

Philippines: Capitalist countries have climate debts to pay

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The Philippines' contribution to greenhouse gas (GHG) emission does not even reach one half of one percent of the world's total, but Filipinos are paying a hefty price for the massive loss of lives, injuries, loss of jobs, and the physical destruction of shelters, farms, and government infrastructures. While those who pollute the planet most, the filthy rich capitalist countries and their transnational corporations (TNCs), wallow in wealth in the safety of their highly-secured havens.

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The grim images of every typhoon's aftermath show not only the horrors of devastation but also the cost that come hard to imagine. Costs are enormous, but do we have any idea how much they are in peso or in dollar terms? And who, by the way, are paying those bills and at what cost?

Storm leaves a price tag

Damage from "Ulysses" (Vamco) as of this writing remains partial. Preliminary estimates as of November 13, 2020 by the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) placed damages at P4.254B (\$88.29M).[1] Damage from "Ulysses" is believed to be far-reaching than "Ondoy" (Ketsana) as the former brought more areas under water, including Cagayan, when big dams up north released waters that exceed their holding capacity.

There are conflicting reports in terms of the number of fatalities as government agencies issue contrasting figures. The NDRRM counts 42 in its latest report. The police count is 53. Ondoy, which hit mostly the eastern and southern part of Metro Manila and Central Luzon, left 747 dead in 2009. Its damage to agriculture was estimated to have reached P3.1B (\$64.3M).[2] Another report estimated Ondoy's total damage to have reached \$1.09B.[3]

"Ulysses" came just several days after two powerful typhoons, "Rolly" (Goni) and "Quinta" (Molave) hit the southern part of Luzon. News reports said the combined damage to agriculture from both is estimated to reach P4.6B (\$95.46M). Total cost of damage from 'Rolly', the strongest as of date for 2020, was P11B (\$228.27M).[4]

In 2016, the Philippine government has conducted an official accounting of the total damages from natural disasters that hit the country from 2006-2015. The 2016 Compendium of Philippine Environment Statistics (CPES) came up with the total of P374B (\$7.76B). It includes damage to

agriculture worth P225.63B (\$4.67B), infrastructure P81.97B (\$1.70B), and private property at P66.598B (\$1.38B)[5].

But another study indicates that damage from the 2013 “Yolanda” (Hyan) alone, the strongest typhoon on earth ever which killed 6,300 people, injured 28,688, left 1,062 missing persons, 16,078,181 affected persons, and damaged 1,140,332 houses have reached P571.1B (\$11.85B), according to the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS).[6] In a separate report the International Labor Organization (ILO) said some 6 million jobs were affected in areas hit by “Yolanda”, while another 800,000 were destroyed by typhoon “Hagupit” (Ruby) a year later.[7]

Who’s footing the bill?

The PIDS report said the Philippines, based on catastrophe modeling, faces an annual average of P133.2B losses due to tropical cyclones and P43.5B from earthquake. Now, how do we fund regular disasters which price come higher than this average as we have shown above?

The National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Fund (NDRRMF), commonly known as calamity fund, and the Local Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Fund (LDRRMF) have been created for this purpose. Over the last 3 years, however, their allocation suffered funding cuts when they should be increasing amidst the intensifying climate crisis. The NDRRMF fund was raised to P38.9B in 2016 from P6B in 2011 but it was cut to P15.755B in 2017[8]. A P30B calamity fund was proposed for 2019 but it was cut again by Congress to P19.6B. The fund for 2020 was reduced again to P16B. The allotment for the proposed 2021 budget is P20B[9], only a billion higher than the newly-concocted P19B fund for ending the local communist insurgency.

Evidently, this level of funding never meets even the most immediate post-disaster needs of Filipinos, notwithstanding the bottlenecks and issues of corruption in the response process. In other words, most of the post recovery efforts come from the people themselves and, in the case of businesses where 99 percent are micro in scale, the resiliency of enterprising Pinoys.

For ordinary workers who earn \$6 only in the daily average wage, this glorified concept of Filipino resiliency is nothing but a leveled up sacrifice in the face of ever-increasing neglect and hostility by the ruling elite. This resiliency, I hope, would later advance into a level of resistance; otherwise, the working class is locked inside this cycle of permanent sacrifice.

The Filipino people have been making a lot of sacrifices from climate crisis. And government funds regularly allocated for disaster response are money taken out from the much needed social services. We should assert that funding for climate change damages must come from external sources, particularly from Annex 1 countries.[10] Officially, the country has also been committing significant emission reductions targets (70%) in climate negotiations. Yet those who are assigned to foot the bill, the highly industrialized countries, are failing in their financial obligations.

Climate reparation

As the current climate change narrative departs from natural to man-made causes, so must the consciousness of the working class is on this issue. For what we seek is no longer which between the natural and man-made phenomenon has a greater value in the climate change debate, but who among the most responsible have the greatest price to pay for the bill for climate damage.

Climate scientists have closed this ‘natural’ vs ‘man-made’ debate several years back when they all

pointed to industrial activities over the last 50 years or so which cause the rapid increase in GHG emissions, thus, the rise in global temperature. In short, capitalist countries which own those great carbon emitting industries owe developing countries like the Philippines billions of dollars in climate debt. And since they were responsible for the climate crisis, they earn a price to pay for the climate damage that is happening in poorer and most vulnerable countries.

There is mounting cry for climate justice from the South. There must be reparation from the North.

But victims have climate obligations, too, in ensuring reduction in carbon emissions. Workers do understand this duty as more jobs and sources of life will be destroyed as the planet keeps on warming. Moreover, we truly recognize that the only way to stop the planet from heating up further is by shifting the production and consumption processes in favour of low-carbon economic activities.

The Philippine labor agenda on recovery

COVID-19 merely compounded these pre-pandemic problems. But decoupling climate from the health crisis, which the Duterte government consciously does in terms of emergency response and recovery program, is ignoring the interconnectedness of these crises and rejecting the viability of nature and employment-based strategy for recovery in favour of market-based, business-as-usual solutions.

It is for this reason that workers organizations in the Philippines affiliated with the broad labor coalition Nagkaisa (United) are pushing for a labor agenda on recovery which includes demands for income and employment guarantees[11] to address the deteriorating jobs crisis. Our demand for employment guarantee contains a proposal for the creation of climate jobs in renewable energy, housing and building sector, transportation, and nature conservation.

We are advancing this climate jobs agenda based on the principles that recovery should not just heal but also make people more healthy and secure; that it does not simply restore lost jobs and free markets but one which creates green, decent jobs and a sustainable future. We also campaign for a tax on wealth[12] to finance the recovery and development agenda.

Needless to say, that recovery from COVID-19 and the transition to a safer and better world can be made faster and viable when binding climate justice and reparation obligations replace the menial act of donations and loans coming from the rich capitalist nations. ###

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Notes

[1] <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1360146/ulysses-leaves-p4-25-b-damage-to-infra-dpwh>

[2] <https://news.abs-cbn.com/business/09/29/09/storm-hits-rp-rice-more-imports-unlikely>

[3] <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2018/09/02/have-we-learned-the-lessons-from-ondoy/>

[4] <https://mb.com.ph/2020/10/27/at-least-p286-3-m-in-damage-caused-by-quinta-in-bicol-8-reported-missing/>

[5] Natural Disaster Damage at P374B in 2006-2015." Business World. Bworldonline.com. February 5, 2018. <https://www.bworldonline.com/natural-disaster-damage-p374b-2006-2015/>

[6] <https://pidswebs.pids.gov.ph/CDN/PUBLICATIONS/pidsdps1721.pdf>

[7] International Labour Organization, 100 days on, Haiyan survivors need more jobs to recover [Feature]. 17 February 2014.

https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/multimedia/features/WCMS_235730/lang--en/index.htm

[8] Ibid, PIDS.

[9]

<https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/news/nation/762687/senate-finance-panel-mulls-increasing-calamity-funds-for-2021/story/>

[10] <https://unfccc.int/parties-observers>

[11] <https://mb.com.ph/2020/10/07/labor-group-bats-for-income-employment-guarantees/>

[12] <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2020/08/06/labor-unions-push-to-tax-wealth/>

P.S.

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<https://partidongmanggagawa2001.blogspot.com/>

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