# Where is PH’s heat action plan? | Inquirer Opinion

https://opinion.inquirer.net/180856/where-is-phs-heat-action-plan

People living in the Philippines are enjoying pleasant weather due to the lingering effects of La Niña, but this should not fool anyone into complacency because temperatures are expected to break records again in a few months.

Despite the country’s cool weather, January has been the warmest on record globally, according to satellite data from the European Union’s Copernicus program. Samantha Burgess of the Climate at the European Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasts said these findings were unexpected because the development of La Niña, which heralds the periodic cooling of sea-surface temperatures across the east-central equatorial Pacific, was thought to have had a “temporary cooling effect on global temperatures.”

Richard P. Allan, a professor of climate science at the University of Reading, on the other hand, said that while last month’s warm temperatures are not necessarily cause for immediate alarm, they suggest that “natural cooling phases may become less effective at temporarily offsetting the impact of rising greenhouse gas levels on global temperatures.”

Even more concerning, as independent media organization Mongabay reported, is that heat waves across the world’s oceans have become “larger and stronger” overwhelming the influence of La Niña. “The Arctic has been warming about four times faster than the globe as a whole, and right now it’s running a dangerous fever,” it quoted Jennifer Francis, an Arctic expert at the Woodwell Climate Research Center in the United States, as saying.

## Extreme weather events

This should serve as an adequate warning for the Philippines, which saw soaring temperatures last year that even resulted in the suspension of classes.

In the 2025 Climate Risk Index, which ranks countries most affected by extreme weather events, the Philippines ranked 10th because of the “relative number of people affected, accompanied by relative fatalities and economic losses.”

The study found that more than 6.4 million Filipinos were affected by a total of 372 extreme weather events over 29 years, from 1993 to 2022. This has caused more than $34 billion in economic losses when adjusted for inflation, or almost P2 trillion.

An average of 20 typhoons hit the country annually, a reality that Filipinos have to live with given the country’s geographical location. It is indeed necessary that the government pays attention to the threats of super typhoons, but it should also not neglect the other side of extreme weather events—droughts and heat waves.

Countries like Singapore and India, recognizing the need for proactive measures, already have heat action plans. For other countries like the Philippines, however, such plans are integrated into overall disaster management programs, community-based or led by civic organizations.

## Early warning systems

This won’t do given what happened last year when 4.6 million Filipinos were affected by the extreme heat wave as indices surpassed 42 degrees Celsius and forced the closure of 4,000 schools nationwide. The government even had to declare a state of calamity in more than 400 cities while areas like Cebu experienced a water shortage.

Heat waves and droughts are a national issue as they affect the public’s well-being and important sectors like agriculture, thus, crafting a heat action plan should not be left alone to the barangays or private sector.

A good heat action plan, experts said, should include early warning systems and coordination, public awareness campaigns, medical professional training, and heat exposure reduction and adaptive measures.

Ahmedabad in India implemented South Asia’s first heat action plan in 2013 after a 2010 heat wave. The city invested in early warnings and health-care training and launched public awareness campaigns that helped it avoid more than 1,100 heat-related deaths annually.

## Burning question

Singapore’s heat action plan, meanwhile, is part of its Green Plan 2030, which aims to mitigate the effects of rising temperatures by adapting practical solutions like increasing urban greenery, utilizing cool paint on buildings, and discouraging ownership of cars, which produce a lot of heat and emissions.

The Philippine government should not wait for the heat to become unbearable before it crafts an action plan. It should particularly keep in mind students who attend classes in poorly ventilated buildings, workers whose nature of work exposes them to the heat, farmers whose livelihoods are affected by droughts—and everyone because nobody is immune from global warming.

“At this point, it is not whether it will get hotter, it’s how much hotter it’s going to get and how we’re going to learn to cope with that heat,” said World Meteorological Organization Joint Office for Climate and Health lead Joy Shumake Guillemot. “Unfortunately, we are already locked into this hotter future … the future is going to be much hotter than what we have experienced in past decades.”

The burning question is: Is the Philippines ready for that?