

Headline: Movement for water security

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Climate change has worsened the prospect of water everywhere (e.g. floods) and water nowhere (droughts).

With 73 people dying every day because of water-related causes, there is now a growing clamor for a movement for water security.

This was articulated by Romeo Royandoyan, Alyansa Agrikultura convenor and Centro Saka executive director. This was stated after the opening speech of Agriculture Secretary Emmanuel Piñol on Oct. 3 at the National Water Forum that emphasized “transforming policy into action.”

It was suggested that the movement be spearheaded by the private sector (defined here as including both civil society and business).

The first obvious sign of the need for a water security movement was when leaders of the five-coalition AgriFisheries Alliance met with President Duterte on April 16, 2016, to address our worsening water crisis.

PRRD took decisive action. On June 20, 2017, the Office of the Cabinet Secretary called a tripartite meeting in Malacañang on the water issue.

Participating were key leaders in the legislature (Senate and House of Representatives), the Executive (six departments), and the private sector (Agri-fisheries Alliance and the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry).

Organized on the same day was the steering committee for the National Water Roadmap and Summit. The chair was the Cabinet secretary, with the secretary general coming from the private sector.

The secretariat was DENR's National Water Resource Board, while the academic and science main resource was the University of the Philippines, Los Baños (UPLB).

The private sector participation intensified with the conduct of seven different water sector presummits in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. Each had specific private sector leaders in the following seven water sectors: environment, economy, domestic-household, urban, resilience, governance and agriculture.

In the Asian Development Bank (ADB) reports of 2014 and 2016, we rated in the bottom third of 42 countries in water security.

The ADB report said that problem was not water, but poor governance.

For each of the seven sectors and presummits, a volume on the situation was produced primarily authored by a specific UPLB dean.

This pointed out the general direction and two priority actions that should be acted upon. Each sector had a three person overview team: the appropriate government official, the UPLB dean, and a private sector water leader.

Unfortunately, though much has been accomplished, more action has to be done. Consequently, only in the last two months, there have been several water forums held by different private sector groups. Examples are the Management Association of the Philippines, the Water Alliance, Water Links, the Arangkada with the Joint Foreign Chambers, the European Chamber of Commerce, and other smaller private sector groups. Meanwhile, the Climate Change Commission has scheduled three water roundtable discussions with private sector's significant involvement in preparation for a national water conference/summit on Nov. 20. Largely due to private sector initiative, the Philippine Council of Agriculture and Fisheries recently held a national water forum.

Considering the severity of the river crisis and climate change, Royandoyan suggests that all these different private sector initiatives must now be harnessed into a national movement for water security. The private sector must do its own activities independent of the government. At the same time, it must unite and support government, while taking courage in reporting corruption and abuse.

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Creativity and inclusivity in addressing the water crisis should be used. An example would be girl scouts helping in reforestation to preserve our water, teaming up with corporations for help. Working with government to use both local and foreign sources funds will go a long way. Royandoyan believes we need a movement for water security. Given our situation today, Royandoyan certainly has a point.