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Headline: Public-private water partnership in time of climate change

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Public-private partnership is a requirement to successfully address our water crisis, especially in this time of climate change. In the Philippines, 73 people die every day from water-related causes, while we collect only 4 percent of our rainwater compared to India's 60 percent in key areas.

As stated in UN Water (www.unwater.org): "Water is the primary medium to which we feel the effects of climate change. Water availability is becoming less predictable in many places... Increased incidences of flooding threaten to destroy water points and sanitation facilities... droughts are exacerbating water security, thereby negatively impacting people's health and productivity. Ensuring that everyone has access to sustainable water and sanitation services is a critical change mitigation strategy for the years ahead."

This challenge cannot be met effectively by our government alone. In fact, the 2013 and 2016 Asia Development Bank studies on water in 48 countries show that the Philippines was at the bottom third in water effectiveness. These studies identified governance, not water supply, as the main culprit. This is why we must turn to a more active partnership between the private and public sectors.

On April 16, 2016, this point was highlighted during a seven person meeting between the Agri-Fisheries Alliance or AFA (representing farmers and fisherfolk, agribusiness, science and academe, rural women and multisector leaders) and President Duterte, together with Bong Go. In that meeting, the President committed to personally address our water crisis. This is necessary, because only the President can effectively unite the 34 water-related government agencies which hardly talk to each other today.

On June 20, 2017, in a Malacañang public-private sector meeting, Senate Climate Change Committee chair Loren Legarda said that usually, the government would seek private sector help. In this case, it was the private sector that sought government help, following up the President's commitment a year earlier.

Thus was formed the tripartite Steering Committee for the National Water Roadmap and Summit. This is composed of leaders from the legislative (Senate and House of Representatives), the Executive (Neda, DA, DPWH, DILG and the Cabinet secretary) and the private sector (AFA and the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry). The DENR's National Water Resource Board serves as the secretariat, with UP Los Baños providing the technical support.

Since then, seven Luzon-Visayas-Mindanao prewater summits were held. Each resulted in a volume authored by a UPLB dean, a three-person coordinating team with a government department point person, a UPLB dean, and a private secret water champion for that subsector. They have since been working for their subsectors' two to three priorities and key result areas. This will culminate in a National Water Summit planned with the President during the Climate Change Week in November.

This is where the public-private water partnership will be best harnessed for concrete action led by the President. Examples of public-private collaboration were seen during the Management

Association of the Philippines' Water Forum chaired by Roberto Batungbakal on Aug. 24. After taking over from government, Manila Water showed a decline in systems losses to 11 percent (global average is 20 percent) from 63 percent, while Maynilad increased 24-hour service from 46 percent to 98 percent. This could not have been done by the government alone, nor could have it been done without government guidance and support.

In the next few days, many private sector water initiatives are being conducted. Examples are the Aug. 30 European Chamber of Commerce's "Water Challenge," the Sept. 12 Arangkada Philippines' "How to solve the water crisis" session during its annual meeting, and the Sept. 27-28 International Waterlinks Forum.

Considering the successful results reported from the public-private partnership on Aug. 24, it is imperative that private sector inputs be merged with the government's initiatives to have an integrated public-private sector water presentation to the President during the National Water Summit held during the Climate Change Week this November. It is only with this public-private sector unity that we can successfully address our current water crisis.

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