

Acceptance speech of Dr. Geminn Louis C. Apostol

Good afternoon, isang makakalikasang hapon po sa ating lahat!

We humbly accept this award with much gratitude, but also with a profound sense of urgency. As a nation, we find ourselves, yet again, amidst a dengue outbreak—one that is worse than before with over 76,000 cases in just the first three months of this year—a staggering 78% increase from last year.

What makes our recent dengue outbreaks particularly unsettling is how they defy our traditional understanding that dengue is a rainy season disease. Our research uncovers that it is temperature that significantly drives the growing incidence of dengue throughout the country, with 72% of nearly 2 million cases from the past decade attributable to our warming climate.

Our findings demonstrate that the climate crisis is indeed a health crisis. But this burden is not shared equally. The heaviest toll falls on those least equipped to bear it. Our study places the greatest burden in poor provinces, especially in Mindanao—where healthcare systems already struggle, where water and sanitation infrastructure are inadequate, and where poverty and conflict compound vulnerability to climate change, deepening existing inequalities.

Looking ahead, what we also found in our research shook us to our core. Our projections through 2100—the first comprehensive long-term dengue forecast for the Philippines—reveal increasing dengue cases across all future climate scenarios, with only the possibility of decline around 2070 under the most sustainable pathway. Despite these discouraging projections, we are hopeful that this study will be the first of many as we fill a critical gap in health and climate research in the Philippines. The impacts of climate on health cut across multiple sectors of human life, necessitating interdisciplinary solutions that can only be grounded in interdisciplinary evidence. We look forward to collaborating with other Ateneo units in building this evidence base, alongside our work with the DOH to create a comprehensive health and climate database that will encourage more researchers to contribute to this multidisciplinary field.

On behalf of my co-authors, Drs Seposo, Valenzuela, Lao, Wangkay and Enriquez, and the ACRI Environmental Health, we are profoundly grateful to the ASMPH leadership, particularly Dean Alfonso and Research Director Tanchanco, for their unwavering support. This research was made possible by funding from the University Research Council, with essential data provided by the DOH Epidemiology Bureau, and with the DOH Health and Climate Change Office ensuring that our findings served as key policy evidence for the recently launched Philippine Health and Climate Change Strategic Roadmap 2050.

In this critical moment when humanity must choose a sustainable path forward, we commit to continuing this vital work. As researchers at the intersection of health and climate science, we understand that our work is more than academic—it's about protecting lives in the face of an escalating climate crisis. Through evidence-based solutions that address both environmental stewardship and people's wellbeing, we hope our research contributes to a future where development and climate resilience advance together, leaving no one behind.

Maraming salamat po!