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Headline: Our journey to climate-smart development: Bad to reassuring news

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THE bad news is that the Global Climate Risk Index of Germanwatch, a non-government organization based in Bonn, Germany, ranks the Philippines as 5th in terms of vulnerability to the impacts of climate change and natural hazards for 1994-2014, and first for 2013.

That is one top rank that, surely, we cannot be happy about. Many of our people have already suffered much from adverse climate change and natural hazards. Facing such risks, as our policy makers have recognized, is not only a development issue for us—it is a survival issue for our current and future generations.

Commendation

Despite the bad news, we are making the world know, through our Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC), that we have recognized our responsibility to contribute our “fair share in global climate action” and we have identified our intended actions to do so. The INDC is, thus, an important document that we must understand, especially if we have not participated in its formulation, and act on—for the good of our businesses, our country, and others in this planet earth that we all live in.

Climate Change Commission (CCC) Secretary Lucille Sering, on behalf of the Philippine government, submitted our INDC to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) secretariat on Oct. 1, 2015, after “exhaustive, inclusive, and participatory processes.”

I commend her and the CCC staff and all of those who participated in those processes, including our Chair Ed Chua, Executive Director Bonar Laureto and staff in the Philippine Business for the Environment (PBE), for our joint public-private sector efforts in producing the INDC.

I urge you to download it from <https://www4.unfccc.int/submissions/INDC/Submission%20Pages/submissions.aspx>. This document, together with the INDCs of other countries, will largely determine if the target goal of controlling climate change (mainly by stabilizing greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere and limiting the global temperature increase to 2 degrees Celsius) can be achieved and agreed on at the Conference of Parties of the UNFCCC, which includes the Philippines, in its 21st session in December 2015 in Paris.

I request you to read well the Philippines’ INDC and identify the challenges and opportunities that can lead your company and our country to a “climate smart,” and “inclusive sustainable development.”

Those are but some of the keywords that can influence our future. There is an increasing list of such words on climate change—mitigation, adaptation, resiliency, vulnerability, justice, gap, etc.

We hope that the top management of business enterprises will be the first to respond positively to our call for awareness and understanding of the INDC and those keywords, and what they stand for. More important, we hope that business and all of us will take positive action on the challenges and the opportunities arising from them.

Good and better news

The good news is we now have a supportive environment in the Philippines that can enable business to face the challenges from climate change risks.

Our existing laws and policies—the “best in the world,” according to one UN official—can help in overcoming our vulnerability to climate change.

But UN regional champion for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation, Sen. Loren Legarda, who has authored or co-authored many of the laws, has long been pointing out that the problem is in the enforcement of the laws and policies. Such enforcement depends on both the regulator and the regulated.

The better news is more and more companies now recognize that controlling pollution (in particular, greenhouse gas emissions, directly or indirectly), that leads to adverse climate change, is not a penalty but an opportunity. After all, emissions are products, too, that consume raw materials but which a company cannot sell.

Corporate initiatives that address climate change and environmental protection include climate-responsive planning and design by Palafox Associates and Ayala Land, solid waste management and waterways clean-up by ABS-CBN, Race-to-Reduce challenge (to reduce consumption of energy, water, and paper) by AP Renewables, climate-proofing of facilities and business continuity program by Manila Water, use of water-impounding systems and local, natural agriculture by MFI Foundation, environment friendly gardening and training by Flor's Garden, Locavore strategy in supplies sourcing by Nurture Wellness Village, development of solar-powered automated weather monitoring system by Webcast Technologies, green merchandizing by Smart Communications, recycling to the maximum by Unilever, roof gardening and conservation of resources by Zoomanity Group, carbon finance and environmental development programs by DBP, vertical gardening and periodic green hour observance by Dusit Thani Hotel, eco-marathon for smarter mobility by Pilipinas Shell, bamboo farming and promotion by Carolina Bamboo Garden, promotion of climate-smart lifestyle and marketing of environment-friendly goods by Echostore, and greening of the supply chain by Nestle, Philippines.

I must add, too, our own Kalinga Para sa Aeta Program with our Aeta Gawad Kalinga (GK) village in Bamban, Tarlac.

I want to write more about this a bit because the Aetas and other Indigenous People (IP) should get priority attention in our journey to climate-smart development that is both inclusive and sustainable.

Most of them do not yet have adequate shelter and other basic needs and, often, their common livelihood is charcoal-making, which contributes to global warming.

Yet their ancestral domain lands also have much of our country's wealth—minerals, biodiversity and watersheds. Tapping such wealth for the common good requires a lot of care.

We started to build houses and other basic facilities for our Aeta GK village in 2005, with the biggest funding support from the Chinese-Filipino community through Kaisa Para sa Kaunlaran and founder Tessy Ang

According to our Aeta leaders, their original 67 families in the village have now grown to 200 families! One reason given to me: If a woman is 13 years old and is still single, she is an old maid! Education can change that thinking that is why we motivate the young ones there to continue studying so they can eventually avail themselves of the college scholarships that two of our

partners (the Pampanga State Agricultural University and the Benita and Catalino Yap Foundation) offer.

We also hope to help our Aeta families go into cassava farming with the commitment of San Miguel Corp. to buy the cassava that they will produce so they will no longer cut trees to make charcoal or go into white sand mining.

This case is a sample journey to climate-smart development that is aimed to be inclusive and sustainable. We have faced and will continue to face many challenges in this journey in one community that is still in the so-called Base of the Pyramid. But, whether it is a poor community or an industrial company, we need “financial resources, technology transfer, and capacity building support for adaptation,” at different levels of effort.

Our INDC has identified those needs, to which I now add the acronyms that I have been using—TLC and SIMBY. TLC is “Top management commitment to Lead by example in Caring for our environment, while SIMBY is “Start In My BackYard.” And son Toby will, perhaps, add Nike’s “Just Do It!”

Reassuring news

Our top managers must really lead by their example, start in their homes and companies, and act now! The journey can be tough sometimes. In fact, the Philippine INDC expressed our need for external assistance in improving our country’s adaptive capacities and resilience. But we have also some reassuring news from within our country: Our private banking community led by BPI is now expanding its services to support those who want to help control climate change. PBE can assist in the analytics—first in taking an inventory of greenhouse gas emission then in managing it.

Solutions

Ayala Corp. can share experience on how to get top management support and prepare a company’s sustainability report. And the newly formed Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) Philippines can lead a company to where and how to get support on solutions to the specific climate change challenges that it faces.

To hear more details about this reassuring news, I invite you to join us at the High-Level Dialogue on the INDC that the Management Association of the Philippines, through our Climate Change, Disaster Prevention, and Sustainability (CDS) Committee, will hold tomorrow noon in partnership with the CCC, PBE, and SDSN, and with the support of the UN Development Programme and sharing by the Ayala companies.

By “High-Level,” we mean not only having high-level decision makers as participants, but also having a purposeful, cooperative dialogue towards a high-level climate-smart development and quality of life for all of us.

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(The author co-chairs with Col. Alex Escano the MAP CDS Committee. A core member of the Philippine Council for Sustainable Development, she is also a trustee of the PBE and Asiapro Foundation. Feedback at and . For inquiries on the High-Level Dialogue tomorrow, contact the MAP Secretariat via 751-1149 to 52.)