledge on climate change, biodiversity conservation, disaster risk reduction, and volunteerism.

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THE MANILA TIMES

[World Cup sparks climate concerns](#)

The 2030 FIFA World Cup will send dozens of football teams and hordes of fans crisscrossing the globe for matches on three continents, sparking alarm over the environmental cost.

An announcement on the 2030 and 2034 World Cups will be made on Wednesday, with expectations of a dramatic expansion of geographic footprint — and with that planet-heating greenhouse gas emissions.

While Saudi Arabia is the lone candidate for 2034, Morocco, Spain and Portugal have formed a joint bid for the 2030 tournament, with Uruguay, Argentina and Paraguay each also set to host a match.

Guillaume Gouze, of the Centre of Sports Law and Economics at the University of Limoges, said FIFA has a "moral responsibility" to integrate climate concerns into its tournament plans.

Instead, he said, it had proposed World Cups that are an "ecological aberration."

'Crazy idea'

Benja Faecks of the NGO Carbon Market Watch, which evaluates climate promises of major events, told AFP that in general attempts at greenwashing in sport — or "sportswashing" — are harder than they used to be, with academics and campaigners holding organizations to account.

But she said that the 2030 tournament was "an unfortunate geographic choice."

When an event is spread over sites thousands of kilometers apart, teams and potentially hundreds of thousands of their loyal fans have to travel by plane.

The three matches in Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay are to mark the 100th anniversary of the event, which was born in Montevideo.

FIFA is keen to support access to football across different parts of the world, said David Gogishvili, a researcher at the University of Lausanne in Switzerland.

But "it is a crazy idea in terms of the impact this choice will have on the planet," he added.

FIFA has already expanded participation in the competition, which will see 48 teams take part in the 2026 edition — held in Mexico, the United States and Canada — compared to 32 in 2022.

This "is almost worse than the Cup on three continents," says Aurelien Francois, who teaches sports management at the University of Rouen in France.

More teams means more fans wanting to visit the venues, more capacity needed in the hotel and catering sector, and more waste, among other issues.

FIFA says that, with the exception of the games in Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay "for 101 games, the tournament will be played in a footprint of neighboring countries in close geographic proximity and with extensive and well developed transport links and infrastructure."

Meanwhile, oil and gas giant Saudi Aramco became a major sponsor earlier this year in a controversial deal that runs through to 2027.

In October, an open letter from more than a hundred female professional footballers across 24 countries called for the deal to be cancelled on the grounds of human rights and environmental concerns, saying: "FIFA might as well pour oil on the pitch and set it alight."

Just shrinking the geographic footprint is not enough, researchers said.

While the 2022 World Cup was held in a "compact" site in Qatar, it was necessary to build new air-conditioned stadiums that were rarely reused.

Potential improvements could include a policy of not awarding the World Cup to a city where everything has yet to be built, echoing a rule by the International Olympic Committee, said Gogishvili.

Another idea to reduce air travel is to reserve a large proportion of stadium tickets for fans travelling from within a few hundred kilometers, and encourage transport by train.

Gouze, like other experts interviewed by AFP, supports creating more fan zones in soccer-loving cities for "a collective experience" that recreates the stadium atmosphere in front of a big screen.

But this would need FIFA to accept the impact on the economic profitability of the World Cup.

Soccer fans are a reflection of the population as a whole, so a growing percentage are more environmentally conscious than even a few years ago, said Ronan Evain of Hamburg-based Football Supporters Europe.

He said that while co-hosting is not a problem in and of itself, citing the example of the 2002 Cup co-hosted by Japan and South Korea, the 2030 tournament poses "too many questions" for fans.

These include the environmental costs, as well as financial considerations for fans trying to follow their teams across the planet.

But die-hard supporters will not let the long-haul flight put them off, said Antoine Miche, director of Football Ecologie France.

"Passion can make you do things that don't make sense," he added.

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