

YOUTH & CLIMATE CHANGE

By Arturo R. Barrit

Only humans are capable of changing the climate. Humans have altered nature. We are the only beings on this planet that can truly do something about climate change. We have managed to throw off Earth's carbon balance. **And this comes with astronomical costs: torrential rains, violent storms, deadly floods, water scarcity, droughts, food security and health, all leading to internal displacement and marginalization of hundreds, even thousands of people.** We are familiar with these outcomes because they are regular visitors in our country. The super typhoon "Yolanda" (International name Haiyan) have taught Filipinos a painful and very expensive lesson on climate change.

The super typhoon that struck the Philippines produced an outpouring of emotion during the two-week meeting of the United Nations Convention Conference on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Warsaw, Poland – November 11-22, where thousands of delegates from around the world talks about the warming global treaty and was quick to suggest that a warming planet turned the storm into a lethal monster.

The super howler Yolanda was being described by disaster management experts as one of the most intense and strongest of its kind make landfall in recent history.

With climate change, no one is ever exempt. Human influence on the climate change is clear.

Scientists have warned us that planet warms because of carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases, the difference between sea and earth temperatures increase. It is this difference that fuels these kinds of storms.

Accordingly, a positive achievement that was reached during the Copenhagen Summit was the **adoption of the REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation).** Conversely, forests serve as a carbon sink, absorbing the carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

The IPCC reported that even if we stop emissions now, the effects of carbon dioxide already in the atmosphere can extend for many centuries. Carbon dioxide reduction is imperative. The IPCC is the most overtly cautious organization. It has to get the consensus of thousands of scientists worldwide before putting anything to print.

Youth Participation in the UNFCCC Negotiation Process

The **United Nations Joint Framework Initiative on Children, Youth and Climate Change** released a publication entitled **"Growing Together in a Changing Climate: The United Nations, Young People, and Climate Change,"** which contained information on some of the many **climate change initiatives – projects, campaigns, educational tools, websites and publications produced by the UN and young people.** They ranged from global initiatives raising awareness for combating climate change to advocacy efforts at the UNFCCC negotiations. **Strong social and environmental awareness further unite young people to negotiate with a single voice on a global level.**

Young people wanted to share their hopes and aspirations for international actions towards addressing climate change issues. They planned and implemented advocacy strategies by meeting with government's representatives in their respective capitals and organized the Conference of Youth

Involvement of young people in the UNFCCC negotiation process provides an avenue for elaborating holistic approaches to tackle climate change and promote sustainable development.

Examples of Youth Participation in Other IGO Processes

Across the UN system, young people have been actively and effectively participating in intergovernmental processes. There are a number of UN agencies that have developed youth-related initiatives linked to their mandates and areas of work. **Young people are considered an important stakeholder group in the UN system.** They actively participate in advocacy, national adaptation and mitigation actions, along with international negotiations. For this reason, many UN system entities have dedicated climate change youth programs and activities.

The **UN Commission on Sustainable Development (UN CSD)** prompted by the outcomes of the Johannesburg Plan of Action stemming from the WSSD, recognizes youth as a major civil society group. During the UN CSD sessions, young people are able to deliver opening statements as part of the general debate and are part of an interactive discussion between major groups and governments. **Youth also participate in thematic dialogues on the implementation of the work of the UN CSD.**

The **UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme)** on the other hand implements a long-term strategy on the engagement and involvement of young people in environmental issues. **The UN Food and Agricultural Organization (UN FAO)** has been supporting the development of food security and climate change educational programs and resources for rural farmer field and life schools. **Over 3,000 young people have already completed the Climate Change Challenge badge** develop by FAO, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts and the Youth and United Nations Global Alliance. The UNICEF has a Youth Climate Change Ambassador Program and has developed the “Unite for Climate” online community for youth climate change action.

The **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)** have always had a major focus on youth in its programs. UNESCO seeks to empower young people by reaching out to them and encouraging their participation in its programs, various networks and partner organizations.

The Way Forward: Enhanced Youth Participation on Climate Change Issue

One of the objectives of the publication entitled: **“Youth in Action on Climate Change. Youth in Action on Climate Change: Inspirations from Around the World”** is to highlight concrete work young people do to incite their governments and the international community to scale up action on climate change and raise ambition towards a post-2020 climate change regime. It is designed as a tool and a source of inspiration for developing





and carrying out projects, initiatives and campaigns to increase awareness of the causes and impacts of climate change, promote sustainable lifestyles and advance green low-carbon development.

A strong youth constituency with a number of official youth Government delegations during UNFCCC meetings is essential for improved communication between government negotiators and civil society actors. Most efforts must be made that young people are ready to take advantage of new environment-oriented employment opportunities.

Growing attention to climate change and sustainable development offers an ideal opportunity for green economic growth around the world. Green jobs not only provide much-needed employment opportunities for youth, they also give young people an outlet to contribute directly

to the fight against climate change by adopting green behaviors in the workplaces as well as in their private lives.

Tackling climate change requires concerted coordinated Government action as well as efforts by individuals. Therefore, it is essential to strengthen both formal and informal education on climate change and viable life-styles. In addition, new sustainable production and consumption patterns must be promoted and young people supported as environmental champions in their local communities. Partnerships should be developed between Governments, international agencies and youth organizations for joint environmental initiatives aimed at building capacity of young people. Considerable efforts are also needed in strengthening the capability and resilience of young people in rural communities to adapt to climate change.