

Headline: A hotter, scarcer and more open world

Byline: Rodel D. Lasco

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Recently, we were privileged to host business strategist and best-selling author Andrew Winston at our first Climate Dialogues in Manila. Winston's best-selling book is titled "The Big Pivot," which is essentially a challenge to business enterprises to cope with and even prosper under three conditions prevailing in the world today — hotter, scarcer and more open.

First, we live in a hotter world as greenhouse gases continue to push air temperatures up. Recently, the carbon dioxide concentration (the most important greenhouse gas) of the earth's atmosphere breached 415 parts per million, the highest ever in recorded history. In the Philippines, Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration records show an average warming rate of 0.1 degree Celsius per decade. Thus, the future is bound to be even hotter, which will bring with it more extreme events and disasters of unprecedented proportions.

Second, we live in a world where our natural capital is rapidly depleting. For example, lush tropical forests used to cover 90 percent of the Philippines, but now we have barely 25-percent forest cover. Mangrove forests have declined by more than 50 percent from about 500,000 hectares in the early 1920s to around 250,000 ha today (Philippine Climate Change Assessment Report, 2017).

Third, we live in an ever-connected world through the internet and 24/7 cable TV, where what happens in one obscure corner of the globe can become viral in an instant.

What are its implications? Winston's "The Big Pivot" details how business enterprises can navigate this new world. But what about other sectors of society, especially in a developing country like the Philippines?

First, our policy makers and local executives must realize that business-as-usual risk-coping mechanisms will no longer work. While risks of climate-related disasters increase, the natural capital needed to address them has decreased.

For instance, as sea level rises (because of hotter climate), there will be higher storm surges. Mangrove forests could help reduce the impacts of storm surges, but we have lost most of our mangrove forests through deforestation and coastal degradation. Given this scenario, more innovative ways of responding to disaster risks are needed.

Second, we must redouble our efforts to conserve and manage our remaining natural resources. There is very little we can do to stop global warming. But there is much we can do to conserve our remaining forest, land, coastal and water resources.

Third, we must take advantage of the information highway that the internet has created. A more open world means that ordinary citizens can access information that hitherto was available only to a privileged few. This increased transparency makes it harder for those who contribute to making our world warmer and resources scarcer to hide their deeds. We must find ways to make government, business and ordinary citizens more accountable for their actions through the openness that the wired world affords us.

While the Philippines shares in the experience of these global megatrends, it faces some of its own seismic societal transformation such as rapid urbanization and demographic shifts. But with an emerging change of voter preferences in local leaders, there may be hope for lasting societal change that will allow us to cope and even prosper in a hotter, scarcer and more open world.

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Rodel D. Lasco is an author of several Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports including the forthcoming sixth assessment report. He is the executive director of The OML Center, a foundation devoted to discovering climate change adaptation solutions (<https://www.omlopezcenter.org/>).

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