

Headline: Land, forests and human survival

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Globalization is happening not just in the realm of the economy but also in ecology. Here, I use globalization in the sense of interconnectivity of causes, so that what happens in one corner of the world creates a chain of effects that ripple through our natural systems and daily existence.

Just in the last few weeks, the world has witnessed the burning of the Amazon forests, the world's largest tropical forest. As of the end of August, BBC reported that more than 450,000 hectares have gone up in flames. That is an area larger than the island of Luzon, and the fires are still burning. More than dry weather conditions, many are blaming intentional forest clearing for the unusually high frequency of fires this year. In other forests in Angola and the Democratic Republic of the Congo that are as globally important, more fires are burning but are not hitting the headlines. Closer to home, forests in Indonesia are ablaze again, dispersing haze to neighboring countries.

Why are the Amazon forests important? For one, they are the habitat of thousands of plants and animal species, a veritable biodiversity treasure trove. Just as important, when forests are burned they emit huge amounts of greenhouse gases (GHG), the gases responsible for warming our planet. According to the BBC, this year's fires have released almost 230 megatons of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. That is more than the entire GHG emissions of the Philippines for a year.

This delicate relationship between land management and climate change could not have been made more salient than by the recently released special report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in August, which highlights the critical role of forestry, agriculture and other land-use changes in mitigating climate change, since they are responsible for almost a quarter of all GHG emissions. Reforestation helps reduce carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, because trees capture carbon in their woody biomass. On the other hand, land-based activities are crucial in providing food and other necessities for a rapidly developing world. These activities can also help people adapt better to a changing climate.

It is at these critical junctures that I further the notion of globalization as the sense of intercollectivity in crafting solutions. The need to address these issues that affect the entire planet must range from individual resolutions to international cooperation. We are one people living in one planet. The word ecology comes from the Greek word oikos, which means "home." All of humanity live in one house, and all humans are both privileged and burdened that their actions can shape the destiny of our home planet.

Our planet is changing at an unprecedented rate. We can ignore the signs around us and suffer the consequences. Or we can act accordingly. There is no easy way. Let us make the right decisions for the sake not just of our generation, but also of those to come.

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