

Headline: Planet Earth: endgame?

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Our planet is on the brink of irreversible collapse due to rapid and unregulated human activities. To borrow from the plot of the popular comic book movie still showing in local theaters near you, joining forces to beat a global threat is critical at this juncture of history; and one need not have superpowers to make an impact.

“Green,” not greed. Since the Industrial Revolution, our natural resources have been depleted dramatically as we improve the way we transport goods, consume and produce energy and urbanize spaces. We humans have dominated the planet, but our nonrecyclable waste end up in seas and soils, forcing species of plants and animals that lived way before our earliest ancestors did to vanish into thin air. No other species is to blame but us; we created the big companies in developed countries responsible for nearly two-thirds of greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere.

Yet we have the power to mitigate the impacts of climate change. Collective action, such as a rapid global shift to clean energy, is key. Government actions will have to be ambitious to catch up with rising climate threats. Obsessing with greening our personal choices and changing our individual lifestyles are not enough.

Flirting between 1.5°C and 2°C. The world is currently halfway toward the threshold that could mark an unsafe climate change. This finding was reinforced by a recent special report by a group of global climate science experts, which said that the 2°C target is a critical limit for climate policy, and is not a responsible target. Even 1.5°C of warming would have devastating effects on health, livelihoods, food security, water supply, human security and economic growth.

But the “degree target” challenge should not justify inaction. Developed countries remain responsible for the bulk of historical emissions, and therefore must take the lead in implementing ambitious mitigation actions and ensuring that some \$100 billion jointly mobilized every year by 2020 is made more accessible to developing countries.

Paradigm shift. In the Philippines, we are still focused on disaster preparedness and response rather than addressing poverty, income inequality and overexploited natural resources. In many instances, large-scale mining and land use change have modified ecosystems that naturally protect communities from potential climate-induced hazards. This places farming and poor communities at the periphery of land use and development policies, depriving them of the right amount of resources to thrive.

Despite the call for a paradigm shift from disaster response to holistic risk reduction under the Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act, our current approaches remain largely reactive and dependent on stopgap infrastructure measures that have left more environmental and social harm than good.

Dangerous economic growth fetish. Should natural resources endure overexploitation for economic “growth”? No. Fetishizing economic growth by hinging our progress on traditional measures of “growth” is dangerous. GDP, for instance, is a misleading measure of national progress, and could eventually lead us askew to irreversible ecological collapse.

Alternative ways to measure growth should treat the economic system beyond wealth, and pursue metrics that also

capture environmental and social costs. It's high time we shifted to alternative economies that value our environment and wellbeing rather than the costs of what we produce and consume.

So, is it already “endgame” for planet Earth? I hope not. We need a planet that sustains life for everyone, and not one that grows only for a few.

The choice is ours. The choice is now.

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