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DAILY GUARDIAN

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MANILA BULLETIN

[THE GREEN TEA — On authentic civil society engagement in nature and climate](#)

By: Billie Dumaliang

As the echoes of the 28th Conference of Parties of the UN Convention on Climate Change (COP 28) fade, I find myself contemplating the essence of genuine civil society involvement in the realms of nature, climate, and governance. This introspection stems from my organization's inaugural participation as an official observer at these pivotal international climate discussions.

[\[Opinion\] The leader we need now](#)

By: Anna Mae Lamentillo

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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

[Bracing for the dry spell](#)

A line from the popular Filipino Christmas song “Himig ng Pasko” goes: “Malamig ang simoy ng hangin,” referring to the cooler temperatures during this season. But not so this year because it’s a warmer-than-usual December as El Niño continues to affect the country, especially Batangas, Cavite, and Oriental Mindoro. The dry spell is predicted to last until the second quarter of 2024 and is likely to hit almost 80 percent of the provinces.

[PH at ‘severe’ risk of ecological threats seen to worsen conflicts, poverty](#)

By: Kurt Dela Peña

Aggravated by climate change, ecological threats—water and food shortage abetted by population growth- is likely to raise the risks of conflicts and mass displacement worldwide.

PHILIPPINE NEWS AGENCY

[Global crisis unleashed: 2023's devastating floods](#)

Severe natural disasters triggered by climate change marked a calamitous year with thousands tragically killed around the globe.

THE MANILA TIMES

[\[Opinion\] Bamboo has a key role in climate adaptation](#)

For centuries, bamboo has built a reputation as a popular multitasking material. It is used for building houses, making furniture and utensils, crafting musical instruments and weapons, producing feeds for livestock, and providing fabrics for clothing.

[\[Opinion\] Weathering the storm: Navigating climate-care nexus in the Philippines](#)

By: Channe Lindstrøm Oğuzhan, Leah Payud and Jessica Henn

In a coastal community in Leyte province's Tacloban City, Maria's life was intricately woven with the ebb and flow of the sea. Her days were filled with caring for her two young children and selling fish caught by her husband at the market. Little did she know that winds of change were brewing far beyond the horizon.

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

[Barangay rangers at frontlines of protecting Ilocos Norte's forests](#)

By: Edmar Delos Santos

Every month, for 10 days, 68-year-old farmer Jaime Quilling hikes for three hours up a nearby mountain in Barangay San Francisco in Dingras town. With him are 35 fellow barangay ranger officers (BROs), who patrol and maintain 100 hectares of forest land.

CCC IN THE NEWS:

PHILIPPINE NEWS AGENCY

[Christmas and Traffic: Navigating the Festive Gridlock](#)

By: Brian James Lu

Why is it that we always experience nightmarish traffic in Metro Manila during the Christmas holidays? We call it the Christmas rush when traffic is not moving at all. Filipinos call it “carmaggeddon” to illustrate the severity of traffic.

Information and Knowledge Management Division

BUSINESSMIRROR

Endangered species list grows by 2,000—climate change is part of the problem

Climate change is worsening the planet's biodiversity crises, making environments more deadly for thousands of species and accelerating the precipitous decline in the number of plants and animals on Earth, according to an international organization that tracks species health.

Species of salmon and turtles are among those facing a decline as the planet warms.

Atlantic salmon isn't yet threatened with extinction, but its population dropped by nearly a quarter from 2006 to 2020, said the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which tracks biodiversity around the globe.

It is now considered near threatened. They live in fewer places and face human-created hazards like dams and water pollution.

Climate change is making it harder for the fish to find food and easier for alien species to compete, according to the group. Although there are some signs of hope: their numbers ticked up in Maine this past year.

The news was announced at the United Nations climate conference in the United Arab Emirates on December 11.

Leaders of the IUCN updated their Red List of Threatened Species, a tracker of biodiversity around the globe.

It was mainly bad news. The list includes information on 157,000 species, about 7,000 more than last year's update.

The IUCN said just over 44,000 species are threatened with extinction. That's roughly 2,000 more than last year.

"Species around the world are under huge pressure. So no matter where you look, the numbers of threatened species are rising," said Craig Hilton-Taylor, head of the Red List unit at the IUCN.

Climate change is worsening conditions for about 6,700 species threatened with extinction.

The Central South Pacific and East Pacific green turtle is at greater risk because of climate change, for example. Fewer turtles hatch as higher seas inundate nests. Warming waters can harm its food supply of seagrasses.

The update includes the first broad assessment of the health of freshwater fish species.

One-quarter of species—just over 3,000—face an extinction risk.

As climate change raises sea levels, salt water is traveling further up rivers, for example. And these species already face tremendous threats from pollution and overfishing, the IUCN said.

Frogs, salamanders and other amphibians are suffering the most. About 41 percent of these species are under threat.

“They are climate captives because of higher temperatures, drought—whatever happens amphibians cannot move out of harm’s way and are directly impacted by climate change,” said Vivek Menon, deputy chair of the IUCN’s species survival commission.

There was a bit of good news.

Two antelope species are fairing better, although they still have a long way to go before their long-term survival is stabilized.

For example, the scimitar-horned oryx, a light-colored animal with curved horns, had previously been categorized as extinct in the wild but is now endangered.

It faced a lot of threats: poaching, drought and car accidents all played a role in largely eliminating the species by the turn of the century.

But recent efforts to reintroduce the species in Chad have helped and there are now at least 140 adults and more than twice as many calves on a large nature reserve.

IUCN’s director general Grethel Aguilar said it’s clear humans need to act to protect biodiversity and when conservation is done right, it works.

To combat the threat posed by climate change, she said fossil fuels need to be phased out, a contentious focus of this year’s COP28 negotiations.

“Nature is here to help us, so let us help it back,” she said.

CNN

[PH's Yllana Aduana crowned Miss Earth Air 2023](#)

Philippines' bet Yllana Marie Aduana was crowned Miss Air of Miss Earth 2023 pageant held in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam on Friday.

For the final question, she was asked: "An official at a recent climate conference was quoted as saying 'there is no science behind calls for the phaseout of fossil fuels.' Do you agree? Why, or why not?"

Aduana answered: "As someone who is from the medical field, I do believe that everything roots from science and I think that the greatest gift we have in this generation is the sophisticated technical installations that we have and so there is science in the phaseout of fossil fuels."

"One thing we can also agree on is that we can live the zero-waste and sustainable lifestyle. I've always been practicing it because sustainability will always ensure the stability in our future," the Filipino queen added.

Albania's Drita Ziri bagged the coveted crown, succeeding Mina Sue Choi of South Korea.

Meanwhile, this year's other elemental queens were Vietnam's Đỗ Thị Lan Anh as Miss Water; and Thailand's Cora Bliault as Miss Fire.

Aduana is a licensed medical laboratory scientist and model by profession.

The Siniloan, Laguna-born beauty advocates using education as a platform to help fight climate change.

The last Miss Earth winner from the Philippines was Karen Ibasco, who won in 2017.

Other Filipina Miss Earth winners were Karla Henry (2008), Jamie Herrell (2014), and Angelia Ong (2015).

DAILY GUARDIAN

[DOE honors energy-efficient entities](#)

Twenty-seven (27) out of 360 entries from the government and private sectors emerged as the leading organizations with exceptional implementation and adoption of energy efficiency and conservation programs, innovations, and practices, the Department of Energy (DOE) announced during the 2023 Energy Efficiency Excellence (EEE) Awards held at the Hilton Manila in Pasay City on 19 December 2023.

These twenty-seven entities covering the industrial, commercial, and government establishments generated a combined total of more than 20,000 megawatt hours of energy savings, 14,000 tons of CO₂ emissions avoided, and PhP170 million of savings.

Every December coinciding the commemoration of the National Energy Consciousness Month, the DOE honors and acknowledge the organizations that endeavor energy efficiency and sustainability practices. These awards were for many years called the Don Emilio Abello Awards, named after the Father of the Energy Conservation Movement in the Philippines, which he initiated in 1973 in the middle of the oil crisis following the OPEC oil embargo and the overnight increase in oil prices when he was then the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Meralco.

The oil shocks of the 1970s led to a massive push by the government on energy efficiency and conservation through the character of Asiong Aksaya, who personified the consequences of wasting resources that are far from finite. Nowadays, especially with the global energy crisis brought by geopolitical tensions, the escalated concerns over energy security, and the inflationary impact of higher energy prices on the economy and the people's livelihood, the government's call for an efficient use of energy has intensified.

"We, therefore, laud all the participants, with special mention to these 27 entities for their exceptional efforts in making energy efficiency and conservation an enduring part of their business culture and a way of life", Energy Secretary Raphael P.M. Lotilla said, adding that their example hopes to be emulated by more organizations across the country.

The Secretary said the practice of energy efficiency and conservation is central in dealing with today's energy challenges, with its huge potential in mitigating affordability, energy security, and climate change. The draft 2023-2050 Philippine Energy Plan (PEP) aims to achieve 10 percent of energy savings on oil products and electricity by 2040 up to 2050.

He also noted that while the Energy Conservation Act institutionalizes energy efficiency practices, the DOE will continue to enhance its existing policies to align with the fast-changing innovations and technologies that come with energy efficiency and conservation standards, adding that in the coming weeks, the DOE will release policies that will reclassify Designated Establishments in the Commercial, Industrial, and Transport sectors to better capture the energy consumption of these sectors as well as the authorization of energy auditors under the Government Energy Management Program.

The EEE Awards is a non-fiscal incentive given to establishments or organizations that exemplify strong dedication to achieving conservation and are taking the lead in promoting energy efficiency and conservation best practices.

The Awards were divided into three categories – Energy Management for Industries and Buildings, Outstanding Individuals/Groups, and Government.

The Awards for Energy Management for Industries and Buildings have six subcategories, namely, Energy Management for Large Buildings, Energy Management for Small and Medium Buildings, Energy Management for Large Industries, Energy Management for New and Existing Buildings, and Energy Management for Tropical Buildings.

Meanwhile, the sub-category for the Government efficiency awards was divided into National Government Agency (NGA), Government-Owned and Controlled Corporation (GOCC), Local Government Unit (LGU), and State Universities and Colleges (SUCS).

GMA

[Protected bike lanes can do more than just ease Metro Manila's worsening traffic congestion](#)

By: Ted Cordero

Protected bike lanes can do more than just ease Metro Manila's worsening traffic congestion

This doesn't just translate to inconvenience and constant risk of tardiness, but to actual monetary costs. A study by AltMobility and Friedrich Naumann Foundation showed that Metro Manila commuters spend 188 hours in traffic per year (equivalent to 23.5 days of vacation leaves), costing a whopping P27.221 billion in losses to the economy based on average hourly salary in the capital region.

The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) meanwhile estimates the economic impact of road traffic at P3.5 billion a day for Metro Manila and another P2.4 billion for its surrounding provinces like Cavite, Bulacan, Rizal, and Laguna.

And as though that's not enough, traffic congestion is also responsible for air pollution, which in turn affects our health.

In a recent Need to Know video, DENR said 80% of air pollution in Metro Manila comes from the vehicle emission.

A joint monitoring effort of DENR and Clean Air Asia meanwhile found the level of pollution increases during "Ber" months until January, when traffic congestion worsens.

According to DENR data for 2022, Metro Manila air does not meet the World Health Organization's air quality recommendation. In fact, Mehan Garden in Manila clocked in three times more particulate matter than the average annual recommendation of WHO in that year.

All this exposure to poor air quality has the Philippines reporting some 66,000 premature deaths annually. That's not mentioning the health consequences of sedentary hours spent in traffic.

So how do we help ourselves? Enter protected bike lanes and active transport

Cycling translates to healthier people and safer roads. According to DOTr Active Transport Program manager Eldon Dionisio, "Cycling helps reduce the risk of serious

diseases, such as cancer (reduced by 40%), heart illness (reduced by 52%), and prevents around 40% of premature death and depression. Furthermore, cycling also helps curb obesity and prevents the incidence of type II diabetes.”

AltMobility and the Naumann Foundation add that biking can help adults meet the minimum required level of physical activity which in turn could reduce the risk of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as coronary heart disease, diabetes, stroke, and cancer.

“Considering both direct and indirect-direct costs of contracting NCDs, biking generates P0.26 worth of health cost savings for every kilometer cycled. If only 5% of Metro Manila trips are served by cycling, the annual health cost savings would amount to P738.3 billion, which is equivalent to the amount required to build 246 kilometers of bike lanes,” the study said.

Moreover, AltMobility and Naumann Foundation found that as the number of cyclists increases, an individual’s risk of getting hit by a motorist decreases.

“As such, cycling promotion can also help mitigate the steep economic cost of road crashes in Metro Manila, which amounted to as much as P75.32 billion in 2019,” it said.

Apart from its plans of establishing a network of 2,400 kilometers of bike lanes all over the country — building from the 564 kilometers of bike lanes already constructed in Metro Manila, Metro Cebu, and Metro Davao — the DOTr’s Active Transport Project Office is always pursuing the establishment of protected bicycle lanes; Class 1 which is separated from the carriageway and Class 2A which is protected with physical separators, Dionisio said.

“These designs are based on the standards issued by the DPWH (Department of Public Works and Highways) which is based on various international standards as well. In fact, aside from the establishment of new bicycle lanes, the Department’s Active Transport Program includes the improvement of existing infrastructure by widening, paving, and increasing their protection from motor vehicles,” he said.

Dionisio added, “other concerned national and local government agencies should align with the prioritization of sustainable modes of transport to allow the Department to establish safe and protected infrastructure.”

Active transport as a solution to traffic congestion

Because going back to Metro Manila traffic: Cycling can help reduce traffic congestion. According to Dionisio, biking could be an effective traffic solution by “moving more people per unit space,” adding that “one bike is equivalent to 0.2 to 0.25 car unit.”

“Surveys conducted in 2021 showed that at least 50% of road users are willing to shift to active transport should safe infrastructure be available,” Dionisio said.

In fact, a Social Weather Stations survey conducted between May 2020 and March 2023, bicycle-owning households outnumber car-owning ones by a ratio of 4:1.

The percentage of cycling households (with at least one member who cycles regularly) increased from 11% in 2020 to 29% in 2022 and to 36% as of March 2023, the survey added.

In the SWS surveys, among the top reasons for shifting to cycling are to save on fares at 56% and to improve one’s health at 46%.

“On a global average, a kilometer covered by bike generates a social benefit of around P39.00, whereas cars and buses cost society P21.00 and P16.00 per kilometer traveled, respectively,” Dionisio said.

AltMobility and Naumman Foundation study, likewise, found that using a bicycle instead of a car could save a household about P281,462 a year, which can be spent more on food and healthcare. This is based on the basic expenses of owning a vehicle such as registration, fuel, parking fees, and regular maintenance.

When a car user shifts to a bicycle, it means one less motor vehicle on the roads, which equates to one less source of air pollution — and billions of savings for the government.

AltMobility and Naumann Foundation’s study found that building a new bike lane on an existing road instead of a new car lane would save the government P26.8 billion.

“Considering the great majority of households that do not own private vehicles, building bike lanes is more cost-effective and quite literally leads to and can further increase savings,” the study said.

In a bid to encourage active transport among commuters, the DOTr, Dionisio said, is also in the process of installing bicycle end-of-trip facilities in different transport facilities to allow multi-modal mode of transport.

“Further, the Road Sector is currently in coordination with the Rail Sector to also allow full-sized bicycles to board selected train cars,” he said.

“DOTr's Active Transport program includes the establishment of bike lanes traversing public transport (PT) facilities such as stops, stations, and terminals. Further, construction and installation of end-of-trip facilities or bike parking at said PT facilities is in the pipeline as well. Lastly, the program will also pilot the construction of proper PT stops which are integrated with bicycle lanes,” he added.

But pedestrians must not be overlooked

While the government says it prioritizes inclusivity in its infrastructure programs or projects, for sustainable and inclusive transport advocacy group Move As One Coalition authorities might be overlooking on something and that would be the pedestrians.

Move As One Coalition communications consultant Dinna Dayao told GMA News Online that active transport not only covers cycling, it includes walking.

Citing a 2020 Social Weather Stations Survey, Dayao said 44% of Filipinos walk to work “yet pedestrians — including persons with disability (PWD), the elderly, pregnant women, and small children — remain an afterthought in the design and planning of road infrastructure.

“Pedestrians are forced to climb steep, unfriendly, and inconveniently located footbridges. The countdowns on stop lights often favor motorists over pedestrians by allotting them a longer time while pedestrians have to hurry as they cross the street,” she said.

“As a result, pedestrians are at great risk of being hurt or killed by speeding vehicles on our country’s roads. More than 57,000 pedestrians in Metro Manila were hit by vehicles from 2005 to 2015, according to Thinking Machines,” she added.

With this, Dayao said Move As One Coalition is calling on the government to fulfill the declaration in the Philippine Development Plan 2023-2028 that "pedestrians and cyclists will be accorded highest priority in the hierarchy of road users."

“Pedestrians of all ages and abilities need improved infrastructure so that they can walk safely,” she said.

Move As One Coalition’s communications consultant also recommended to change the settings of countdown in stop lights to favor the movement of pedestrians over motorists.

“It is unfair that the safety of pedestrians on the road be disregarded for the speedier travel of the minority — 6% —of Filipinos who own private vehicles,” Dayao said.

Aside from standards-compliant protected bike lanes, Move As One Coalition is urging the government to strictly enforce the 30 kilometers per hour speed limit in cities.

Dayao, citing the World Health Organization, said “this speed limit [is] ‘where people and traffic mix make for streets that are safe, healthy, green and livable, in other words, streets for life’.”

Moreover, she said the government should build ramps and include other features that will improve PWD access... plant trees and other plants that will provide shade to pedestrians.”

For the benefit of both cyclist and pedestrians, Dayao said the Philippines should get rid of footbridges, except in expressways and tollways as well as build crossing that are “simple, direct, and at street level.”

“Elevated walkways are a waste of public funds. Many people — including PWDs, the elderly, and those with children or are carrying heavy packages — avoid using them because it often takes too much time and energy to do so,” she said.

Biking as a climate solution

Besides, the climate crisis warrants humanity to bring down its dependence of fossil fuels, including transportation.

Citing studies, AltMobility and Naumann Foundation said transport is the largest source of air pollution and energy-related greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions at 34%, with road transport accounting for 80% of the emissions.

If a “business-as-usual” scenario would continue for road transport in Metro Manila, GHG emissions in the capital region could amount to 19,300 kilotonnes of CO₂ emissions.

“The establishment of bicycle lanes paves way for a more sustainable mode of transport. The presence of bicycle lanes allows modal shift from motor vehicle drivers to cycling, which effectively reduce carbon emissions,” Dionisio said.

Besides, Dionisio adds “Bicycle life cycles have registered the lowest carbon footprint (around 21 grams CO2 per passenger per kilometer).”

Likewise, AltMobility and Naumann Foundation said that a shift to cycling from driving could save around 245 grams of CO2 per kilometer cycled as driving emits 271 grams of CO2 whereas cycling only produces 26 grams of CO2 -including production and maintenance of a bike.

“The reversal in car dependence will also translate to a reduction of CO2 emissions and is equivalent to planting 2.31 million trees a year,” it said.

A study from the University of Southern Denmark said global carbon emissions would drop by nearly 700 million tonnes per year if everybody cycled like the Dutch.

“Dutch people cycle an average of 2.6 kilometres each per day. If this pattern was replicated worldwide, the study suggests, annual global carbon emissions would drop by 686 million tonnes,”

MANILA BULLETIN

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By: Billie Dumaliang

As the echoes of the 28th Conference of Parties of the UN Convention on Climate Change (COP 28) fade, I find myself contemplating the essence of genuine civil society involvement in the realms of nature, climate, and governance. This introspection stems from my organization's inaugural participation as an official observer at these pivotal international climate discussions.

Admittedly, I am far from an expert in these complex negotiations, but our modest delegation embarked on this journey with dual goals: to absorb knowledge and to amplify our commitment to environmental stewardship and nature-based climate solutions, notably through the Masungi Geopark reforestation initiative in Rizal province.

Our involvement began on a disheartening note. Various civil society organizations, dismayed by the perceived exclusion from the Philippine delegation's activities, voiced their concerns.

A coalition, including the Philippine Movement for Climate Justice, Caritas Philippines, and the Center for Energy, Ecology, and Development (CEED), issued a statement at the summit's commencement. They urged the Philippine delegation, under the leadership of Department of Environment and Natural Resources Secretary Ma. Antonia "Toni" Yulo-Loyzaga, to embody the spirit of solidarity characteristic of the Filipino community. The statement emphasized the imperative of climate justice and sustainable development, rooted in current realities and pivoting toward a just energy transition that centralizes the people and their voices.

These sentiments resonated with us, especially given our own experiences of unheeded communications with officials, adversely impacting environmental conservation efforts and the security of frontline defenders. Although there were dialogues between civil society organizations and select members of the Philippine delegation in the coming days, the content and outcomes of these discussions remained elusive to me.

However, a beacon of hope emerged when members of the House of Representatives delegation to COP 28 engaged in a fruitful dialogue in "The Climate Era" session we hosted together with Reboot Philippines at the Civil Society Climate Justice Hub. Representatives Anna Veloso-Tuason, Ferdinand "Didi" Cabredo, and Jose Manuel Alba from the Climate Change Committee, alongside Kabataan Partylist Representative Raoul Manuel, demonstrated commendable leadership. They were presented with case

studies highlighting the potential threats of renewable energy projects to critical wildlife habitats, such as the Masungi Karst Conservation Area and the Northwest Panay Peninsula National Park. This open dialogue culminated in an invitation to civil society to formally report these cases to Congress, enabling the institution to take appropriate actions.

This receptiveness and willingness of elected officials to engage directly with citizens' concerns epitomizes courageous leadership — a quality that thrives on listening and facing potentially uncomfortable discussions head-on, where transformative resolutions can emerge.

Notable achievements like the inauguration of the first Philippine pavilion at the Climate Change conference and the country's acquisition of a seat on the Loss and Damage Fund Board are commendable yet modest victories. These should be pursued with unwavering commitment to accountability, inclusivity, and compassion, ensuring that the voices of the most affected are not just heard but are integral in shaping the policies that govern our collective future.

[Opinion] The leader we need now

By: Anna Mae Lamentillo

It is projected that almost 600 million people will continue to face hunger in 2030, according to the United Nations in its State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) report 2023.

The number is about 119 million more than in a scenario in which neither the pandemic nor the war in Ukraine had occurred. This only means that achieving the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target to eradicate hunger has become even more challenging.

In fact, after coming out of the Covid-19 pandemic, the world is now facing a food crisis that has been aggravated by several factors, such as geopolitical tensions, extreme weather events, the emergence of El Niño, and climate change.

In the Philippines, to cushion the impact of these stressors on our own food security and overall economic growth, the administration of President Ferdinand “Bongbong” Marcos Jr. (PBBM) is making the necessary structural changes, including adjustments in fiscal, monetary and spending policies.

Last month, US-based S&P Global credit rating agency affirmed its “BBB+” long-term and “A-2” short-term sovereign credit ratings on the Philippines.

S&P Global noted the Philippines’ above-average economic growth potential compared to its peers, which will be supported by stable macroeconomic fundamentals driven by the government’s sound macroeconomic policy and fiscal consolidation strategy through the country’s first-ever Medium-Term Fiscal Framework (MTFF), which was crafted by PBBM’s economic team within his administration’s first month in office.

S&P Global emphasized that, “The stable outlook reflects our expectation that the Philippine economy will maintain healthy growth rates and the fiscal performance will materially improve over the next 24 months.”

Meanwhile, recent data showed a slowdown in the country’s inflation and improvement in employment figures.

In the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) data early this month, there is a dip in inflation numbers to 4.1 percent from 4.9 percent the previous month.

Moreover, October labor force numbers also saw a slip in unemployment rate to 4.2 percent, primarily due to increase in jobs generated in the tourism-related sector, as well as in the information technology-business process outsourcing (IT-BPO) sector.

Bracing for El Niño

The President has also mandated all relevant government agencies to ensure that all necessary programs are in place to mitigate the impact of the El Niño phenomenon.

He said that the government will implement fiscal measures to cushion the impact of El Niño phenomenon in the country in addition to other strategies to be carried out by the administration.

PBBM made an assurance that the government will continue to explore all possibilities for the continuous distribution of water to ensure that lands remain fertile and productive. He stressed the importance of irrigation, because with better water source, farmers could increase the number of cropping season to three, which could increase production immediately by 30 percent.

Recently, the President led the turnover of ₱776 million worth of excavators as he called on the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the National Irrigation Administration (NIA) to assess farmers' needs to accelerate the construction of irrigation facilities from existing water sources.

He also assured that the country can maintain good food buffer stock until early next year.

The leader we need now

The beginning of the third decade of the 21st century had us grappling with the devastating effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. It has completely changed the way we live.

And while the pandemic is over, its impacts have been bolstered by other global issues. The world continues to face challenges that would be critical to our development goals. Now more than ever, it is crucial to have a leader who understands the complexities of our nation and is committed to steering us toward progress and unity.

It is timely that we have PBBM — a leader with unwavering dedication to public service and forward-thinking vision, the kind of leader that our country needs now.

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S&P affirms PH’s credit rating

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The leader we need now

The beginning of the third decade of the 21st century had us grappling with the devastating effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. It has completely changed the way we live.

And while the pandemic is over, its impacts have been bolstered by other global issues. The world continues to face challenges that would be critical to our development goals. Now more than ever, it is crucial to have a leader who understands the complexities of our nation and is committed to steering us toward progress and unity.

It is timely that we have PBBM — a leader with unwavering dedication to public service and forward-thinking vision, the kind of leader that our country needs now.

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Bracing for the dry spell

A line from the popular Filipino Christmas song “Himig ng Pasko” goes: “Malamig ang simoy ng hangin,” referring to the cooler temperatures during this season. But not so this year because it’s a warmer-than-usual December as El Niño continues to affect the country, especially Batangas, Cavite, and Oriental Mindoro. The dry spell is predicted to last until the second quarter of 2024 and is likely to hit almost 80 percent of the provinces.

The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration already raised the El Niño alert as early as March. The Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas said this week that it will pose a grave threat to agricultural output and can affect the food supply, causing prices to further go up, and influencing interest rates. This is certainly not the best news to have this holiday season when many Filipinos are already reeling from the high prices of commodities—a reality that has dampened consumption despite the festivities and preparations for “noche buena” celebrations. Yet many have also been looking forward to the new year with optimism—the latest Social Weather Stations survey said 48 percent of adult Filipinos think that quality of life will improve in the next 12 months.

Task Force El Niño

But Filipinos will need to brace themselves for the challenges that El Niño poses to the country next year: Science and Technology Secretary Renato U. Solidum Jr. warned that 65 out of 82 provinces will likely suffer droughts until May 2024. This will be felt in terms of agriculture and fisheries outputs raising their market prices, reduced water supply for households, as well as warmer climate that could affect public health, and if unchecked, result in the rise of tropical and food-borne diseases.

Last week, President Marcos already tasked concerned government agencies to complete water-related projects, mostly for farm irrigation and power supply, by April 2024 as part of several interventions that have been lined up to mitigate the impact of El Niño. Mr. Marcos also ordered the revival of the Task Force El Niño under the Office of the President. He assured that the government had been preparing for El Niño and that the country’s buffer stock of agricultural products could last up to the first quarter of next year.

Early warning, early action system

If, as Solidum has noted, this El Niño is “comparable” to the 1997-1998 episode that was regarded as the worst El Niño event in the world, the task force should have by now developed or rehabilitated water systems including irrigation canals, diversion dams, and small scale irrigation projects to help farmers, measures that government said it would do as early as April. It cannot afford to wait until the eleventh hour to implement these interventions when dams have dried up and the country is already facing a severe lack of water supply. In 1997-1998, about 292,000 hectares of rice and corn area were completely damaged resulting in the loss of P3 billion. Back then, authorities also had to institute water rationing in Metro Manila.

Certainly, a lot has changed over more than two decades, specifically in terms of technology. Drought monitoring and early warning systems now allow the government to take the appropriate measures to minimize the impact of extreme weather events even before they happen. During the 2018-2019 drought in Mindanao, an “early warning early action” system was set up through the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to help farmers plan ahead on which alternative, short-cycle crops to plant under the dry conditions. They were provided with good quality vegetable seeds and water drums as well as resources for a women’s cooperative to set up a duck and goat farm that could augment their income and provide an additional source of food.

Anticipatory actions on the ground

“Having relevant information in advance ensures enough time to launch and implement anticipatory actions on the ground. It provides time to talk to farmers, government counterparts, and local experts to find out what their needs are and build tailored plans that not only provide support but also put farmers on a stronger footing to face future shocks,” FAO said in its 2020 impact report.

Mr. Marcos has promised that the government will implement programs similar to what it did when inflation was at its peak, including the Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situation under the Department of Social Welfare and Development, and the Tulong Panghanapbuhay sa Ating Disadvantaged/Displaced Workers or TUPAD under the Department of Labor and Employment extended especially to farmers. The Department of Agriculture has also promised to help farmers by providing them with drought-tolerant and early-maturing crop varieties and organic fertilizers.

Indeed, if all these plans are properly implemented, and given the available resources and advanced technology, such early interventions can help Filipinos survive the coming dry spell.

PH at 'severe' risk of ecological threats seen to worsen conflicts, poverty

By: Kurt Dela Peña

Aggravated by climate change, ecological threats—water and food shortage abetted by population growth- is likely to raise the risks of conflicts and mass displacement worldwide.

As the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) pointed out, without concerted action, present levels of ecological degradation will considerably worsen, intensifying existing social issues, like malnutrition and forced migration.

This was the reason that in its 2023 Ecological Threat Report (ETR), the IEP stressed the need to “build resilience to these threats” by making substantial investments now.

“Ecological threats will continue to create humanitarian emergencies, increase conflict and result in forced migration, unless there is a sustained effort to reverse the current trend,” it said.

Based on the ETR, which looked at ecological threats in 221 independent states and territories, the Philippines, with an overall score of 4.5 out of 5, is at “severe” risk of natural disasters, food and water shortages, and population pressure.

The country, which is expected to have a population of almost 150 million by 2050, scored 4.5 for risk of natural disasters, 4.01 and 4 for risk of water and food insecurity, and 2.95 for risk of rapid population growth.

All over Southeast Asia, the Philippines is the seventh country at “severe” risk, next to Indonesia (4.51), Thailand (4.6), Laos (4.79), Timor Leste (4.96), Myanmar (5), and Cambodia (5).

Intensifying conflict

IEP said ecological threats increase the risk of conflict.

It explained that a 25 percent rise in food insecurity increases the risk of conflict by 36 percent, while the same level of water shortage and natural disasters increases the risk of conflict by 18 percent and 21 percent.

All over the world, IEP said by 2050, 2.8 billion people will reside in countries confronting severe ecological threats compared to 1.8 billion in 2023, with 1.1 billion of these people living in states with low societal resilience.

“The impact on conflict risk is greatest in areas with a history of conflict, a lack of resilience, and weak institutions,” it said, pointing out that these areas are especially prone to conflict after an ecological shock, like flood or drought.

It was stressed that “the magnitude of this impact will increase as the long-term effects of climate change start to take hold,” especially where long-term climate variation is an issue.

Food and water insecurity

For IEP, food insecurity remains an issue of significant concern, with prices now 33 percent higher than they were in 2016. It said there are 42 countries facing severe food insecurity.

By 2050, five billion people could be living in areas with high or severe food insecurity.

Water risk is also a significant ecological threat, and is “getting worse,” with an estimated two billion people all over the world not having regular access to safe drinking water.

These trends, the United Nations (UN) pointed out, are expected to worsen.

“It is likely that global warming will exceed 1.5°C during the 21st century, making it harder to stay below 2°C. This is likely to exacerbate ecological degradation and the underlying drivers of conflict,” it said.

Natural disasters

The risk posed by natural disasters continues to increase, too, with over 1.8 billion people living in areas that confront severe risk from natural disasters, IEP said in its report.

There is even a strong chance that more than five percent of the population will be severely impacted by a devastating natural hazard. There are 44 countries with both a high risk of natural disasters, and low resilience.

“The impact of extreme weather events is compounded when countries have low levels of resilience. The inability of many countries to deal with the impact of natural disasters has led to a greater need for disaster relief funding,” it said.

Last year, 35 percent of total funding from the UN Central Emergency Response Fund was dedicated to providing aid in the aftermath of natural disasters, compared to only 17 percent a decade ago.

Based on data from Oxfam, in the Philippines, while LGUs spend their 30 percent Quick Response Fund in response to actual disasters, they are less likely to make use of a significant share of the 70 percent fund for preparedness and mitigation.

Swelling population

It was pointed out, too, by IEP that increasing demographic pressure compounds the risks caused by the rest of ecological threats, as rapid population growth increases strain on public resources and societal resilience.

Over 40 percent of the subnational areas in the world are expected to record population growth of more than 20 percent by 2050, including Manila in the Philippines, where the population is seen to hit 23.55 million.

For IEP, “ecological threats, societal resilience and low levels of peacefulness will not be resolved without concerted international action.”

PHILIPPINE NEWS AGENCY

Global crisis unleashed: 2023's devastating floods

Severe natural disasters triggered by climate change marked a calamitous year with thousands tragically killed around the globe.

Considered among the most destructive natural disasters humanity faces, flood catastrophes claimed thousands of lives in 2023. Nearly every nation suffered fatalities and devastation due to the relentless havoc caused by floods.

Anadolu's "Disasters of 2023" special series covers the flood disasters during the year.

Climate change, carbon emissions, and various environmental factors have influenced changing precipitation patterns, prompting a surge in global flood disasters, affecting numerous countries.

In addition to the tragic loss of lives, floods have left a trail of extensive damage, wreaking havoc on settlements and agricultural areas.

Largest flood disaster of the year happened in Libya

The "Daniel Storm" hit eastern Libya on Sept.10 and triggered disasters in cities like Benghazi, Bayda, Marj, Sousse and Derna in the Central Mediterranean.

The flood in the east resulted in more than 4,300 fatalities, including at least 17,000 children, and displaced 40,000 victims internally.

About 70 percent of the infrastructure in the affected eastern regions suffered damage.

Ninety-five percent of educational institutions were damaged, leading to a 10-day nationwide suspension of education.

A three-day mourning period was declared for victims.

Derna recorded as worst-hit city

The Bumansur Dam (23 million cubic meter capacity) and Al-Bilad Dam (1.5 million cubic meter capacity) were built in Libya between 1973 and 1977 for flood control and irrigation purposes. The collapse of both dams submerged the city of Derna.

Decomposing bodies under debris and mixing sewage water with drinking water raised the risk of a disease outbreak.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported that the disaster displaced 40,000 residents.

Libyan National Unity Government spokesman Muhammad Hammude noted the rainfall was the highest in more than 40 years.

A report by the World Weather Attribution suggested human-induced climate change has made the disaster in Libya 50 times more likely.

Hundreds dead in Congo flood

In the South Kivu province of the Congo, 438 victims were killed in a flood disaster caused by heavy rains in May.

The country declared a national mourning period after the disaster.

Heavy rains hit Greece

Greece has seen heavy rains since Sept. 5, resulting in the loss of 17 lives.

Widespread power outages disrupted communication for many stranded in disaster areas. Search and rescue teams intervened in inaccessible regions by utilizing inflatable boats.

The floods prompted the suspension of primary and secondary education in the Thessaly region.

In Volos, one of the hardest-hit cities, sheep and goats consumed 300 kilograms (661 pounds) of medical hemp from a flooded greenhouse.

In a mining site landslide in the North Kivu province, at least 100 workers were trapped underground.

Hurricanes, storms left thousands homeless

Typhoon Doksuri triggered devastating floods in August, prompting 1.2 million residents to evacuate their homes in China's Hubei province.

Authorities swiftly established 155 reservoirs and eight collection basins that were strategically positioned to mitigate the flooding menace surrounding Beijing and Tianjin.

The Guangdong province in the southern region faced a deluge in September, prompting a search for more than 70 crocodiles that escaped a nearby farm.

Cyclone Freddy wreaked havoc in Malawi in April, leaving 537 people missing. The storm, affecting the southeastern coast of Africa, claimed more than 1,000 lives, caused extensive damage to infrastructure and displaced more than half a million residents.

Peru grappled with the aftermath of Tropical Storm Yaku in March, resulting in flooding that left 2,500 families homeless in Lima, Cieneguilla, Chosica, Chaclacayo, Ate, San Juan de Lurigancho, Carabaylo, and Punta Hermosa. The storm, along with floods and landslides, led to 499 fatalities and 1,332 injuries.

In June, the anticipated Biparjoy storm triggered the evacuation of more than 150,000 residents in India and Pakistan.

In Japan, June's tropical Typhoon Mawar caused one fatality and forced the temporary evacuation of 2 million residents.

Monsoon rains affect thousands of lives

Monsoon rains in August displaced 60,000 in Myanmar and stranded 700,000 in Bangladesh from floods and landslides.

At least 1.2 million people in the regions, including Cox's Bazar, Chattogram, Bandarban, and Rangamati, were affected.

In Pakistan, 215 lives were lost in disasters and accidents caused by monsoon rains starting at the end of June. Severe monsoon rains led to flooding in the Punjab province, and 14,000 residents had to leave their homes.

Flood disasters displaced thousands in every region of the world

In April, floods in southern Somalia affected 460,000 people, prompting a UN call for urgent assistance.

Flooding along the Shabelle River was deemed the worst in 30 years, submerging 79% of Beledweyne. In November, heavy rainfall forced 500,000 to abandon their homes.

Ghana faced flooding in October, displacing 26,000 due to the overflow of the Akosombo Dam. Following the flood, malaria and typhoid outbreaks affected the region, keeping more than 19,000 children out of school.

In June, severe rainfall in India's Assam state flooded 108 villages, displacing more than 115,000 residents.

In Yemen's central city of Marib, heavy rainfall and flooding in March displaced over 9,000 families.

THE MANILA TIMES

[\[Opinion\] Bamboo has a key role in climate adaptation](#)

For centuries, bamboo has built a reputation as a popular multitasking material. It is used for building houses, making furniture and utensils, crafting musical instruments and weapons, producing feeds for livestock, and providing fabrics for clothing.

Today, the versatile bamboo has transcended its traditional roles as the world seeks sustainable and affordable solutions to the challenges of climate change.

Among the bamboo's innovative iterations are as a substitute for steel reinforcing rods in concrete, blades for wind turbines, and a source of renewable energy.

But there are two areas where bamboo could have its biggest impact in these climate-stressed times.

Bamboo stands can be developed into carbon sinks to help reduce greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Forests and oceans already absorb carbon dioxide, the main culprit in global heating, but their efficiency is being seriously compromised by deforestation and warming sea temperatures.

Studies have shown that bamboo's carbon sequestration rate can equal or surpass that of fast-growth trees.

Bamboo grows faster and is easier to plant. Forests take years to grow back.

Bamboo could also be the perfect substitute for wood and plastic products. It can reduce the reliance on timber as a building component and save the world from a plastics dystopia.

China is the world's biggest bamboo producer, with an annual production of about 40 million tons. Not surprisingly, it is leading the way in developing new uses for bamboo.

The country has launched a three-year action plan to promote bamboo as an alternative to plastic products.

China has also come up with a list of plastic items that will be substituted by bamboo.

For one, its researchers are trying to develop disposable bamboo-made bags instead of plastic ones.

Replacing 20 percent of plastic utensils with bamboo ones would be equivalent to reducing carbon emissions from 300,000 cars, according to a Chinese study.

The changes are beginning to take hold. In the office of a bamboo manufacturer in Jiangxi province, the keyboards, mouse pads, pens and calculators are made of bamboo.

The company's chairman told the Xinhua news agency that about 400 grams of plastic are needed to make a keyboard, "so the bamboo keyboards we've made over the years have eliminated the use of almost 2,000 metric tons of plastic."

The company has been exporting its products to 20 countries and regions, and its average annual export value has soared to \$10 million.

There is also a conscious effort to preserve bamboo stands by cutting the bamboo at the right time so as not to damage the bamboo stands.

In side events during the COP28 in Dubai earlier this month, China showcased the potential of bamboo in the fight against climate change.

The events also highlighted the need to establish a level playing field for fair competition with plastics in international markets and the pivotal role of value chains to drive innovation and lower costs for bamboo alternatives to plastics.

The Philippines is the world's sixth biggest bamboo exporter, but the industry has been struggling to improve its standing. The Philippine Council for Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources Research and Development (Pcaarrd) blamed it on "the low supply of raw materials, low survival rate for macro propagation, limited technology for shoot production and marketing strategies, high cost of processed products and weak transfer of technology."

Things began to inch forward in 1988 when the government finished the first nationwide inventory of bamboo resources. Since then, the efforts to boost the industry's growth have been gaining momentum.

By 2021, the government had infused nearly P2 billion into projects to develop the bamboo industry. And the Development Bank of the Philippines opened a P10-billion lending facility for would-be bamboo farmers.

Earlier this week, the DTI met with industry stakeholders to discuss proposed bills related to the Bamboo Industry Development and the setting up of some sort of bamboo coalition.

The government is looking at a whole-of-nation approach to ensure sustainable progress in the bamboo industry.

We hope the government's initiatives toward that end take firm root.

[\[Opinion\] Weathering the storm: Navigating climate-care nexus in the Philippines](#)

By: Channe Lindstrøm Oğuzhan, Leah Payud and Jessica Henn

In a coastal community in Leyte province's Tacloban City, Maria's life was intricately woven with the ebb and flow of the sea. Her days were filled with caring for her two young children and selling fish caught by her husband at the market. Little did she know that winds of change were brewing far beyond the horizon.

On Nov. 8, 2013, Typhoon "Yolanda" (international name: Haiyan) descended upon Maria's community with unforgiving force, leaving a haunting landscape of destruction. As the wind and rain subsided, Maria emerged from what remained of her home. Her heart shattered as she surveyed the wreckage.

Many people had been killed, including her husband. With no time to grieve the loss, the weight of being the primary caregiver intensified as Maria's thoughts turned to her children.

Maria had to walk further each day just to secure a meager ration of rice and clean water. Her younger child had developed a persistent cough. Ordinarily, she would have rushed to the local clinic, but now she felt helpless as the nearest functioning healthcare facility was miles away. The school, where Maria's elder child once eagerly learned, now stood as a skeletal reminder of interrupted dreams.

Like many women in the Philippines, Maria had to juggle the responsibilities of rebuilding a home, providing for her children, and ensuring their survival. A study by Oxfam Pilipinas showed that women usually spent an average of 12.53 hours daily on care activities before the super typhoon. The women of Leyte faced a common struggle, and Maria found solace in "bayanihan," the Filipino communal spirit of helping one another.

As Leyte island rose from the ruins, Maria's story became one of resilience. The scars of Yolanda were evident, but so were the stories of survival of caregivers who carried the weight of their communities on their shoulders.

Maria's situation is not an isolated case. The Philippines is ranked as the world's most disaster-prone country due to its high susceptibility to disaster and lack of adaptive and coping capacities. During disasters, both direct and indirect care work increase due to disruption of care-related services.

Recognizing climate change's profound impact on care work, the Philippines has been at the forefront of addressing the climate-care nexus. Oxfam Pilipinas and its partners have been campaigning to tackle social norms, advance policy reform and emphasize

the importance of unpaid care work in community resilience building, leveraging evidence of exacerbated care tasks post-Yolanda.

This year, a pivotal moment in this endeavor was marked by a subnational consultation on care organized in Region 8 (Eastern Visayas) by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (Escap), Oxfam Pilipinas, the National Economic and Development Authority in Region 8 (Eastern Visayas), Philippine Commission on Women, and Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement. This event, timed during the 10th anniversary commemoration of Yolanda, provided a platform to delve into the dynamics of the climate-care nexus.

The consultation deepened the understanding of the intersection between climate and care with the presentation of Escap's recent policy paper on gender equality and climate change. The discussions illuminated the commendable progress made by the Philippines in advancing the care economy, notably through their recent national consultation on care and successful policies, including care ordinances led by local government units.

However, significant challenges emerged, such as the provision of climate-resilient care infrastructure and care policy implementation, especially in rural and remote areas. Additionally, concerns were raised about the limited availability of unconditional social protection measures focused on care, highlighting caregivers' vulnerabilities during disasters.

During the event, Oxfam Pilipinas appealed to the local government agencies and decision-makers to make visible the invisible, making the case that care work is integral and crucial when thinking of solutions to address climate change. They highlighted the importance of bringing about the agency of carers, mostly women and girls, as active participants in any change process.

Escap's Conceptual Framework for Policy Action on Care Economy emerged as a tool for addressing climate-care challenges in Region 8. This framework outlines four crucial policy categories for addressing the care economy: care infrastructure, care-related social protection, care services and employment-related care policies.

These components aim to tackle unpaid care work, promote equitable distribution, and ensure accessible, affordable and high-quality care services.

The active participation of line ministries, local government officials and civil society organization representatives sparked innovative ideas that culminated in recommendations to address the climate-care nexus in Region 8.

These included the need to improve national data on unpaid care, increasing the role of women as stewards of nature-based solutions such as mangrove restoration, and the potency of creating a cohort of champions to recognize and redistribute care work through shifting norms and formulation of policies.

Yolanda's aftermath exposed the vulnerabilities of caregivers to climate change, yet the Philippines has emerged as a pioneer, embarking on a journey to address the intricacies of climate and care. The valuable insights and strategies developed through these efforts now stand as a blueprint for the entire Asia-Pacific region, which is the most disaster-prone in the world. Let's build on these initiatives and propel toward a world that is more gender-equal and climate-resilient, where no one is left behind.

THE PHILIPPINE STAR

Barangay rangers at frontlines of protecting Ilocos Norte's forests

By: Edmar Delos Santos

Every month, for 10 days, 68-year-old farmer Jaime Quilling hikes for three hours up a nearby mountain in Barangay San Francisco in Dingras town. With him are 35 fellow barangay ranger officers (BROs), who patrol and maintain 100 hectares of forest land.

“Our trees in the mountains are thick and have grown in numbers since then as we don’t want people to cut them down [illegally],” Quilling said. He attributed this to the work they do as BROs, which their barangay formed in 2015.

Quilling is among the 209 active BROs deployed in eight municipalities and cities across Ilocos Norte. Established in 2011, the BROs’ primary duty is to safeguard the province’s 8,000-hectare Green Wall reforestation project, in support of the National Greening Program (NGP). Barangay San Francisco started their BRO program in 2015.

Due to the limited water irrigation in their area, farmers in their sitio (zone) of San Roque can only plant and harvest rice once a year. Thus, Quilling and other BROs view their work as BROs as a more stable source of income. Each BRO receives a monthly compensation of P4,000.

Given these conditions and their proximity to the mountains, all BROs from their barangay come from Sitio San Roque.

Rooted in their own communities, BROs are a crucial part of the Green Wall reforestation program. But are these efforts enough to arrest deforestation and combat climate change in the country?

Minimized kaingin practice

Joey Ferrer, president of the BROs in Barangay San Francisco, said that he and his team are constantly on alert for any signs of a forest fire. Upon seeing smoke or any signs of fire in their area, the BROs immediately respond even at night.

Ferrer, 39, believes that the fires are not accidental. He attributes them to the kaingin or slash-and-burn farming, which had burned some areas of their mountains.

In their neighboring town Solsona, a forest fire due to human activities hit at least 45 hectares of forest land in various villages last March.

According to Philippine Science Letters, deforestation and kaingin are said to be integral components of the process of forest destruction, which could pave the way for the “local extinction” of many forest species. Moreover, kaingin causes severe erosion, depletes soil nutrients, damages watersheds, and reduces floral and faunal biodiversity.

Since the BROs started patrolling in their area, Ferrer says that the fires have been minimized.

“I befriended everyone here—that’s why they no longer plan to set fire to the mountain,” he shared.

Aside from planting and maintaining native and fruit-bearing trees, BROs also report illegal loggers and establish firelines to prevent large-scale fires in their area.

Community-based interventions

The BRO program is an example of community-based forest management. For Prof. Arlene Gonzales, a climate change expert from Mariano Marcos State University (MMSU), such intervention plays an important role in climate mitigation and adaptation as it could pave the way to expand the forest cover in an area, which can help absorb carbon emissions.

In 1995, the Philippines institutionalized the Community-Based Forestry Management (CBFM) program, which aimed to specifically protect forest lands for the community to attain social equity and sustainability.

Gonzales pointed out that conservation efforts usually failed before the emphasis on the community’s role. But now, BROs themselves manage forest plantations where seedlings are grown and lead conservation programs.

While the massive reforestation project is in line with NGP, the inclusion of community members is a vital factor in the maintenance, according to Gonzales.

“The good advantage of involving the community in the reforestation or even conservation of our forests is that the sense of ownership is actually in their hands,” Gonzales said.

Less forest cover?

One measure to assess the impact of the BROs and the Green Wall program is the rate of deforestation.

According to the 2022 Global Forest Watch report of the World Resources Institute, (WRI) Ilocos Norte lost 2,710 hectares of tree cover, equivalent to a 1.5% decrease from 2001 to 2022. The data is based on spatial data and satellite imagery.

For the period 2001 to 2022, Ilocos Norte ranked 69th out of 81 provinces listed for tree cover loss. In contrast, Palawan, which topped the list, lost over 202,000 hectares.

Data from Mongabay also showed that as of 2018, Ilocos Norte had the largest share of tree cover among Region 1 provinces, accounting for 54% of its land area.

Marygail Antonette Killa, Ilocos Norte Provincial Environment and Natural Resources Officer, said that the province boasts of a healthy green canopy and primary forests because of the Green Wall program, as well as mangrove forests.

“There are portions in our green canopies that trees do not seem apparent, but it does not mean that we are degraded; we simply need to plant more trees,” she added.

While Gonzales agreed that Ilocos Norte does not face severe deforestation compared to other provinces in the Philippines, she also underscored the need to enhance it.

Killa also claimed that the program further helped protect the province from strong typhoons. According to data from MMSU and the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Association (PAGASA), an average of nine of the 20 tropical cyclones that strike the country directly affect the province of Ilocos Norte.

“As we can observe, there is almost no news regarding eroded areas [during typhoons] in our plantation areas. We are not affected as we are [continuously] maintaining our green canopy,” she said.

Climate-oriented reforestation

According to Gonzales, another measure to assess the Green Wall program is how much carbon dioxide or greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere are absorbed by the trees.

“I agree that [it is beneficial] for climate change mitigation—the Green Wall is very good. [But] you can’t measure it immediately. If the tree or the species they use are slow-growing trees, it’s hard to see even the ten years of age of the project,” she said.

Beyond reforestation projects, Gonzales hopes that the provincial government would consider afforestation or planting trees with no previous tree cover, specifically in coastal areas, to enhance resilience and adaptability to the effects of climate change.

For now, the most immediate and tangible effects are felt by the BROs in their communities. Quilling said that they no longer see or hear people cut trees because of their patrols.

However, Quilling noted that one of the challenges BROs experience in growing seedlings in the mountains, specifically during the wet season, is that these trees often struggle to thrive. That is why they already schedule planting activities during the rainy season, allowing the following months for maintenance.

To further safeguard the 100 hectares of mountains in their area, Ferrer recommended the increase of BROs in their community. However, he acknowledges the government’s limited funding but hopes that it will be considered in the future.

“If there are no BROs in our community, I’m sure our mountains might have experienced massive deforestation,” Ferrer, the BRO president, said.

CCC IN THE NEWS:

PHILIPPINE NEWS AGENCY

[Christmas and Traffic: Navigating the Festive Gridlock](#)

By: Brian James Lu

Why is it that we always experience nightmarish traffic in Metro Manila during the Christmas holidays? We call it the Christmas rush when traffic is not moving at all. Filipinos call it “carmaggedon” to illustrate the severity of traffic.

The Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) announced as early as Dec. 7 that the public should expect the start of heavy traffic, leading to the Christmas season. Indeed, the monstrous traffic jams at SLEX, NLEX, EDSA, C5, and on arterial roads are miseries to everyone. Not even the clearing of Mabuhay lanes can ease the traffic situation in Metro Manila.

Christmas has become synonymous with traffic, even in major cities such as Baguio and Cebu.

Traffic during the Christmas season has become a natural thing. I have been stuck in traffic countless times, so I know how it feels to be sitting inside your car and watching as time passes by and, indubitably, burning needless fuel. Many studies have already been conducted to prove the monetary effects of traffic.

No less than National Economic and Development Authority chief Arsenio Balisacan acknowledged that time lost by people in Metro Manila traffic and the cost of operating vehicles in gridlock amount to PHP3 billion a day. He admits that this is even a conservative estimate. How much more during the Christmas season when we experience carmaggedon?

In 2016, the vice chairman of the Climate Change Commission (CCC), Sec. Emmanuel de Guzman, said that according to a global GPS-based survey, Metro Manila has the worst traffic on Earth. Some 80 percent to 90 percent of air pollution is caused by vehicles, mostly jeepneys, buses, and commercial vehicles that use diesel. That was in 2016, and after seven years, hundreds of thousands of vehicles have been added to the already congested roads in Metro Manila. And traffic continues to exacerbate.

Perhaps one of the reasons for the holiday traffic is the consumerism of people who engage in gift-buying. This leads to a higher volume of vehicles on the road, especially near malls and shopping centers.

On Oct. 20, the MMDA announced that starting Nov. 13, malls will open at 11 a.m. and close at 11 p.m. This will last until Jan. 8, 2024. Why the adjustment in mall hours? Well, according to the MMDA, there is a need to spread mall hours in the evening to spread out the presence of cars plying the roads.

Another reason is road closures due to events such as parades and festivals. The arbitrary closure of roads affects traffic on secondary roads, resulting in gridlock. Tertiary roads are also arbitrarily closed due to programs, mass, and community Christmas parties. It has become customary for just anybody to close roads, even without the approval of the village chiefs.

Mall sales and promotions during the Christmas season contribute to traffic congestion. With people and employees getting their 13th month pay and bonuses, mall sales are opportunities to buy goods at lower prices.

The inadequacy of our public transportation to accommodate the increasing population in Metro Manila and to respond to the spike in people's activities during the holidays remains a principal reason. Hordes of people line up the streets and struggle to ride the diminishing number of public utility vehicles. What complicates the traffic situation is the non-stop construction and maintenance of roads, leading to bottlenecks and traffic jams, especially during peak hours. There are roads undergoing construction that have been left unattended, with the contractor seemingly abandoning the project.

The inclement weather during holiday seasons also contributes to traffic. Rains and typhoons often occur in December. Just recently, Tropical Storm Kabayan hit the Philippines on Dec. 18, causing flooding and rain in various areas in Mindanao.

But traffic should not dampen our resolve to celebrate Christmas. We are passionate about celebrating Christmas because perhaps 90 percent of our population is Catholic. Christmas is the biggest and longest holiday in the Philippines. Emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic, this year's Christmas season may be one of the most celebrated, considering the penchant of Filipino families to spend the holidays outside Metro Manila and in other places. Even malls are teeming with people, especially families, unmindful of traffic on the streets. Baguio City is a recipient of many visitors, with traffic resulting in gridlock.

Perhaps this year's Christmas signifies the normalcy that we need. Businesses are recovering. Entrepreneurs are happy that, finally, customers are back. Businesses have reasons to be happy since, at the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, more than 380,000 small businesses immediately stopped operations, according to the International Labor

Organization (ILO). About 1 million more were forced to operate with a skeletal workforce. Eventually, a lot of businesses permanently closed shop, unable to recover from the incessant lockdowns for two years.

I am hopeful that we are indeed on the road to economic recovery. We must not lose sight, however, of the fact that the Covid-19 is still out there and continues to mutate. A new Covid-19 sub-variant has been detected in India and may spread across the globe.

The Department of Health (DOH) continues to advise people to wear masks in crowded spaces to avoid infection. Everyone understands that we cannot afford another lockdown. The lockdowns have brought us where we are right now—happy to be outside our homes, not minding the traffic.

In closing, while Christmas traffic may test our patience, it is a reminder of the vibrancy of our society and the shared joy that accompanies the holiday season. As we navigate through the gridlock, let us cherish the moments of celebration and hope for a brighter, less congested future.

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