

Headline: Gov'ts 'overlook climate' in dev't planning

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As the Asia-Pacific region pursues economic development to catch up with the rich West, policymakers are mostly overlooking one crucial detail—climate change—that could spell disaster moving forward.

At the main plenary session of the World Economic Forum (WEF) on East Asia's second day, delegates noted the seeming disconnect between discussions on economic growth and the region's ability to cope with changing global climate conditions.

"What we're desperate to do is to bring the conversation out of the ministries of environment alone and put it on the table of the ministry of finance, planning, development and beyond," World Bank vice president and climate change special envoy Rachel Kyte said yesterday.

In most countries, particularly developed nations, ways to address climate change were being discussed by minor agencies that focus on reducing pollution, Kyte said. These discussions, she said, carried less weight in the budgeting process that dictated most governments' economic agendas.

The effects of climate change would play a key role in Asia Pacific's economic fate because most cities such as Manila—this year's WEF East Asia host—were poorly planned and located in coastal areas that were vulnerable to storms.

Atutoshi Nishida, chair of global industrial and technology company Toshiba Corp., shared Kyte's sentiment. Nishida said in his native Japan, in the wake of the Fukushima disaster, the issue of nuclear power was not being discussed with "cool heads."

He said nuclear power's ability to provide clean and reliable energy was undeniable. "But critics say we should replace nuclear with coal, but they aren't considering the issue of emissions," he said.

Kyte said the projected 3- to 4-degree increase in the world's temperature by 2030 would result in a "new normal," where storms like Supertyphoon "Yolanda" would be a regular occurrence. "Yolanda" (international name: Haiyan), which left more than 6,000 people dead in Visayas, is considered the strongest typhoon to ever make landfall in recorded history.

The Philippine government expects to spend over P100 billion up to 2017 for reconstruction efforts in areas affected by Yolanda. Kyte said the Philippines was one of the few countries in the world where climate change was a major consideration in economic planning, citing the administration's plan to "build back better" in Visayas.

According to Takehiko Nakao, president of Manila-based multilateral lender Asian Development Bank (ADB), governments should impose taxes that penalize companies with big carbon footprints. Cities should also be planned better, focusing on mass transport systems to move people around more efficiently.

South Korea's Hanwha Group said subsidies on "dirty-power" generation industries such as oil and coal should also be stopped. Hanwha Group managing director Kim Dong Kwan said resources

should instead be diverted to supporting renewable energy sources such as solar, geothermal, wind and hydroelectric power.

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