

## **Synthesis of the Forum by Dr. Ed Prantilla**

I think it is not fruitful for me to summarize what had been discussed this afternoon. It will be better for all of us I think to have a copy of all the papers presented and study them. I think that will make us better understand the gravity of the situation we are facing at this point of time. What I will do therefore is to comment on some of the issues presented.

First, I would like to point out that the community level approach to mitigate the effects of climate change, and maybe even contribute to its reversal, is I think highly appropriate and should be promoted and replicated. Most of the discussions on climate change or global warming, at present, is at the aggregate level, which although certainly very important and critical to the future of the human race, are, by and large, unintelligible to an ordinary person. This is especially true to those in the rural communities who may have not heard about the Kyoto Protocol, ocean acidification, greenhouse gases, etc., but will not be spared of the effects of climate change or global warming. Indeed, those in the rural areas or those engaged in farming may immediately feel the effects because of the drought and the floods that accompany climate change. Of course, they may attribute these phenomena to something else. However, the process of identifying and implementing projects at the community level on water conservation, reforestation, soil conservation, etc. could be accompanied by practical lessons or discussions of climate change or global warming, which could be easily understood and where one can easily relate to, will be more effective than a theoretical discussion of the effects of climate change.

Second, it is sometimes amusing to see or read something about us making planet Earth miserable, i.e. we are making the Earth sad by destroying the environment. This is I think far from the truth. What we are doing, that is, denuding our forest, polluting our rivers and oceans, polluting the air, etc. is strictly making our own lives miserable and at the end killing ourselves. I don't think the earth would mind if we level the mountains, cut all the trees, poison the rivers, lakes and seas, etc. Earth will be completely indifferent to that. Of course, because as has been illustrated earlier, if we disturb the system, the system will adjust to equilibrate itself. That is why, the rise in temperature will be accompanied by typhoons, extreme weather disturbances and so on.

Third, climate change did not happen overnight, that is, there have been centuries of gradual build-up. It is only recently when the change started to accelerate that more and more scientists and policy makers started to get alarmed when possible scenarios due to climate change started to appear in technical journals and reports. Of course, what really galvanized the scientists and policy makers was the 2007 report of the

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. I am sure most if not all of you have read the report. One of the most interesting part of the report is the documentation of changes that occurred during the last century and more. I said it is most interesting because not only that it gives us a picture of what happened, for example, the increase in global average surface temperature, global average sea level, the snow cover of the Northern Hemisphere, etc., but the fact that data exist so that such measurements could be made. This I think something we are deficient of in the Philippines, we do not have adequate and reliable data to enable us to track what happened to our environment during the last 100 years. In fact, we don't even have adequate data on rainfall, stream flow of rivers, water level of lakes and the Philippine sea, etc. during the last 25 years. We don't also have adequate data to calculate our carbon footprint or our ecological foot prints. Of course, there are ways of estimating it, I mean you could answer questions posed by a website and your ecological footprint will appear, but for policy making and designing programs that will reverse or mitigate the effects of climate change, this is not enough. What I think for us to consider is that if we are to reverse climate change or at least stabilize the system, it will be a very long process. That is assuming of course that it could still be reversed. Because maybe the system will equilibrate but at an entirely different situation as we are now.

Fourth, there still a lot of things we don't know about global warming or climate change. Maybe that is one of the reasons why there is an on-going debate on whether there is really a global warming or there is really a change in the climate of countries all over the world. Some question the data and the method of analysis used. This is, of course, where researchers should come in so that the questions that are being raised could be answered. I am glad PCARRD is addressing this issue. But, while waiting for the results of these studies, we should remind ourselves that we already have some information on the effects of global warming or climate change and we do have a good idea on what the future will be if the present trend will continue. Therefore, there is no reason for us not to act.

Fifth, in a problem like climate change, the government is a major player. This is because it is the government that could formulate and implement policies. There are of course a number of policies in the Philippines that could mitigate the effects or even slow down and hopefully even contribute to the reversal climate change. The problem is we did not implement these policies or if they are implemented, it is a half-hearted implementation. So, we continue to denude our forest, destroy the forest cover of our watersheds, pollute our rivers and seas, and of course our population continues to grow rapidly. Maybe the problem we have in this country is that the government is not seriously addressing the problem of climate change.

I hesitate to end my comments on a pessimistic note, but, maybe it is important for us to ask ourselves whether we human beings are really destined to live in this planet indefinitely. Come to think of it, compared to the dinosaurs, we have not live long yet on this planet. In fact it is said that in our modern anatomy, humans have existed only for 125,000 years. Yet, in those 125,000 years humans have changed planet Earth into something different. Maybe it is the tremendous change that humans have done to this planet that made Stephen Hawking say that humans have to think seriously about settling on another planet, maybe in another solar system. One writer also question whether our brain has evolved for our advantage in the long-run. This is because he said we seemed to have an innate tendency to destroy ourselves, that is, we pollute the air that we breathe, we pollute the waters that we drink, and we (humans) create bombs that can destroy Earth. It is quite disturbing because no other animal on this planet could do that. I guess it will be a race, that is, whether we, humans, could develop the technology for interstellar travel or change our way of life, before we destroy ourselves.

Thank you very much.