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Trash piles up in MM after New Year revelry

Environmental watchdog EcoWaste Coalition has called on local government units (LGUs) to improve the implementation of environmental laws as it expressed dismay over the heaps of garbage that piled up on the streets of Metro Manila following the New Year's Eve revelry.

During an ocular monitoring yesterday, the group's "Basura Patrollers" observed mounds of garbage consisting of left-over food, disposable beverage, food containers as well as other discards from parties such as firecracker and fireworks debris, especially in populated residential neighborhoods.

EcoWaste also noted that public areas not designated by authorities as firecracker zones were also strewn with burnt firecrackers.

"The mixed garbage piled up along roads and sidewalks is a stark reminder of the need to step up efforts at all levels to counter the throw-away culture with a sustainable lifestyle that will, among other things, respect and care for Mother Earth, conserve resources, safeguard human health and, of course, prevent and reduce trash,"

EcoWaste Zero Waste campaigner Jove Benosa said.

"Our society cannot continue depleting the Earth's diminishing resources and churning out waste with little or no regard to their consequences," he added.

Benosa noted that the national and international Zero Waste Month is being observed this January, so it is an opportune time for the public to learn zero waste strategies by "cutting

back on what we dispose of, turn waste into resources and promote green jobs without incineration while reducing the emission of dangerous pollutants such as dioxins, greenhouse gases and heavy metals."

EcoWaste cited figures from the National Solid Waste Management Commission, which projected waste generation in Metro Manila in 2022 at 3.6 million tons. For 2023, the NSWMC projected that trash to be generated in Metro Manila would reach 3.7 million tons.

Based on the NSWMC's estimates, food and organic discards constitute 52 percent of Metro Manila's waste while 41 percent are recyclables and seven percent are residuals.

"To prevent and reduce waste, manufacturers need to switch to

sustainable business practices by adopting eco-design and extending their responsibility to what they make throughout the product life cycle, including managing the waste," Benosa said.

Benosa said LGUs, for their part, must improve the implementation of the basic provisions of Republic Act 9003 or the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act, especially in terms of waste separation at source and setting up of materials recovery facilities.

"To reduce waste, people should consume with health and the environment in mind, shun single-use plastics, sort out our discards and make reuse, repair, recycling and composting a habit. A zero waste and toxics-free future is possible," he said.

- Elizabeth Marcelo



New year revelry leaves behind heaps of holiday trash in metropolis—group

BY JONATHAN L. MAYUGA

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THE New Year revelry in Metro Manila left behind heaps of mixed holiday trash dotting the streets to the dismay of a local waste and pollution watchdog campaigning for zero waste and a toxic-free society.

The Ecowaste Coalition said that based on ocular monitoring, mounds of garbage consisting of food waste, disposable beverages and food containers and trash from the joyful gatherings and parties, including firecracker and firework debris, were seen in many places, especially in highly-populated residential neighborhoods.

Streets not designated by the authorities as a firecracker zone were also found strewn with burnt firecrackers, the group said.

According to EcoWaste, in market areas in Manila, Pasay and Quezon Cities, large amounts of abandoned mixed waste from last-minute shopping sprees last Saturday were observed. These include corrugated boxes, polystyrene fruit containers, plastic and wooden fruit crates, rotten fruits, vegetable scraps and other organics and lots of plastic packaging materials.

Throw-away culture

THE group said that in Tabora Street and M. de Santos Street in Binondo, Manila—where dozens of street vendors ply their trade—a backhoe loader was used to shovel the massive garbage to a compactor truck.

“Some of the sweepers and waste collectors have to work in the early hours of New Year’s Day to remove garbage from the streets before people wake up,” EcoWaste Coalition Zero Waste Campaigner Jove Benosa was quoted in a statement as saying.

According to figures obtained from the website of the National Solid Waste Management Commis-

sion (NSWMC), Metro Manila’s projected waste generation in 2022 was 3.6 million tons per year. For 2023, it is projected to reach 3.7 million tons. Based on government estimates, food and organic discards constitute 52 percent of Metro Manila’s waste, 41 percent are recyclables and 7 percent are residuals.

“The mixed garbage piled up along roads and sidewalks is a stark reminder of the need to step up current efforts at all levels to counter the throw-away culture with a sustainable lifestyle that will, among other things, respect and care for Mother Earth, conserve resources, safeguard human health and, of course, prevent and reduce trash,” Benosa added.

He noted that Philippine “society cannot continue depleting the

earth’s diminishing resources and churning out waste with little or no regard to their consequences.”

Possible future

BENOSA urges for Filipinos to “learn and celebrate how zero waste strategies can help us cut back on what we dispose of, turn waste into resources and promote green jobs without incineration while reducing the emission of dangerous pollutants such as dioxins, greenhouse gases and heavy metals.” This as the national and international zero waste month is observed this January.

“To prevent and reduce waste, manufacturers need to switch to sustainable business practices such as by adopting eco-design and ex-

tending their responsibility to what they make throughout the product life cycle, including managing the waste,” Benosa said.

He added that waste could be prevented and reduced if local government units improve the implementation of the basic provisions of Republic Act 9003 (Ecological Solid Waste Management Act), especially the need to enforce waste separation at source and set up Materials Recovery Facilities (MRFs).

“To prevent and reduce waste, we, the people, should consume with health and the environment in mind, shun single-use plastics, sort out our discards and make reuse, repair, recycling and composting a habit,” he concluded. “A zero waste and toxics-free future is possible.”



Group asks probe on hiring of foreign crew in Manila Bay reclamation project

By Darwin G. Amojelar

A GROUP of local seafarers asked the Department of Labor and Employment and the Department of Migrant Workers to look into the operations of Chinese dredging vessels in Manila Bay that are allegedly employing foreign crew.

The Samahan ng Nagkaka-isang Marinong Pilipino alleged in a letter dated Dec. 18 to Labor Secretary Bienvenido Laguesma and Migrant Workers Secretary Susan Ople that majority of the crew members of foreign vessels operating in Manila Bay are not Filipinos.

The group said the vessels were supposed to be under a bareboat charter or temporarily under Philippine flag arrangement, but they continued to employ Chinese crew which is not allowed. Chinese vessels and crew are not permitted to do business in the Philippine domestic waters unless they are given a special permit by Maritime Industry Authority.

Sought for comment, Marina NCR regional director Marc Anthony Pascua confirmed the agency issued the required permits to the vessels of China Harbour Engineering Corp. operating in Manila Bay.

"There are vessels of China Harbour issued with special permits or bareboat



Migrant Workers Secretary Susan Ople

charter operating in Manila Bay," he said.

Pascua said, however, that employment of Chinese crew under a BBC arrangement is not allowed.

China Harbour Engineering won contracts in 2019 for land reclamation project in Manila Bay.

Manila Standard tried to get comments from Benjamin Guo, deputy contractor's representative for Pasay Reclamation Project of China Harbour, but he had yet to respond as of press time.

SNMP asked the Philippine Coast Guard, Marina and the Department of Labor and to inspect the foreign vessels that are being used in a reclamation project in Manila Bay.

It said China Harbor started hauling sand from Zambales province in May 2022.



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WHILE SEEKING MANKAYAN COMMUNITIES' NOD

MINING FIRM MAY APPEAL SC RULING ON BENGUET IP CONSENT

BAGUIO CITY—Top gold miner Lepanto Consolidated Mining Co. may still ask the Supreme Court to reconsider its decision voiding a 2015 arbitral ruling that exempted the 86-year-old mine from securing the consent of indigenous communities at its mine site in Benguet province.

In a Dec. 21 disclosure notice to the Securities and Exchange Commission that was obtained by the Inquirer on Friday, Lepanto said its mining operations would continue.

"The company is considering all its legal options in respect of the SC decision, including the filing of a motion for reconsideration," it said in the notice.

Lepanto had asked for arbitration in 2015 after it questioned the need for the informed consent of ancestral domain dwellers in Benguet's mining town of Mankayan to renew its mineral production sharing agreement (MPSA),

which has been in effect for 25 years.

The ad hoc arbitration tribunal favored Lepanto's position in the same year, despite the argument from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) and the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB) that sparing Lepanto from the requirement "effectively disenfranchised" Mankayan's indigenous Filipinos.

Unanimous decision

But in a unanimous en banc decision promulgated last June but made public at its online portal on Dec. 22, the high court ruled that the consent of Mankayan's residents "cannot be undermined, worse disregarded," as protecting indigenous Filipino rights is a constitutional mandate and is "clearly, categorically, and positively reflected in the Ipra (the Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997 or Republic Act No. 8371)."



ANOTHER DAY AT WORK Mine workers, in this photo taken in August 2018, are seen at the mouth of a mine tunnel of Lepanto Consolidated Mining Co., one of the country's pioneer mines operating in Mankayan, Benguet. Lepanto faces a legal setback after the Supreme Court voided the 2015 arbitral ruling that exempted the company from securing the consent of the Mankayan indigenous communities. —EV ESPIRITU

Lepanto, which started in 1936, generated P1.16 billion worth of gold from January to September 2021.

The disclosure report did

not reveal Lepanto's other options. But in a Wednesday interview, MGB Cordillera director Fay Apil said the company has requested from her office

an endorsement to the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) so it could proceed with the free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) process with the Mankayan Indigenous Cultural Communities so it could renew its MPSA.

'Very discouraging'

The mining industry has found the FPIC process "very discouraging" because arriving at a consensus takes months or even years, according to MGB sources, who asked not to be named because they were not authorized to discuss NCIP issues.

In some cases, the mines have been asked to shoulder the cost of assembling the communities because NCIP, which is under the Office of the President, remains underfunded and understaffed, the sources claimed. Worse, some mining applicants have to wait their turn until the designated FPIC team completes the process for

mines that are first in line, they said.

But a 2013 policy study indicated that "indigenous communities have been shortchanged, if not deceived, by many FPIC applicants," which required an overhaul of the process at the time.

The study was conducted by the DENR and the German-Development Cooperation-Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH.

Among its recommendations were for the NCIP to be "provided with sufficient funding to insulate it from undue influence from vested interests" and for the FPIC process to seek consent also from "areas that will be affected by the project, such as upstream and downstream communities."

The study also recommended that the ancestral domain be "the primary unit for consideration in FPIC, not the political boundaries." —VINCENT CABREZA

INQ



Resources database creation OKd

PRESIDENT Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. has approved the establishment of National Natural Resources Geospatial Database, Environment Secretary Maria Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga said.

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) will be tapping the expertise of the Philippine Space Agency and the Department of Science and Technology (DoST) for the project, she added.

"One of the projects we pre-

sented to the President which he immediately approved is the establishment of a National Natural Resource Geospatial Database. This will serve as the baseline for all our national resource inventory in the country," Yulo-Loyzaga said.

"We've already started to actually build our team ... but we've [also] already reached out to the Philippine Space Agency [and the] DoST."

"We are really looking at the use of satellite imagery and other types

of sensing systems in order for us to understand what has happened to our country physically in the last half decade or so," she said.

This includes "how has land use changed, how our forest actually increased or decreased, how our mangroves actually increased or decreased, and to begin to profile and account and value the kind of services that our natural environment gives toward our development."

► DatabaseB2

climate change negotiations."

The country, she added, has been asked to host next year's Asia Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction.

"We've now been asked by the United Nations to actually host this conference here in 2024. So far, it has been given a positive response so we are now working through the final acceptance of that invitation to

host it here," she said.

In the meantime, regional consultations that began in October will continue this month in the Visayas and Mindanao as part of the DENR's efforts to engage stakeholders across the country.

"That consultation process involves not just people from [the] government but certainly also the private sector, the community and the different

The government, Yulo-Loyzaga said, wants to ensure that the Philippines is in "alignment with global events and global commitments that our country has entered into, like our commitment to the

practitioners in the different fields that are part of the mandate of the DENR," Yulo-Loyzaga said.

"Our overarching goal here at the department is to use the phrase 'measure what we treasure,' and by doing that we feel we will be able to contribute to the Philippine Development Plan moving forward," she continued.

BELLA CARIASO



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Pangasinan boosts tourism, health

LINGAYEN, Pangasinan – In line with the goal of boosting its services and encourage economic activity and tourism, the provincial government of Pangasinan has forged a pact with various national government agencies and local government units in the region.

The most recent convergence the province has made was the memorandum of agreement signed with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources for the interim management of the foreshore area for salt production.

The Pangasinan Provincial Information

Office said the salt production sharing agreement aims to provide continuity of operations to the salt industry, gives security of tenure to the more or less 400 displaced salt workers within the aforementioned area with necessary services, technology, and financing to be furnished by the local government unit of Bolinao town.

The salt farm area for the project is about 473.88 hectares of foreshore land situated in Barangay Zaragoza, Bolinao.

“It serves as an avenue to prepare for the looming salt shortage at the end of the year

as local production does not cover domestic demand per the previous announcement of the Department of Agriculture. The government share shall be computed based on a formula per DENR Administrative Order No. 98-67, otherwise known as “Guidelines for the Identification and Award of Areas Suitable of Salt Production,” it added.

Governor Ramon Guico III said that the project supports President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.’s mandate for food sustainability in the country as the salt has many uses and its industry could create more jobs.

PNA



PH group to file class suit vs top US polluters

A PHILIPPINE-BASED environmental watchdog has sent a formal notice to the United States government, through its embassy in Manila, of its intention to file a class suit at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) against top industrial polluters in America together with other industrial states worldwide for the deadly effects of their carbon emissions.

"We would like to put your country, the United States of America (and other co-defendant countries) an official notice that in six months from this date of notification, our multi-sectoral organization will jointly file a one-trillion dollar 'loss and damage' class suit against all of you at the ICJ if you fail to address our legitimate grievances on climate change and human rights that have gravely injured and severely affected our climate-change vulnerable country and its suffering people," said the Clean Air Philippines Movement Inc. (Capmi), headed by its president Dr. Leo Olarte.

Its letter of intent was sent to US Ambassador to the Philippines MaryKay Carlson and received by the US Embassy in Manila on December 29.

Olarte said the purpose of the letter

was to provide the US government a formal notice that Capmi, together with other private sector organizations in the Philippines, will file the class suit "due to all the deadly greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global warming and climate change that is now a worldwide crisis."

The various private sector organizations that have joined Capmi in its intention to file the case include the World Youth for Climate Justice, the United Filipino Consumers and Commuters, Luntiang Pangarap (Green Dream) Movement, Kapisanan and Social Media Broadcasters ng Pilipinas Inc., and Mata sa Balota Movement.

Olarte said they have joined other climate change vulnerable Pacific countries headed by the Republic of Vanuatu in seeking an advisory opinion from the ICJ through a United Nations General Assembly resolution "to clarify the obligations of states to protect the rights of the current and future generations from the adverse effects of climate change."

"By giving an advisory opinion, the Court can provide the impetus for more ambitious action under the Paris Agreement, provide authoritative baselines for state action on mitigation and international cooperation and assistance, integrate areas of international law that are currently separate, human rights and environmental law, provide impetus and guidance for domestic, regional and international adjudications, and cement consensus on the scientific evidence of climate change," the former Philippine Medical Association president said in the letter.

Olarte, who is also a lawyer, said this initiative has already received support at the UN, particularly from the UN High Commission for Hu-

man Rights Commissioner Michelle Bachelet and UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment David Boyd.

"Our Philippine groups are working towards securing global state and non-state support for the ICJ advisory opinion," he said.

Olarte pointed out that demand for an authoritative guidance from the ICJ on the issue of climate justice was initiated by the youth sector from the different Pacific Islands, the most affected region by climate change.

He said this move has also received the backing of 139 civil society organizations and over 100 countries.

Olarte said the UN General Assembly will vote on the ICJ Climate Resolution for the Advisory Opinion this month.

"The link between the climate crisis and human rights is now well established," he said in the letter of intent. "Climate impacts have been shown to exacerbate pre-existing inequalities and human rights challenges such as poverty, well-being, wealth inequality, gender relations and many others."

The Philippines, he added, is generally not a carbon polluting country mainly because its share of fossil carbon dioxide emissions, or carbon footprint, is only .35 percent as compared to highly industrialized nations.

A carbon footprint is the total amount of greenhouse gases, including carbon dioxide and methane, that are generated by an individual, event, organization, service, place or product. The average carbon footprint for a person in the United States is 16 tons, one of the highest rates in the world.

Capmi also sent the same letter of intent to the governments of Japan, Germany, India, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Russia, China and Indonesia through their respective embassies in Manila.

FRANCO JOSE C. BAROÑA



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NG looks to more green jobs to cut unemployment to 5%

By CAI U. ORDINARIO @caiorinario

THE national government aims to bring down unemployment to below 5 percent starting in 2024, according to the recently released Philippine Development Plan (PDP).

The administration is looking to bring down unemployment to 4.4 to 4.7 percent in 2024; 4.8 to 5.1 percent in 2025; and 4 to 5 percent between 2026 and 2028.

This year, the government aims to bring down unemployment to 5.3 to 6.4 percent. In the January to October 2022 period, unemployment averaged 5.4 percent.

"Although unemployment is nearing prepandemic levels in 2022 at 5.7 percent, there is much room to improve the quality, productivity, and stability of employment," the PDP stated.

"By 2028, the target unemployment rate is within 4-5 percent, and the percentage of wage and salary workers in private establishments

to total employed is within 53-55 percent," it added.

The government also aims to increase the percentage of wage and salary workers in private establishments to total employed from the average of 49.6 percent in the January to October 2022 period.

This year, the administration aims to increase wage and salary workers in private establishments to total employed to 50.3 to 50.7 percent; 50.9 to 51.5 percent in 2024; 51.4 to 52.4 percent in 2025; 51.9 to 53.3 percent in 2026; 52.5 to 54.1 percent in 2027; and 53 to 55 percent in 2028.

This will help reduce poverty to 16 to 16.4 percent this year; 12.9 to 13.2 in 2025; 10 to 10.3 percent in

2027; and between 8.8 to 9 percent. The baseline was at 18.1 in 2021.

Good jobs are expected to increase the country's Gross national income per capita to \$4,130 to \$4,203 this year and to \$4,454 to \$4,592 in 2024, which will mark the country's entry into Upper Middle Income Country (UMIC) status.

The GNI per capita of the Philippines was at \$3,640 in 2021, placing it as a low middle income country with a GNI per capita of between \$1,086 and \$4,255.

Based on the World Bank's classification, UMICs are economies with a GNI per capita of between \$4,256 and \$13,205.

The government intends to increase the country's per capita income to \$4,814 to \$4,920 in 2025; \$5,256 to \$5,563 in 2026; \$5,645 to \$6,056 in 2027; and \$6,044 to \$6,571 in 2028.

"While navigating external headwinds, the country will rebuild the losses from the pandemic and invest in improving areas where deep weaknesses were apparent in the pandemic response," the PDP stated. "This development agenda aims to get the Philippines back on track toward achieving upper middle-

income country status by 2025."

Efforts to decrease unemployment and increase incomes is to create green jobs over the medium term, according to the PDP. The government considers this as a key employment generation strategy.

The government plans to create a database of green jobs and implement the Green Jobs Human Resource Development Plan.

These efforts also include intensifying the integration and mainstreaming of green competencies in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and education programs.

The government also plans to ensure the stability of the economy; adequate investments in green sectors; feasibility of creating green ecozones; and sustainability of human capital investments.

In terms of safety nets, the government will provide adequate levels of social protection to address the just transition of unskilled workers to green jobs.

"As economies become more involved in greening processes and structures, those who belong to brown occupations may need assistance transitioning to other occupations," the PDP stated.



5-year Development Plan sets roadmap for economic recovery

The National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) Board chaired by President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr., approved last December 16 the Philippine Development Plan for 2023–2028, with the following key macroeconomic targets: gross domestic product (GDP) growth ranging from 6.5 to 8.0 percent; unemployment contained at between 4.0 to 5.0 percent, or down from 8.0 percent in 2021; single-digit poverty rate at 9.0 percent of the population, down from 18.1 percent last year; increase in wage and salaried workers from 48.0 to up to 55.0 percent.

To jumpstart the attainment of these five-year targets, the government seeks to achieve the following in 2023: GDP growth target of 6.0 to 7.0 percent; Inflation and food inflation maintained at 2.5 to 4.5 percent in 2023 and 2.0 to 4.0 percent from 2024 to 2028; narrowing of national government debt-to-GDP ratio from 63.7 percent this year to 48 to 53 percent by 2028.

NEDA Director-General and Economic Planning Secretary Arsenio Balisacan expressed confidence that Gross National Income (GNI) would improve sufficiently so that by 2025, the Philippines could be classified as an upper to middle-income economy. This will be a remarkable achievement. The Philippines has been classified as a lower middle-income country ever since the World Bank came up with its classification scheme – whether internally in the early 1980s or as officially published since 1989.

In essence, the NEDA points out, the PDP's overarching objective is the revitalization of job creation and poverty reduction and the country's return to its high-growth trajectory following more than two

years of economic slump brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The new five-year plan follows the framework of Ambisyon 2040, the country's long-term development plan established in 2015. This was fine-tuned by the Duterte administration for the period 2017 to 2022 and further refined by the incumbent administration, aligning these with the eight key goals declared by President Marcos in his first State of the Nation Address (SONA) last July, as follows: protecting purchasing power; reducing vulnerability and mitigating the scarring from the pandemic; ensuring sound macroeconomic fundamentals; creating more jobs; ensuring quality jobs; creating green jobs; guaranteeing a level playing field; and maintaining public order, safety, peace and security.

Noteworthy in the NEDA primer is the that it also spelled out the enabling actions to ensure attainment of priority goals. Inflation containment shall be achieved via a wholistic approach that takes into account food, energy, transportation and logistics constraints that disrupt supply and value chains. The remaining obstacles to fully reopening the economy shall be addressed through purposive interventions that would ensure the seamless delivery of health, education and social protection services.

The jobs strategy "will be supported by enhanced implementation of the National Competition Policy and the accelerated operationalization of amended laws governing foreign investments." Reskilling, retooling and job facilitation would ensure higher employability. Finally, the sustainability imperative will drive the creation of green jobs and livable communities.



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EXTRACT ALSO TESTED ON CARS

Nipa sap eyed as green alternative to LPG

By Krixia Subingsubing

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For years now, Filipino scientist Fiorello Abenes has been studying the tropical nipa plant (*Nypa fruticans*) that grows mainly along the Philippines' meandering coastlines. Humble yet surprisingly nimble, it can transform into many things: its leaves, a hut; its sugar-rich sap, into ethanol.

Now, he and his team at the Mariano Marcos State University (MMSU) have found a way to use nipa ethanol, or "nipahol," as an alternative cooking fuel to liquefied petroleum gas (LPG).

Under the Department of Science and Technology's Balik Scientist program—under which he counted among its first **A2**

Balik Scientists in the 1970s—Abenes and his team have developed a prototype that uses gravity instead of pressurized gas to "feed" nipahol to a burner.

When scaled up, this project can help provide jobs in coastal communities and even help do away "dirty cooking," especially in the country's rural areas, where many still rely on biomass, kerosene and coal.

Vehicle fuel

But beyond cleaner cooking fuel, Abenes is targeting something more radical—using nipahol as a cheap gasoline additive for cars.

"Of course, it's still a good thing to pursue (nipahol as cooking fuel). We are still helping the environment, and we would save a lot of lives," he told the Inquirer. "But the better use for nipa sap is to adapt its ethanol as a suitable gasoline additive and help drive gas prices down."

In fact, he and his team have known for quite some time that it can be done. For years now, the MMSU has been distilling nipa sap in their own facilities using a four-hour process called reflux distillation, which extracts 95 percent hydrous ethanol from the sap.

The distilleries cost P500,000, and so far they've produced 3,000 liters of ethanol. Some were repurposed into disinfectants used in northern Luzon during the pandemic, and also for a nipahol stove prototype.

Right now, he said, they need more funding to be able to turn nipahol into pressurized gas like LPG and to commercialize it eventually.

But what Abenes is ultimately hoping for is a green light from the Department of Energy to test nipahol as a renewable fuel.

This is because ethanol can be used as a vehicle fuel by itself (E100), blended with gasoline (E85), or as a gasoline octane enhancer (10 percent concentration).

'Satisfactory substitute'

The 2006 Biofuels Act mandates the use of 5 percent ethanol in gasoline by 2009 and 10 percent in 2011. However, the law also requires that the ethanol used be 99.6 percent anhydrous, or without water.

Abenes, however, disagrees with that high threshold, as 95 percent hydrous ethanol is the maximum that can be extracted from indigenous sources like

nipa, sweet sorghum and coconut. Studies abroad, for example, have shown that using hydrous ethanol can be just as efficient and economical for cars.

In 2017, a team of MMSU scientists led by its president, Shirley Agrupis, as well as Nathaniel Ericson Mateo, James Paul Madrigal and Marilou Lucas tested out that formula on a brand-new Kia car and a Japanese motorbike.

For these test runs, they found that hydrous ethanol blends provide more power and better fuel economy compared with anhydrous ethanol and neat gasoline.

"Based on these studies, the study concludes that hydrous ethanol is a satisfactory substitute to anhydrous ethanol both as oxygenate and as gasohol fuel," the authors said.

"Considering the production cost difference, a case can be made that the Philippines should consider transitioning to hydrous ethanol as oxygenate and fuel in the future," they added.

'Harvest'

This is where nipahol comes in, Abenes said. Compared with sugarcane and coconut, nipa is the most efficient source of ethanol "because the sap you extract from it is already fermented, and there is no investment because they grow in coastal areas."

At present, there are around 38,000 hectares of nipa across the country, Abenes said. "You do not have to plant it, you do not have to cultivate it, you can just harvest and harvest 100 days a year for one plant. Each harvest can extract one and a half liter," he added.

Even the distillery facilities at MMSU are "so sophisticated and yet so simple," he added. "If we can only give a chance to this technology, we can create so many jobs, as 62 percent of our people live in coastal areas... It's a big income earner but first we have to find the market to do it."

He estimated that their current stock of nipahol can be mixed initially to 60,000 liters of gasoline. "All we need is a gasoline station and money to do it, and we can provide a side-by-side comparison on cars and tricycles."

"It's so ironic that we're getting all this publicity for a stove [when] we can demonstrate that this can be used as an alternative source of fuel," Abenes said.

"We have long been finished with the research and all we need is the chance to try it out." INQ



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MEASURING IMPACTS OF NONGOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS' WORK IN COMMUNITIES: INDIVIDUAL VS. FAMILY BENEFICIARIES

SEVERAL years ago, I had a conversation with a former long-time leader of an association of families and beneficiaries of a foreign nongovernment organization (NGO) in a barangay in Bicol.

The foreign NGO implemented sectoral projects on education, health and nutrition, livelihood, environmental sanitation, and community development. I was one of the NGO's technical staff in the mid-'80s and '90s. It was in another development era, which was a mix of dole-out and welfare approaches. Climate change, human rights, food security, etc., were unheard of. The same with digitalization, artificial intelligence, etc. Attendance

and participation were interchangeable, which was how I characterized that period.

I immediately posted the salient points of that conversation on Facebook. The succeeding paragraphs, most of which are cautionary tales, are drawn from that FB post with a little tweaking for context, clarity, and emphasis.

A beneficiary is expected to benefit from the short- and long-term results of a development program, project, and policy. In making both ends meet, a beneficiary is better than a nonbeneficiary, but not for a long time. Not long after the NGO's departure, the beneficiaries are virtually back to their default survival mode.

In the end, a beneficiary and a nonbeneficiary are in the same boat, especially in times of financial shock because of calamities, etc. This is the case even if a beneficiary was provided a new house, a small business grant, training, etc.

But family beneficiaries are not back to square one. They can better understand local and national issues, and how their lives are affected. Women, especially mothers, have increased their knowledge of proper health and nutrition practices. Parents put a premium on the education of their children, and go to great lengths to finance their schooling. They know how to coordinate with the government to access re-

sources and services. They have the capacity for collective actions. And they have easy access to schools, health clinics, etc. Several families have escaped from poverty even before the NGO's phase-out. The children with adequate education have become overseas workers, government or private employees, small business owners, et al.

The foreign NGO provided scholarships for a college degree or a vocational course. They are thankful to the foreign NGO for helping to change their lives for the better. This suggests that educational assistance is the most beneficial because its impact is not only sustainable, but also life-changing. And yet the rural poor have

become poorer. This is regardless of whether they are former beneficiaries of an NGO or the government. Many of the children who have their own families are no better than their parents and forebears. The small landholdings they inherited have become less economically viable. And most of them have sold or pawned their farm lots and other inherited assets. Some have moved to cities, particularly to Metro Manila. But without a college education, they have no full-time jobs and live in squatter areas.

There must be "redevelopment" to sustain development gains after the phase-out of an NGO, or the efforts go down the drain. A second time around,

say after five years, would be a good time to apply relevant lessons learned and good practices for sustainability reasons. This must be a key feature of the strategic directions of an NGO. At the outset, an NGO must know where to work, with whom, how, for how long and for whom, and why. Plus, how does one measure long-term results or impact? Skip individual beneficiaries and go for family beneficiaries. When a family member makes good in life because of a development intervention by an NGO, the whole family, in fact, becomes the beneficiary.

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UN conference concludes with 'historic' biodiversity deal

THE community of the world's nations adopted a landmark framework to support global biodiversity last December 19, and the agreement contains significant contributions from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), committed to make sure that the needs and impacts of agrifood systems are given due consideration.

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework was approved at the UN Biodiversity Conference COP15 summit after marathon negotiations at the headquarters of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the multilateral treaty tasked with the conservation of biological diversity and the sustainable use of its components.

The document explicates the four goals and 23 targets for 2030 adopted, which include a pledge to protect 30 percent of the Earth's lands, oceans, coastal areas and inland waters, to repurpose \$500 billion in annual government subsidies so that they provide incentives rather than trigger harm for biodiversity goals, and to create a Special Trust Fund under the aegis of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) to support implementation of the new Framework.

"The COP15 summit was a success as a framework for the future

was agreed," said FAO Deputy Director-General Maria Helena Semedo, who headed FAO's delegation at the summit and is responsible for the Natural Resources and Sustainable Production stream at the UN agency. "Now we have measurable objectives and dedicated financial mechanisms, which is a big step forward."

Hailed by UN Secretary-General António Guterres as the outline of a "peace pact with nature", the framework culminates years of multifaceted work by FAO, which at the COP13 in 2016 was mandated to develop and manage a biodiversity mainstreaming platform to foster dialogue between the environment sector, often focused on conservation, and the agricultural sectors, whose function of feeding the world inevitably has a large impact on the world's natural resources.

FAO distributed a white paper to COP15 delegations and the organization's experts were repeatedly asked for technical inputs during the just-concluded CBD negotiations.

FAO and partners also hosted a series of side events to highlight specific topics. These included the importance of mountain areas, of forest ecosystem restoration, of the role and knowledge of Indigenous Peoples, of the roles of wild meat and sustainable wildlife management,

of pollinators, fisheries, of assuring that finance flows are consistent with nature-positive pathways, and of the prospects for evidence-based bioeconomy opportunities to contribute to and accelerate global biodiversity mainstreaming.

At COP15 FAO also launched the Global Soil Biodiversity Observatory (GLOSOB), which aims to deepen knowledge about the critical functions of what Semedo calls the biodiversity "that we do not see". Only a tiny fraction of soil organisms have been identified to date, and the GLOSOB observatory offers an urgent opportunity for countries—and their farmers large and small—to contribute to measuring and monitoring what is happening on the level where food begins.

Sustainable utilization

WHILE many biodiversity conservation advocates have long favored expanding protected areas, FAO champions a view where many of these areas are critical for the food security and cultural integrity of the world's peoples, underscoring the importance of managing multiple goals in a holistic way.

Moreover, as more than a third of the Earth's surface is devoted to agriculture, and biodiversity itself comprises crop varieties and livestock breeds as well as microorganisms in the soil, agrifood

systems are essential parts of an effective and efficient approach to protecting global biodiversity. A wealth of evidence suggests that assuring sustainable utilization is often a more fruitful path than rigid protection.

So while agrifood production must be made more sustainable, conservation must also be sustainable.

"It is important to grasp that while agrifood systems can reduce biodiversity, ultimately they depend on it, so there is a lot of room for mutual and symbiotic benefits," said FAO's Semedo.

"Any solution to stop and reverse biodiversity loss will require agrifood system transformation, and the Global Biodiversity Framework will not succeed without the engagement of the food and agriculture sectors," said Frederic Castell, Senior Natural Resources Officer and leader of FAO's work on biodiversity mainstreaming. Agrifood systems are central to around half the targets of the new Framework, he added.

Target 10 of the Framework captures the spirit of that point.

Promises and challenges

THE Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework contains numerous specific elements that have been driving FAO's work and will add new tasks.



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How Putin's war and small islands are accelerating the global shift to clean energy, and what to watch for in 2023



BEACHGOERS walk near wind turbines along the coast of Pingtan in Southern China's Fujian province, on August 6, 2022. China announced ambitious schemes to enable the country to meet its 2030 clean energy goals five years ahead of schedule. AP/NG HAN GUAN

By RACHEL KYTE
Tufts University

The Conversation

THE year 2022 was a tough one for the growing number of people living in food insecurity and energy poverty around the world, and the beginning of 2023 is looking bleak.

Russia's war on Ukraine, one of the world's largest grain and fertilizer feedstock suppliers, tightened global food and energy supplies, which in turn helped spur inflation.

Drought, exacerbated in some places by warring groups blocking food aid, pushed parts of the Horn of Africa toward famine. Extreme weather disasters have left trails of destruction with mounting costs on nearly every continent. More countries found themselves in debt distress.

But below the surface of almost weekly bad news, significant changes are underway that have the potential to create a more sustainable world—one in which humanity can tackle climate change, species extinction and food and energy insecurity.

I've been involved in international sustainable development for most of my career and now teach climate diplomacy. Here's how two key systems that drive the world's economy—energy and finance—are starting to shift toward sustainability and what to watch for in 2023.

Ramping up renewable energy growth

RUSSIAN President Vladimir Putin's war on Ukraine has reverberated through Europe and spread to other countries that have long been dependent on the region for natural gas. But while oil-produc-

ing countries and gas lobbyists are arguing for more drilling, global energy investments reflect a quickening transition to cleaner energy.

Call it the Putin effect—Russia's war is speeding up the global shift away from fossil fuels.

In December, the International Energy Agency published two important reports that point to the future of renewable energy.

First, the IEA revised its projection of renewable energy growth upward by 30%. It now expects the world to install as much solar and wind power in the next five years as it installed in the past 50 years.



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accelerating the global shift to clean energy, and what to watch for in 2023

The second report showed that energy use is becoming more efficient globally, with efficiency increasing by about 2% per year. As energy analyst Kingsmill Bond at the energy research group RMI noted, the two reports together suggest that fossil fuel demand may have peaked. While some low-income countries have been eager for deals to tap their fossil fuel resources, the IEA warns that new fossil fuel production risks becoming stranded, or uneconomic, in the next 20 years.

The main obstacles to the exponential growth in renewable energy, IEA points out, are antiquated energy policy frameworks, regulations and subsidies written at a time when energy systems, pricing and utilities were all geared toward fossil fuels.

Look in 2023 for reforms, including countries wrestling with how to permit smart grids and new transmission lines and finding ways to reward consumers for efficiency and clean energy generation.

The year 2023 will also see more focus on developing talent for the clean energy infrastructure build-out. In the US, the recently passed Inflation Reduction Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law will pour hundreds of billions of dollars into clean energy and technology. Europe's REPowerEU commitments will also boost investment. However, concerns about "buy American" rules within the new US climate laws and an EU plan to launch a carbon border adjustment tax are raising fears that nationalism in trade policy could harm the speed of green growth.

Fixing international climate finance

THE second system to watch for reform in 2023 is international finance. It's also crucial to how low-income countries develop

their energy systems, build resilience and recover from climate disasters.

Wealthy nations haven't moved the energy transition forward quickly enough or provided enough support for emerging markets and developing countries to leapfrog inefficient fossil-fueled energy systems. Debt is ballooning in low-income countries, and climate change and disasters like the devastating flooding in Pakistan wipe out growth and add costs.

Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley has brought together international financial institutions with think tanks and philanthropists to push for changes.

Countries like Mottley's have been frustrated that the current international financial system—primarily the International Monetary Fund and the multilateral development banks, including the World Bank—haven't adapted to the growing climate challenges.

Mottley's Bridgetown Initiative proposes a new approach. It calls for countries' vulnerability to be measured by climate impact,

and for funds to be made available on that basis, rather than income. It also urges more risk-taking by the development banks to leverage private investment in vulnerable countries, including climate debt swaps.

The Bridgetown Initiative also calls for countries to reflow their IMF Special Drawing Rights—a reserve available to IMF members—into a proposed fund that vulnerable countries could then use to build resilience to climate change. A working group established by the G-20 points out that the "easiest" trillion dollars to access for urgent climate response is that already in the system.

In early 2023, Mottley and French President Emmanuel Macron, with others, will drive a process to examine the possible measures to improve the current system before the annual meetings of the World Bank and the IMF in April, and then at a June summit called by France.

Watch in 2023 to see if this is the year the G-7 and the G-20 rekindle their global economic

leadership roles. Their members are the largest owners of the international financial institutions, and also the largest emitters of carbon dioxide on the planet. India will lead the G-20 in 2023, followed by Brazil in 2024. Their leadership will be critical.

Watch small nations' leadership in 2023

IN 2023, expect to see small nations increasingly push for global transformation, led by the V-20—the finance ministers of the countries most vulnerable to climate change.

In addition to the Bridgetown Initiative, Barbados has suggested a way to pool new funds working off the model of an oil spill damage fund at the International Maritime Organization. In the IMO fund, big oil importers pay in, and the fund pays out in the event of a spill. Barbados supports creating a similar fund to help countries when a climate event costs more than 5% of a country's GDP.

This model is potentially a way to pool funds from a levy on the windfall profits of energy companies that saw their profits soar in 2022 while billions of people around the world suffered from energy price inflation.

Finally, the breakthrough agreement on biodiversity reached in December 2022 provides more promise for 2023. Countries agreed to conserve 30% of the world's biodiversity and restore 30% of the world's degraded lands. The funding—a \$30 billion fund by 2030—remains to be found, but the plan clarifies the task ahead and nature's place in it. And we can hope 2023 is a year when signs of peace in our war against nature break out.

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New York OKs human composting law

ALBANY, New York: Howard Fischer, a 63-year old investor living north of New York City, has a wish for when he dies. He wants his remains to be placed in a vessel, broken down by tiny microbes and composted into rich, fertile soil.

Maybe his composted remains could be planted outside the family home in Vermont, or maybe they could be returned to the earth elsewhere. "Whatever my family chooses to do with the compost after it's done is up to them," Fischer said.

"I am committed to having my body composted and my family knows that," he added. "But I would love for it to happen in New York where I live rather than shipping myself across the country."

Democratic Gov. Kathy Hochul signed legislation on Saturday (Sunday in Manila) to legalize natural organic reduction, popularly known as human composting, making New York the sixth state in the nation to allow that method of burial.

Washington state became the first state to legalize human composting in 2019, followed by Colorado and Oregon in 2021, and Vermont and California in 2022.

For Fischer, this alternative, green method of burial aligns with his philosophical view on life: to live in an environmentally conscious way.

The process goes like this: the body of the deceased is placed into a reusable vessel along with plant material such as wood chips, alfalfa and straw. The organic mix creates the perfect habitat for naturally occurring microbes to do their work, quickly and efficiently breaking down the body in about a month's time.

The end result is a heaping cubic yard of nutrient-dense soil amendment, the equivalent of about 36 bags of soil, that can be used to plant trees or enrich conservation land, forests, or gardens.

For urban areas such as New York City where land is limited, it can be seen as a pretty attractive

burial alternative.

Michelle Menter, manager at Greensprings Natural Cemetery Preserve, a cemetery in central New York, said the facility would "strongly consider" the alternative method.

"It definitely is more in line with what we do," she added.

The 130-acre (52-hectare) nature preserve cemetery, nestled between protected forest land, offers natural, green burials which is when a body can be placed in a biodegradable container and into a gravesite so that it can decompose fully.

"Every single thing we can do to turn people away from concrete liners and fancy caskets and embalming, we ought to do and be supportive of," she said.

But not all are onboard with the idea.

The New York State Catholic Conference, a group that represents bishops in the state, has long opposed the bill, calling the burial method "inappropriate."

"A process that is perfectly appropriate for returning vegetable trimmings to the earth is not necessarily appropriate for human bodies," Dennis Poust, executive director of the organization, said in a statement.

"Human bodies are not household waste, and we do not believe that the process meets the standard of reverent treatment of our earthly remains," he said.

Katrina Spade, the founder of Recompose, a full-service green funeral home in Seattle that offers human composting, said it offers an alternative for people wanting to align the disposition of their remains with how they lived their lives.

She said "it feels like a movement" among the environmentally aware.

"Cremation uses fossil fuels and burial uses a lot of land and has a carbon footprint," said Spade. "For a lot of folks, being turned into soil that can be turned to grow into a garden or tree is pretty impactful." **AP**