

Headline: The Philippines: ramping up climate resilience

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This year, the most important summit on climate change in a generation will be held. The aim of the summit is to launch a new global effort to reduce human impact on the climate. We want to create a more liveable and sustainable world for everyone—a world where the economy is cleaner, healthier, quieter, safer and more energy-secure, a world with a better way of producing, consuming and living.

At present, the world is pumping more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere than it had the year before, passing on ever greater risks to our children and grandchildren. The risks can only become graver as the world continues to warm as a consequence of more greenhouse gases accumulating in the atmosphere.

The best global way to tackle climate change is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to come to a decades-lasting agreement on tough new measures to limit the emissions.

There can be no quick fixes. And the world cannot afford to wake up one day only to see that climate change has gone out of control and only then decide that enough is enough.

Climate change is upon us, making widespread global impacts, the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which is composed of hundreds of scientists, warned last year.

These impacts are felt in various forms of disasters—heat waves, droughts, floods, typhoons and wildfires—which disrupt food and water supplies, damage infrastructure, and profoundly affect individuals, communities and nature all around the world.

At this point, the impacts have shown that the world is still ill-prepared for climate change. We must do better. Countries must strengthen their ability to recover from disasters by adopting resilience measures ranging from the simple and low-cost (such as planting mangroves which serve as coastal buffers against storm surges) to the high-tech (like flood barriers).

Here in the Philippines, we are all too aware of increasingly devastating climate change impacts. Our extensive coastline, and more than 7,000 islands, lie in the path of deadly typhoons. The devastation that storms such as these cause has lately become shocking annual events. In the past three years, deadly versions of these caused thousands of deaths and left millions of our people displaced.

Climate scientists say cyclones will become more powerful as sea temperatures rise. Few countries are more exposed to climate change than the Philippines. But our country is also showing the world how to make creative choices in coping with climate change as effectively and smartly as possible.

I was hugely encouraged to see the results of a project in a small town located along the shores of the West Philippine Sea. San Vicente has an idyllic location but at the same time it exemplifies the vulnerability of all island and coastal communities.

Located in the province of Palawan, the town saw massive coral bleaching in 1998 and 2010. It has also experienced frequent floods and droughts that caused severe crop damage. Note that rice production and fishing are vital and critical sources of income for most of San Vicente households.

The project, with international funding from Global Green Growth Institute, foster green growth. In relation to farming, it has introduced modern practices like the use of irrigation and climate-resilient crops to boost yields. As to fishing, the project works at enhancing the capabilities for monitoring against illegal catches. For coastal protection, it looks to the construction of new sea walls and dikes and the installation of an early warning system against storms and tsunamis.

All these steps will help boost San Vicente's economy and its power of resilience, quite apart from making the community better prepared against cyclones, coral bleaching, droughts and floods.

The Philippines can scale up this pilot project by prioritizing climate adaptation at the level of local government units—provincial, city or municipal—across the country. Government funding institutions and investors are drawn more easily to finance projects for which the communities have prepared concrete plans that elaborate the scale and type of assistance they need.

Here, the Philippines is again setting the pace with a climate action program cobbled together through a painstaking process. In 2009, the government enacted the Climate Change Act that established the Climate Change Commission, which has come up with initiatives such as that in San Vicente. In 2012, President Aquino signed into law an act that established the People's Survival Fund—the country's first legislated climate-adaptation financing mechanism which is dedicated to supporting local government adaptation action plans. This could serve as a model for all countries—developing, emerging and industrialized—that are now crafting plans to cut down on emissions and prepare for climate change, under the Paris Protocol for action.

Only last week, French President François Hollande and Christiana Figueres, executive secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), under which the Paris Protocol will be anchored, visited the Philippines to drum up support for climate action.

The high-level delegation came close on the heels of Pope Francis' visit to the Philippines last January, during which he promoted environmental protection, among other causes, and offered words of comfort to communities reeling from the impacts of climate change.

We must act together with a greater sense of urgency and solidarity. There is no doubt that shared leadership will be the key to a successful Paris climate summit.

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