

[OpinionColumn](#)

Can the Philippine deliver on its climate pledges to the Paris Agreement?

By [Rene E. Ofreneo](#)
December 24, 2020

Aside from looking for vaccines to inoculate their citizens against the Covid-19 pandemic, governments around the world are busy updating their “Nationally-Determined Contributions” or NDCs under the Paris Agreement of 2015. Roughly, the NDCs are pledges of the UN Member States to help combat global warming by reducing their respective national GHG emissions and preparing their countries against climate change risks through a combination of mitigation, adaptation and related adjustment policies. The Paris Agreement requires the UN Member States to submit progress reports on the NDCs every five years. The ultimate goal of the Paris Agreement is to keep the rise in global temperature below 2.0 degree Celsius above the pre-industrial period; the ideal target: 1.5 degrees Celsius maximum.

The Philippines’s Climate Change Commission (CCC) is now undertaking what it calls as a series of consultations with various stakeholders—government agencies, civil society organizations, private and business sectors and academe—on the country’s “sustainable development ambitions.” The CCC lists these as follows: sustainable industrial development, eradication of poverty and provision of basic needs, social and climate justice, energy security, and gender and women’s empowerment.

The importance of having an ambitious but doable Philippine program of climate mitigation, adaptation and adjustment policies as the country’s instrument for survival as well as its contribution to the global fight against global warming and varied climate change risks cannot be overemphasized. As it is, the country is facing severe sustainability challenge on three inter-related fronts: economic (flattened economy, weak industry and agriculture, and uncertain future for the nation’s life savers: overseas employment and call center/BPO sector); social (extreme social and economic inequality, weak job-health-social protection for the majority); and environmental (climate change risks and degraded environment).

In a draft NDC paper for 2020, the CCC asserts that the government seeks the “transformation” of the country’s socioeconomic sectors and the building of “a climate-resilient and low-carbon economy.” We agree.

The problem is we do not see any clear “transformation program” in place. What we see instead are endless rhetorics on sustainable development and disaster readiness.

Is this the reason why the Berlin-based Climate Action Tracker rated the original NDC submission of the Philippines as equivalent to “2.0 C compatible” instead of the ideal “1.5 C compatible”? The CAT explained (November 27, 2020 release):

“The ‘2.0 C compatible’ rating indicates that the Philippines’s climate commitment in 2030 is within the range of what is considered to be a fair share of global effort but is not consistent with the Paris Agreement. This approach requires other countries to make deeper reductions and comparably greater effort to limit warming to 1.5 C. If all the countries were to follow the Philippines’s approach, warming could be held below—but not well below—2.0 C, and hence would still be too high to be consistent with the Paris Agreement’s 1.5 C temperature limit, a threshold the Philippines strongly fought for in 2015 during the Paris negotiations.

“Our rating of the Philippines is based on its conditional NDC of reducing GHG emissions by 70 percent below business-as-usual levels by 2030. The Philippines’s BAU scenario, against which the NDC is to be measured, has not yet been published as of November 2020. For the quantification of the conditional NDC target, we thus apply the reduction target to the BAU as estimated by CAT...”

In short, the government, the CCC in particular, has not been truly transparent on the country’s NDC and the supporting programs that should help the country meet its GHG targets under the Paris Agreement. What, in the first place, is this “conditional NDC”? Why has the CCC failed to come up with a full-blown public discussion and media dissemination on the country’s NDC submission? Since global warming threatens our collective existence as a people, why are Malacanang and the CCC, together with DENR and other agencies, not mobilizing the citizenry in this life-and-death battle to contain the CC risks (e.g., typhoons, sea rise, etc.) and re-organize the economy to become resilient and sustainable?

A major area where the Philippines is clearly failing in relation to the Paris Agreement is the country's handling of its energy program. Instead of a shift to the cleaner non-renewables, the DOE has allowed the deepening of Philippine reliance on fossil fuel, particularly coal and gas. The recent DOE announcement of a "moratorium" on new coal plants does not stop development work on coal projects that are on the pipeline and the continued operations of existing coal plants, old as well as a score of new ones that were established in the last 10 or so years. CSO researchers have thus rightly raised the alarm: these coal projects will chain the country to coal in the next 20 years or so, or way beyond the 2030 initial timeline of the Paris Agreement and the 2040 Ambisyon 2040 of Neda.

Thus, instead of GHG reduction, the emerging scenario is that the Philippines will become a major GHG emitter, a supreme irony given the observation by CAT that it was the Philippines that fought hard in 2015 for the Paris Agreement goal of 1.5 C to 2.0 C maximum rise in global temperature. Incidentally, the DOE has a "coal roadmap 2017-2040," which shows the DOE's all-out support for coal production by coal miners, big and small, with "delineated coal reserves" projected from 478 MMT to 766 MMT between 2023 and 2040.

Given the foregoing and the absence of a comprehensive program of transformation for various sectors of the economy, it is doubtful if the Philippines can deliver on its pledges to the Paris Agreement.

<https://businessmirror.com.ph/2020/12/24/can-the-philippine-deliver-on-its-climate-pledges-to-the-paris-agreement/>