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After three years of hard work, 270 scientists from some 70 countries can finally heave a sigh of relief. On Feb. 28, 2022, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released to the world the fruit of its labor—the Working Group 2 sixth assessment report.

Among the most significant conclusions of the report is the need to pursue climate-resilient development (CRD), which refers to the “process of implementing greenhouse gas mitigation and adaptation measures to support sustainable development for all.” This approach is critical if we are to bequeath a livable planet to succeeding generations.

If our development path is fully climate-resilient, we would live in a world with mild temperatures, a high level of well-being, intact ecosystems, equity, and justice. Conversely, if we shun a climate-resilient path, we would inherit a warmer world where poverty is prevalent, ecosystems degraded, and where inequity and injustice are rampant. Between these two extremes are several possible worlds.

At the heart of CRD is the recognition that human systems are interacting endlessly with natural systems. Managing this complex, give and take between the two systems, is key to attaining a sustainable future. As global warming progresses, the IPCC warns that hazards and risks will multiply, spawning unprecedented levels of uncertainty. Development planners and decision-makers should have a systems perspective that is alert to externalities and trade-offs.

The enabling conditions in pursuing CRD are consistent with sustainable development in general. According to the report, we must “make inclusive development choices that prioritize risk reduction, equity, and justice.” In addition, “decision-making processes, finance and actions [must be] integrated across governance levels, sectors and timeframes.” It is heartening to note that the report in fact presented solutions that will allow us to adapt to a warming environment, albeit up to a certain point.

In the end, the IPCC authors warn that we have a narrow window to avert a catastrophic warming of the planet. This window is closing fast, and our actions in the next 10 years will largely determine the fate of humanity.

Our next president’s term will coincide with this critical decade for climate action. Thus, one relevant criterion for our vote is the candidate’s qualification to steer the country toward a climate-resilient path. As one of the world’s most vulnerable countries to climate hazards, we cannot afford to make the wrong choice.

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