

Headline: Synergy needed to fight climate change threats

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Published Date: 12:08 AM June 20, 2016

Section: opinion

Word Count: 6035

Content:

AT THE 2015 UN Climate Change Conference in Paris, we witnessed the adoption of the most historic global agreement on effectively addressing climate change. The United States and China committed to cut their emissions by 28 percent and 65 percent, respectively, in the next 15 years.

On the other hand, the Philippines, one of the countries most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change though it contributes only 0.32 percent of the total global emissions, promised to reduce its carbon emissions by 70 percent before 2030. How does this promise fit into sustaining the country's growth drivers?

This commitment is a direct response to the reality of Filipinos bearing the brunt of climate change over the years—from increasingly deadlier typhoons to diminishing food supply (due to erratic weather patterns that disrupt farmers' harvest schedules). Last March was, on record, the hottest month yet in the last 137 years, putting 2016 on course to setting the record for the hottest year. And to think that the last three consecutive years have been extraordinarily hot, leaving Filipinos no choice but to expect living in hotter temperatures year-round in the immediate future.

Doubtless, the need to adopt green solutions is clearer, greater, and is growing more urgent. One solution is to switch to natural ways of ventilation and cooling. However, we need to consider that some of the Philippine economy's main growth drivers, which have the highest energy demand, require the comfort of an air-conditioned environment.

For the country to realize its climate commitment while sustaining the economy's growth, we need to achieve higher energy efficiency. For this we need the coordinated effort of the government and the private sector.

For example, the IT-BPO (information technology-business process outsourcing) sector contributes the highest to the country's GDP while generating an income of about \$13 billion for the country. The manufacturing sector is also set to be a key growth driver in the economy, as the increase in foreign direct investment by multinational groups and services boosts the country's competitiveness in the Asean. These big players can manage energy demand and reduce dependence on fossil fuels by adopting energy-efficient technologies. These technologies do not just manage energy demand; they also reduce dependence on fossil fuels.

Another opportunity for climate change adaptation: This year, 10 million tourists are expected to visit the country. We will need to build 15,000 more hotel rooms to accommodate them. To be sure, the booming tourism industry would greatly benefit and become even more sustainable if both the new and established hotels would switch to energy-efficient chillers.

Fortunately, some establishments have already made such switch with some help made possible under the Philippine Chiller Energy Efficiency Project (PCEEP) of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. The project, in partnership with Concepcion-Carrier Air-Conditioning Company (CCAC), aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by encouraging public and private establishments to replace air conditioners that are older than 10 years with new units. With assistance from the World Bank, the PCEEP provides establishments undertaking the replacement with "subsidies" worth 15 percent of the total cost. The latest establishment to be outfitted with new chillers is the headquarters of one of the country's leading banks.

Moreover, establishments enrolled under the PCEEP can turn their energy savings into revenues by selling them in the carbon finance trading under the Clean Development Mechanism of the Kyoto Protocol.

Concepcion Industrial Corp. (CIC) has also launched the Green Footprints Movement campaign to encourage more establishments and individuals to be green advocates. Under this program, assuming two million households were to increase their air-conditioning units' temperature setting by one degree Celsius, this would translate into 82,000 tons of reduced carbon dioxide emissions per year. CIC has also been converting the refrigerants of its product lines to nonozone depleting ones since 2015.

There is a clear business case to go green for the country to attain its 2030 goal. Purchasing energy-efficient and non-CFC chillers may seem to entail a huge expense, but its benefits will extend to business' sustainability by way of climate-proofing our industries. Moreover, the amount saved on operating costs will be worth more than the investment in environment-friendly technologies—and with even faster return on investment. Early adopters of energy-efficient technologies are definitely carving a crucial role in leading the market shift to green technologies.

Manufacturers of building technologies must take the lead and partner with main influencers in the construction industry to encourage environment-friendly and energy-efficient technologies. But such an initiative would be more effective with the government incentivizing the use of green-cooling technologies.

Buildings account for 40 percent of the world's total energy consumption; in the Philippines, 45 percent of a building's energy is used up by air conditioners. If more buildings would go for energy-saving cooling systems, the construction sector will drive the economy's growth while increasing businesses' profits by saving on operating costs. And the whole nation will be the most benefited.

With the concerted efforts of the government, the economy's growth drivers, and every individual, reducing carbon footprint will be within the country's easy reach, and more economic opportunities will open up, even as we shall inspire global collective action toward mitigating the impact of climate change.

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