

Headline: As the planet heats up, here's what we can do

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As expected, the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Working Group 3 assessment report, which was released on April 4, 2022, contains a mix of bad news and good news.

The report reiterates what we have known for some time now: Planetary temperature is rising because of the continued emission of greenhouse gases (GHG). Net GHG emissions from all sectors have increased since 2010. Even worse, pledges by nations made during COP26 (Conference of Parties) as contained in their nationally determined contributions will not be enough to keep the earth's temperature below 2 degrees Celsius, much less below 1.5 degrees Celsius. These temperature targets are embodied in the Paris Agreement because if we exceed them, there will be untold damages and losses to both natural and human systems.

According to the IPCC report, if we are to stay within a 2-degree warmer world, deep, drastic, and even immediate cuts in GHG emissions are unavoidable. If these cuts materialize, global GHG emissions should peak by 2025, and we can achieve net-zero emissions by 2050 (for 1.5-degree warming), and 2070 (for 2-degree warming). These are lofty ambitions, and it is arguable whether the global community can muster the boldness and unity even to attempt them.

On the positive side, GHG mitigation technologies are available, and policies are gaining traction. For instance, the costs of several low-emission technologies have fallen continuously since 2010. Overall, there is a need to transition to very low- or zero-carbon energy such as renewables, demand-side measures, and efficiency improvement.

The report also pointed out that there are mitigation opportunities for all sectors. In cities, mitigation can be done by reducing or changing energy and material consumption, and enhancing carbon uptake and storage. For the transport sector, electric vehicles powered by low emission electricity has the largest mitigation potential based on its life cycle. Forest and other land-based measures such as forest protection and expansion can also provide large scale GHG reductions.

Philippine emissions are less than half a percent of global emissions. Some may use this fact to argue that we should not bother with mitigation activities and focus on addressing our vulnerabilities. However, it is precisely because we are one of the most vulnerable countries that we should show our commitment to reducing GHG emissions. By taking action, we are expressing our solidarity with the rest of the global community in fighting climate change. We are then able to challenge the largest emitters to do more in curbing their emissions. More significantly, by reducing our GHG emissions, we are pursuing the interest of our future generations for a more livable planet.

The three IPCC scientific groups have spoken, and their message is clear: Climate change is a clear and present danger. Action is needed. Now.

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Rodel Lasco is one of the authors of the IPCC's Working Group 2 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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