

100 days of climate doublespeak

The missing climate agenda in the Marcos Jr administration

Mr Marcos Jr comes into presidency two years into the COVID 19 pandemic and with the country's economy at one of its lowest points. He also serves his term during what scientists describe as the most critical decade for action to avoid the worst impacts of the climate crisis. The next six years needs to see the Philippines through toward a green and just economic recovery that is underpinned by climate action.

The welfare of present and succeeding generations of Filipinos depend on policy actions governments take today. The Philippine government, in particular, carries a great responsibility in making sure that domestic policies reflect ambitious climate action, and in upholding climate justice for the sake of the millions of Filipinos who face the worst impacts of the climate crisis. It must also strongly pressure and call out developed nations to deliver action and justice by committing to an urgent phase out of fossil fuels, more money on the table for climate finance, and reparation for loss and damage. At this crucial juncture, addressing the climate crisis must be the central overarching policy of the Philippine government, setting a direction for all government plans and programs.

Unfortunately, what we know so far is that three months into this term, the Marcos Jr administration still has no meaningful climate agenda. While the president's speeches may serve to project that he has a heightened awareness of the urgency of climate issues and its current and potential impacts to the economy as well as food and energy security, and that he's doing something about it, his actions on the ground are either missing or in contradiction to his statements.

The climate crisis in the Philippines

The Philippines is a climate emergency hotspot. The most catastrophic manifestation of this is extreme weather events, such as supertyphoons. Data from the past six years has shown that out of the average 20 typhoons we experience every year, as much as six of these annually can be supertyphoons. Many of our poorest provinces are also familiar with major drought incidents in the past decade. We are also highly vulnerable to the slow onset impacts of the climate crisis. A 2021 Greenpeace report¹ warns that sea level rise will affect our coastal cities. Scientists further predict widespread loss of our already degraded coral reefs from warming ocean temperatures and ocean acidification.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, composed of the world's leading climate scientists, warned in 2018² that we only have until 2030 as the window for action to prevent the worst impacts of the climate crisis. The latest IPCC Assessment Report³ released in 2021-2022 further raised the alarm by saying that climate impacts are happening at a much faster rate and more intense scale than previously thought.

In the report, the IPCC notes: "The cumulative scientific evidence is unequivocal: Climate change is a threat to human well-being and planetary health. Any further delay in concerted anticipatory global action on adaptation and mitigation will miss a brief and rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a liveable and sustainable future for all."

¹ [The Projected Economic Impact of Extreme Sea-Level Rise in Seven Asian Cities in 2030](#)

² [Global Warming of 1.5°C](#), an IPCC special report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty

³ [IPCC 6th Assessment Report](#)

It is clear that the climate crisis is the defining issue of this administration. It is not just about climate—it is about food security, access to water, people's health, lives and livelihoods. It is also about justice—the poorest Filipinos, who are already in the margins, will be the ones to suffer the most. The climate crisis is an underlying factor that will derail any expected successes of government plans and programs. It is crucial that this climate agenda is not an add-on or a “nice to have” component in the Marcos Jr administration's economic recovery plans or public health and poverty reduction agendas.

The first 100 days

The first three months in office of a sitting president gives an indication of the priorities, focus and direction of a new administration. In this paper, Greenpeace Philippines takes a look at whether climate action and climate justice are actually an integral part of the present administration's priorities, based on the president's policy actions and direction, and speed of implementation, in his first 100 days.

Even before the start of his term, President Marcos Jr signaled that economic recovery is his top concern. This comes as no surprise given the severe economic impacts of the COVID 19 pandemic. His economic team was formed within three weeks of his inauguration and economic plans are a key focus of both his inaugural speech and his State of the Nation Address (SONA). A day after the SONA, the president's economic team already unveiled a “comprehensive eight-point socioeconomic agenda.”

Interestingly, while the economy was Mr Marcos Jr's main concern after the elections, the public did not hear much from him on this during his campaign. In contrast, Mr Marcos Jr used the issue of renewable energy when he ran for president, and issued calls for collective action on climate. As president, climate change figured prominently in his most important speeches, particularly his inaugural statement, his SONA, his statement on his birthday, and most recently, his speech at the UNGA.

However, it seems apparent that for Marcos Jr and his administration, climate remains only at the level of rhetoric. While there were a couple of positive developments, such as the appointment of a climate advocate at the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, as well as the increase in climate-related expenditure for national government institutions, there is a glaring disconnect between the president's climate pronouncements and actual policies being implemented on the ground. In particular, we see:

- Lack of a holistic climate action strategy. In the President's most public speeches, he refers to the climate crisis as a priority issue of the government. But this has not translated into meaningful action. The government still has no overarching coherent climate plan that should steer the work of all government agencies to address this crisis.
- No energy transition plan. The President used renewable energy to build his image as a supporter of sustainability during his campaign, and he continues to purport to support RE. But in reality, his policy direction on energy fully contradicts his rhetoric on RE.
- Disaster resilience also figures prominently in his speeches, but his stance on the subject remains unclear, whether disaster resilience is merely a response, or whether it should have a policy framework.
- In legislation, only two of his 19 identified priority bills during the SONA are concerned with the climate. At the same time, some of his pet bills will block RE development.
- On budgets, while the increase in climate related expenditure for national government institutions (NGIs) in the 2023 budget may be positive, this is not an indication that there is a climate action plan behind the spending. We also note the decrease in the budget of climate-related implementing agencies, particularly the Climate Change Commission, as well as the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR).

- On appointments, many pro-climate groups welcomed Antonia Yulo-Loyzaga as DENR Secretary, and her announcement to involve civil society organizations. We have yet to see whether this will be a DENR that will put people and the planet before big business.
- From the President's pronouncements and actions, human rights and strengthening democratic processes and institutions does not seem to be a priority. Further, the administration has been mum about the Commission on Human Rights' Report on the National Inquiry on Climate Change--a globally significant report on corporate accountability on climate--which should be actively used by the Philippine government as a basis for its demands on climate justice.

Pronouncements vs reality

Mr Marcos Jr's speeches

Inaugural Speech, 30 Jun 2022

In his inaugural speech, President Marcos spoke of his commitment to prioritizing climate change issues. He said that his administration will seek the support and guidance of partner nations and friends who can help the Philippines, a nation that creates a small carbon footprint yet is disproportionately impacted by climate change. He stated that his first step is to help victims recover, followed by implementing policies and programs to mitigate climate change's harmful impacts.

President Marcos also mentioned that the agriculture sector would be given urgent attention to ensure the country's food self-sufficiency. By following a trade policy of competitive advantage, he noted that the Philippines should focus more on importing what other countries make more of and selling the cheapest rather than trying to produce locally.

Aside from the agriculture sector, President Marcos also listed energy supply as a significant problem in the country and claimed that sufficient fossil fuel-free technologies had not yet been invented for whole economies. He mentioned that there are some tried and proven new ways of mitigation, such as the windmills of Ilocos Norte.

He vowed that his administration would fully attend to the country's responsibility to adapt and mitigate climate change, especially in cleaning up single-use plastics.

State of the Nation Address, 25 Jul 2022

In July, in his first State of the Nation Address (SONA), the President laid out his stance on issues concerning the environment and expressed his understanding on why it is important:

From all this impetus for development and growth, we undertake within the context of accelerating climate change and extreme weather conditions.

Though we are a minor contributor to climate change globally, we have the unfortunate distinction of being one of the most vulnerable countries to the effects of climate change.

For the welfare of our people, it is incumbent upon us to alleviate the effects of that vulnerability.

By putting renewable energy at the top of his climate agenda, the President expressed focus on climate change mitigation, but he has not left out climate change adaptation either with his mention of disaster-proof planning in the communities:

The use of renewable energy is at the top of our climate agenda. We will increase our use of renewable energy sources such as hydropower, geothermal power, solar, and wind.

Geographically, we are a disaster-prone country. Capacity building for our natural disaster resiliency is therefore a must. Investment in science and technology is imperative to enable us to have accurate weather forecasts and on-time disaster alerts.

Studies show that already now many areas in the Philippines are at high risk from the rise in sea levels brought about by the increase in global temperature. We must adapt to this phenomenon with disaster-proof planning of our communities.

He also highlighted water:

We will also look into the precarious fresh water supply situation in the country, especially in our urban areas. Many of our water supply systems date back to the 1950's, and they must now be rehabilitated and improved.

I have instructed the DENR together with the DPWH, to explore possible partnerships with the private sector to address this crucial situation.

Finally, the environmental part of his SONA ended with:

The Philippines has excellent laws on the environment, but we have to guarantee that these laws are properly enforced. And this will require a great deal of coordination and cooperation between concerned government agencies and private stakeholders.

Companies who exploit our natural resources must follow the law. We all have the responsibility to preserve this Earth, for we are but custodians, and we will pass on this great treasure to future generations.

He emphasized that the Philippines cannot achieve economic recovery if climate change will not be mitigated:

There is no question that the preservation of the environment is the preservation of life. If we cannot mitigate climate change, all our plans for the economy, all our plans for our future, will be for naught.

While there was a thorough discussion on the country's economic, environmental, and educational agenda, the topic of human rights was not raised during the speech.

Speech on his birthday, 13 Sep 2022

On his 65th birthday though, on 13 September, he planted a tree and underlined the need to protect the environment⁴, saying that "the seedlings that were planted... will be significant in realizing the government's reforestation goal, as the program generates jobs, opportunities, as well as livelihood for ordinary Filipinos."

More than the economic benefit of the activity, he said the country is essentially and primarily investing in ensuring that the planet remains a safe space, especially for the next generation that will inherit it.

⁴ See https://ops.gov.ph/news_releases/pbbm-marks-65th-birthday-by-planting-trees-raises-need-to-protect-the-environment/, accessed 23 September 2022

Speech at the UN General Assembly, New York, 20 Sep 2022

At the UN General Assembly⁵ Marcos Jr named climate change as one of the “four challenges to the continued survival of the global community.” He acknowledged it as the “greatest threat affecting our nations and peoples” and stated the time for talk is over.

He also spoke of climate justice: “The effects of climate change are uneven and reflect an historical injustice: Those who are least responsible suffer the most. The Philippines, for example, is a net carbon sink, we absorb more carbon dioxide than we emit. And yet, we are the 4th most vulnerable country to climate change.” He called on industrialized countries to immediately fulfill their obligations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement to cut their greenhouse gas emissions, provide climate financing and technology transfer for adaptation for the most vulnerable, and developing countries to lead by example.

He referred to sustainability as a tool to address the challenges, highlighting the need for food security and the importance of water and biodiversity. On development, he said: “We already know that the Gross Domestic Product is an incomplete measure of progress and that vulnerability is multidimensional. Our development agenda must also take into account the interest of all developing nations, including middle-income countries where the majority of the world’s poor live.”

Realities on the ground

Beyond the speeches, the reality on the ground is starkly different. Climate remains at the level of rhetoric.

In his inaugural address on 30 June 2022 as the 17th Philippine president, Marcos Jr mentioned several priority issues and policy directions that his administration will tackle which relate to the agenda on climate. These are: better agriculture; food security and food self-sufficiency; becoming fossil fuel-free; harnessing renewable energy; large-scale practical solutions to pollution; and climate change adaptation and mitigation. Among these issues, his plans around agriculture are the clearest. For the rest, he has stated no plans on how the administration will deal with those issues.

Legislative

As to his first State of the Nation Address (SONA) on 25 July 2022, Marcos Jr enumerated 19 priority legislative measures for which he urged the 19th Congress to pass. Out of the 89 climate-related Senate and House Bills, only two measures that relate to the climate agenda are in the president’s priority list : 1) the creation of the Department of Water Resources and the adoption of the Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM) as the strategic framework for national water management, policy making and planning; 2) the proposed National Land Use Act.

Water

It is good that the president looked at fresh water supply. But it appears he is looking at it from an infrastructure point of view--not from the fact that in order to have abundant fresh water supply, forest and biodiversity ecosystems need to be intact, for these are the precursors of ecosystem services that replenish our water supply. The National Land Use Act will provide for a national and holistic management and development of the country’s land and water resources, hold owners accountable for making these lands productive and sustainable, strengthen the local government units (LGUs) to manage ecological balance within their jurisdictions, as well as provide for Land Use and Physical Planning/Framework as a mechanism in determining policies and principles to implement this measure.

⁵ See https://ops.gov.ph/news_releases/pbbm-addresses-un-general-assembly-urges-urgent-action-on-climate-change-food-security/, accessed 23 September 2022

Energy

Also among his priorities is the enactment of an Enabling Law for the Natural Gas Industry--a bill that will hinder the urgent uptake of renewable energy and set the Philippines back on its climate goals. Should this bill come to pass and the planned fossil gas capacity in the pipeline come online, it will crowd out renewables for at least three to four decades. This is unacceptable given that we only have less than a decade to ensure emissions are drastically reduced.

The Enabling Law or the Natural Gas Industry will also set us back in terms of energy security. With the eventual depletion of the Malampaya gas field, and the absence of new sources, the gas destined for power plants in the pipeline will largely come from imports.

Meanwhile, while he didn't identify nuclear energy as a priority legislative agenda, it remains among the president's top issues. Within a month and a half into his term, his allies in the House of Representatives composed a Special Committee on Nuclear Energy that is distinctly separate from the Committee on Energy, tasked to focus on the dangerous energy source. The speed at which he and his administration are fast tracking nuclear bills is unmatched by action he has done for RE. Like fossil gas, the establishment of nuclear plants will crowd out renewables and delay the much needed modernization of the grid network to maximize variable power.

The attention, energy and resources the Marcos Jr administration is putting on promoting and railroading nuclear energy in the Philippines, despite its inherent dangers and the fact that it will hinder climate solutions, informs us that his actual priorities do not lie with RE. President Marcos' stand and action on fossil gas and nuclear energy clearly belies his claims of support for RE and lays bare his mythmaking that he is an RE champion.

Additionally, despite the greenfield coal moratorium of the previous administration, and a project with a multilateral lender on support for phasing out coal-fired power plants, Marcos Jr has not yet announced a time-bound phaseout of coal, something he could have easily done within his first three months.

Economy

A day after the president delivered his first SONA, PBBM's economic team presented the administration's 8-Point Socio-Economic Agenda. Similarly, there are three general components under the socio-economic agenda in the near- and medium-term that would approximately address climate-related issues and concerns, to wit: 1) protect the purchasing power of families by ensuring food security, reducing transport and logistics costs, and reducing energy costs; 2) create more jobs by promoting investments, improving infrastructure, and ensuring energy security, among others; and 3) create green jobs by pursuing a green and blue economy and establishing livable and sustainable communities.

He noted that the government is drawing up a comprehensive all-inclusive plan for economic transformation which hopefully includes the climate agenda. However, Greenpeace Philippines notes the absence of an overall climate agenda which needs to inform this economic transformation given how he has already identified the climate crisis as a barrier to economic growth.

Disaster resilience

After the earthquake which struck Abra Province on 27 July 2022, Marcos Jr was widely quoted in media the next day to support the establishment of a Disaster Resilience Department, citing the need because of the frequency of disasters in the Philippines. However, he backtracked the day after, and was quoted saying, there was no need for an agency since there was no need to form policy around disaster resilience,

which he said is “just an implementation of a rescue mission or search and rescue mission,”⁶ reinforcing how he seems to look at post disaster operations merely as response and relief efforts. Much later, during his keynote address at the DENR Multi-Stakeholder Forum on 5 October 2022, he said that resilience and adaptation are “on top of the national agenda.”

Since he became president, Mr Marcos has encountered at least two disasters, aside from the Abra earthquake: Typhoon Florita in August which devastated farmlands in Northern Luzon, and Supertyphoon Karding in late September, which ravaged crops in Central Luzon. Agricultural damage from both typhoons stood at billions of pesos. Mr Marcos Jr heads the Department of Agriculture and is well aware of the devastation typhoons, which strike the country at an average of 20 events annually, cause to agriculture. It must be noted that this situation is happening at a time when the government has already announced an impending food crisis by the end of 2022, and amid skyrocketing prices of food.

However, while disaster resilience figures prominently in his speeches, his stance on the subject remains vague and no concrete policy has yet been set forth. Disaster response and resilience (DRR) policy and programs in the country remain fragmented across different implementing agencies. And while there is a National Climate Action Plan, which is said to also serve as the national climate adaptation plan, this has not been updated since 2011. Moreover, the plan fails to look at scenarios and projections that should be able to guide national and local governments in their planning.

Resilience and adaptation are supposedly top agenda of the president, but the absence of any directive on a strategic disaster resilience framework--given its impacts on agriculture and the economy and on food security--proves otherwise.

Food and agriculture

Mr Marcos punctuated his stated priority on food security by appointing himself as Secretary of Agriculture, and presenting a food production agenda within his first month in office. His program, however, is very business-as-usual, including reducing the costs of chemical inputs and creating more farm-to-market roads. With his stated prioritization of the agricultural sector in light of the climate crisis, he could have used his primary focus on food security as an opportunity to truly transform the economy. Unfortunately his pronouncements on agriculture are devoid of any awareness of using the agriculture sector to also address the country’s environmental problems. His agricultural prioritization can be a springboard for climate action had he framed it as a climate adaptation approach and focusing on agroecological approaches that will contribute to enhancing the country’s climate adaptation effort while providing mitigation co-benefits.

Appointments

Greenpeace has high expectations on the appointment of Maria Antonio Yulo-Loyzaga as DENR secretary. Sec. Loyzaga is a respected climate advocate who used to head the Manila Observatory, one of the country’s oldest non-government scientific institutions. Sec. Yulo-Loyzaga's vision is that of a department that is representative of all sectors, inclusive, and diverse. The stated priorities are as follows:

- Accounting of the country’s natural resources;
- Build resilient communities;
- Work with cities;
- Implement practical climate change adaptation measures; and
- Protect indigenous species but also harness them for the country’s benefit.

⁶ <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2022/07/28/2198561/imees-suggestion-marcos-jr-switches-stance-new-disaster-department>

As noted by observers⁷, two things stood out from her policy declaration--her emphasis on making the department open to inputs of civil society and other sectors, and ensuring all policies implemented or supported by the agency are “science-based” and “evidence-informed.”

Budgets

Climate is given priority in one aspect of the budget for 2023, with the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) tagging a total amount of PHP 453.11 billion for climate-related expenditures, up 56.4% from PHP 289.73 billion in 2022. Of the PHP 453 billion, the bulk or PHP 265 billion will go to water sufficiency projects while another PHP 132 billion is earmarked for sustainable energy and PHP 41 billion for food security. According to the DBM, climate change expenditures will continuously prioritize funding for major projects such as the flood management program of the Department of Public Works and Highways with an allocation of PHP 169 billion. The amount will cover the construction and rehabilitation of flood-mitigation structures and drainage systems nationwide.

The Climate Change Expenditure Tagging (CCET) is a tool for national government agencies and local government units to track and monitor climate-related expenditures in order to help these offices identify and prioritize these projects. However, this is just a method of tracking budget spending for data gathering--it is not a climate action strategy. While increased expenditure labeled as climate-related is a good thing, the programs and projects still need to be harmonized under a coherent national climate strategy for these to be effective.

Examining the National Expenditure Program, the President's proposed budget submitted to Congress for its review and approval, here is what these key agencies will have in the aggregate, compared to the pandemic-era budgets that they had, in 2022 and 2021:

Agency	2023	2022	2021
DENR	23,041,980,000 ⁸	25,453,589,000 ⁹	23,595,334,000 ¹⁰
CCC	128,210,000 ¹¹	140,006,000 ¹²	145,493,000 ¹³

For 2023, the budget of the DENR is around 2.4 billion less than the previous year. Meanwhile, the budget of the Climate Change Commission, already small, is 8.42% less than the previous year, and almost 12% less than from 2021.

This downtrend does not correspond to the prioritization of climate change as stated in the SONA, if we look at these agencies as with their task to lead climate-related projects. In particular, the Climate Change Commission has a mandate that is crucially important in this urgent window of action for climate. It is significant to note that the CCC is chaired by the President of the Philippines and that it is “the lead policy-making body of the government tasked to coordinate, monitor and evaluate government programs and ensure mainstreaming of climate change in national, local, and sectoral development plans towards a climate-resilient and climate-smart Philippines.” However, as indicative of its budget, it seems to be at the bottom of the president's priorities.

⁷ <https://www.rappler.com/nation/environment-secretary-toni-yulo-loyzaga-wants-consultative-science-based-denr/>

⁸ <https://www.dbm.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/NEP2023/NEP-2023-VOLUME-2.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.dbm.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/GAA/GAA2022/Volumel/DENR/DENR.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://www.dbm.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/GAA/GAA2021/Volumel/DENR/DENR.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.dbm.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/NEP2023/NEP-2023-VOLUME-3.pdf>

¹² <https://www.dbm.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/GAA/GAA2022/Volumel/OEO/C.pdf>

¹³ <https://www.dbm.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/GAA/GAA2021/Volumel/OEO/C.pdf>

Human rights and democracy

It also seems that human rights and protecting and supporting democratic processes and institutions are not high on the list of the president's priorities, based on both his pronouncements and action. While he discusses these issues with ambassadors and officials from other countries, and makes commitments on these issues, these issues were glaringly absent in his SONA where he laid out the policy agenda of his administration.

Further, the administration has been mum about the Commission on Human Rights' Report on the National Inquiry on Climate Change. Released the week before the elections, this report recognizes the responsibility of fossil fuel and cement companies for human rights harms arising from climate impacts. The groundbreaking litigation that led to the report should be actively used by the Philippine government as a basis for its demands on climate justice.

Greenpeace believes that the administration must adopt the recommendations in the NICC report and hold big polluters responsible for the climate-damaging impacts of their business activities. We challenge the president to act on these findings, and work on people-centered policies that will hold climate-polluting businesses accountable, and prevent further harm to Filipinos and the environment.

What needs to happen

What should the administration's climate agenda look like?

The climate crisis is more than just a social, political and economic issue. It is about our survival and existence. The Philippine government needs to ensure the survival and existence of all Filipinos. The Marcos Jr administration is in power during the last decade where we can prevent the worst climate impacts. This is an enormous responsibility and needs to be taken seriously. Unfortunately, none of the president's lofty words on climate action and climate justice has so far been translated to policy and implementation on the ground.

Climate should be the administration's foremost priority, not just in words, but more importantly, in action. Marcos Jr must show that he is sincere in addressing the climate crisis by ensuring that his actions are consistent with his words.

- Ensure the Climate Emergency Declaration is followed through with a coherent climate plan. The government must institute climate action as the central policy of the state, and must protect people and climate on the basis of climate justice. Climate action must also be at the heart of the country's COVID recovery plan.
 - Climate action and climate justice must be mainstreamed across all local and national government policies and programs (for example in city planning, infrastructure projects, permits for large-scale industrial activities, and fisheries and agricultural policies, among others).
 - Plans for economic recovery from the impacts of the pandemic must build in climate action. The government must develop a green and just recovery plan that is grounded on climate justice.
- Coherent strategies beyond disaster response must be put in place, and these should also address long term vulnerabilities, not just disasters.
- A rapid and just transition to a low-carbon pathway must be instituted through a massive uptake of renewable energy solutions.

- Businesses must be made to align with the 1.5 commitment in the Paris Agreement, and must be mandated to bring their operations in line with the science to address the human rights impacts of climate change.
- Full implementation and strengthening of the country's environmental policies must also be prioritized because ensuring a healthy environment is one of the best ways to mitigate climate impacts on communities.
- Human rights and democratic institutions and processes must be upheld. Environmental and rights defenders must be supported and protected.