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THE start of every year is traditionally an occasion for making resolutions. Policy-makers and other national leaders should pledge to do something audacious in 2023, like eradicating extreme poverty and fighting climate change.

Those issues are somewhat related. That is, climate change has a poverty dimension to it. Climate change affects everyone, but the poor tend to be the most vulnerable to the consequences of rising global temperatures. Unlike the impoverished, for instance, people with means can find shelter during intense storms or have access to food during droughts.

To be realistic, society is unlikely to eradicate all types of poverty. Relative poverty, for instance, will persist, because resources are not equally distributed. That is not necessarily bad.

In some developed countries, a select few have more than others while everyone else has enough to live comfortably well. In the Philippines, even some taipans are poorer relative to the wealthiest individual.

The kind of poverty that should be eradicated is defined as living on the equivalent of \$1 or \$2 a day. That is worse than the official poverty rate in many countries, including the Philippines. To be extremely poor means being deprived of basic needs, like food and shelter. They lack proper health care services, resulting in shorter lifespans. They have no access to quality education, which limits their potential to earn income. And with that, their children grow up poor, repeating the cycle for the next generation.

The Duterte administration did well to reduce the poverty incidence. Unfortunately, many families who earned enough to be officially above the poverty line probably slid back below it because of Covid-19's economic impact.

The Marcos government can do something about extreme poverty, and not merely with dole-out or populist measures either. Generating jobs would be far better as that gives the poor some dignity, which enables them to overcome other challenges in life.

Green opportunities

Programs that mitigate climate change can create employment, particularly by planting trees and mangroves and caring for them. This makes sense given that poverty incidence is higher in rural areas and coastal communities in the provinces compared to urban centers, where there are more placement opportunities.

Planting trees helps capture harmful emissions that are blamed for global warming. But as mentioned previously in this space, people should plant the right kind of trees, the ones that are indigenous or native to the Philippines. Planting foreign tree species can do more harm by crowding out other plants, making the soil acidic and failing to support native wildlife.

Also, people should avoid planting monocultures. They should instead try to recreate forests that support ecosystems.

Mangroves are interesting because they can capture 10 times more carbon per hectare than terrestrial trees, according to several sources including Conservation International.

They are also superior to concrete seawalls in protecting coastal communities from deadly storm surges.

The government, as well as private firms and various civic organizations, already plants trees and mangroves. But the suggestion here is to ramp up those programs and create more jobs.

The beneficiaries will be those living in remote and coastal areas. This program might also be good for indigenous Filipinos, many of whom lack access to economic opportunities. And while this idea might be not enough to entice the urban poor to relocate to the provinces, the program could slow down urban migration. At the least, more opportunities will become available in the countryside.

To be clear, planting trees and mangroves is not a one-off activity. Seedlings will need to be cultivated. Saplings will require some care, particularly during the dry season, and even grown forests will have to be protected from illegal logging and land grabbers. In other words, a program to rebuild forests in mountains and coastal areas could generate plenty of jobs. Plus, even unskilled workers can do the work, perhaps with only minimal training.

Experts will need to fill in other details needed for effective execution. But the general idea can be a worthwhile and meaningful New Year's resolution for the country.