

Headline: Failing to limit global warming will make dev't goals unattainable

Byline: Edgar Gutierrez

Published Date: 02:37 PM November 17, 2016

Section: opinion

Word Count: 5204

Content:

Note: The article was jointly authored by Gemedo Dalle (Minister of Environment, Forest and Climate Change in Ethiopia), Senator Loren Legarda (Chair of the Philippine Senate's Permanent Committee on Climate Change), and Edgar Gutierrez (Minister of Environment and Energy in Costa Rica).

Climate change poses an existential threat to vulnerable countries around the world. Inaction in the face of worsening climate shocks risks moving development goals beyond our reach. Tackling climate change on the other hand presents opportunities. The case for highly ambitious efforts on climate change is now so compelling that addressing global warming is no longer about burden sharing on emission cuts. It is now about securing the most benefits by taking action.

When the world came together to produce the Paris Agreement in December 2015, all nations agreed to limit warming to well below 2 degrees. In that pact, now already in force, we committed to pursue efforts to ensure temperatures would even be half a degree lower at just 1.5 degrees—only just above the warming we have experienced to date.

Half a degree Celsius—it doesn't sound like much, but it's a number that could transform the face of the world as we know it.

At the first global follow-up talks after the Paris Agreement, we are presenting new research from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and science and policy institute Climate Analytics, as commissioned by the more than 40 member countries of our Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF). The report, the Low Carbon Monitor, demonstrates with great clarity just how much of a difference half a degree can make.

If we pass 1.5, new weather extremes will be paired with sure-fire submergence under rising seas of countries like Maldives and the Marshall Islands as well as large, populated low-lying territories in Bangladesh, Vietnam and Egypt. Going beyond 1.5 degrees of warming means the virtual disappearance of the world's coral reefs within the lifetime of most people. It would also increase heatwave spells for multiple regions by an entire month yearly and raise risks of crop yield losses for key breadbasket areas by 10-15% in the coming decades.

Keeping warming down not only reduces risks. The polluted air that greenhouse gas emission controls tackle already causes more deaths than alcohol or tobacco. Current policies would still leave over one billion people without electricity by 2030. In fact, to achieve universal access to energy 14 years from now, 60% of new energy must come outside of traditional grids. The logistical and infrastructure advantages of renewable energy are plain for all to see.

The required action to keep us below 1.5 is just too ambitious, some say. Well, Costa Rica has gone more than 200 days in the past year with 100% of its energy production derived from renewable sources. The world economy already grew by more than 3% in the past few years, while overall global emissions remained stable.

In fact, on the new estimates released, keeping warming below 1.5 degrees could raise global economic output by \$12 trillion by 2050 in particular because so many of the devastating impacts

associated with higher levels of warming would be avoided. The benefits of tackling climate change can also be passed on to workers in a socially just way. Producing energy from coal or oil creates the least possible jobs, whereas sustainable biomass or renewable hydro energy have among the highest employment contributions. Ambitious climate policies could thereby double jobs come 2050.

Least developed, low- and middle-income developing countries still require partnerships to access new clean energy technologies, to bridge investment shortfalls when they leave the polluting carbon path, and to develop skills and know-how that remain the domain of large and advanced economies.

Renewable energy costs are already substantially lower than just a few years ago. Already they are competing at cost with carbon intensive energy in a low-price oil market still distorted by hundreds of billions of dollars of fossil fuel subsidies. If all embrace low emissions development, renewable energy could be five times cheaper or more by 2050—a vision of a low cost energy future we believe everyone wants and deserves.

Even the recent outcome of the U.S. elections cannot stop us. No country has said they will walk away from global action. To the contrary, countries including China, the EU, Japan and Saudi Arabia have all reconfirmed their commitment to implement the Paris Agreement. Others such as Australia, Pakistan and Italy have even joined the Agreement in the days since the U.S. elections. Together they send a resounding message: the countries of the world will forge on. Those that do will be better off by skipping all the downsides of a 19th century development model while cashing in on more jobs, more growth, and a higher quality of work and life.

Subscribe to our daily newsletter

By providing an email address. I agree to the Terms of Use and acknowledge that I have read the Privacy Policy.

Limiting global warming to below 1.5 degrees Celsius can and must be done. We will make it happen not just to survive, but also to thrive.