

Headline: Don't waste it

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Published Date: 05:14 AM June 27, 2019

Section: opinion

Word Count: 4527

Content:

Climate change is happening (despite what Donald Trump thinks) and is making rainfall less predictable and, in many cases, with less rain than before. We are seeing this right now, with the rains not here when it is already the rainy season.

As recent months have shown, we are in a precarious position. The east concession area ran out of water in March. With Angat Dam now below the 160-meter critical level (the water level is the lowest it's been in nearly 10 years), supply from the dam has had to be reduced to 1,200-1,250 million liters per day from 1,600 MLD normally, so the rest of Manila is starting to follow with rotational interruptions. That will continue until there's not just rain, but heavy enough to fill the dam.

Water pressure will have to be reduced and periods of availability limited; no more 24/7 if sufficient rains don't come. What a situation to be in, being dependent on something we can't control — rain. And one we could have addressed but didn't, with a nonacting Aquino administration. It has a lot to answer for in its inaction on this essential commodity.

A second dam is finally underway, seven years from when it was first proposed. Had Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System (MWSS) built the dam then like the concessionaires begged them to, we wouldn't have this crisis now. It will be four or five years before the new dam is finished.

Laguna de Bay is being tapped for more, but given the sad, heavily silted state of the lake, it needs rain, too. It's also a polluted source that costs a lot to clean. Who's supposed to pay for that? The concessionaires? They didn't create this mess, the Aquino MWSS did. Gerry Esquivel should pay for it out of his own pocket.

The situation is critical, yet we all go on our merry way, wasting water without a care in the world. It's time we all focus on one thing: conserving it. Think before we use water. The government needs to start imposing some forced restrictions.

Australia is the driest continent in the world. Almost everyone there is water-conscious and actively works to use the least water possible. That's the first lesson for us: Change attitudes, convince Filipinos to think every time — "how can I reduce using water in what I'm doing now?" A quick, simple way is to turn off the tap when you brush your teeth. That can save six liters per minute. Multiply that by 10 million people, that's 60 million liters per day (if you clean your teeth twice a day for 30 seconds as you should). About 80 percent of Aussies do that.

Put a brick in the cistern to reduce the volume of water. Install a two-step flush mechanism. Have shorter showers, and turn off the water while soaping. Fix leaking taps, as those drips add up to a lot of wasted water. Water your garden with a watering can, not a hose which can use up to 1,000 liters per hour. Water in the early morning or, better yet, in the late afternoon to reduce evaporation.

Buy household products that are water-efficient. Only wash clothes with a full load, if you're lucky enough to have a washing machine. Wash your car from a bucket, not the hose. If you must use the hose, do so sparingly. When you wash cutlery and dishes, use a bowl and rinse all together. Collect the rainwater from your gutters. Close to 80 percent of Australians do these things to "do my bit for the environment."

Everyone is going to howl when I suggest this, but an effective way to reduce water consumption is to charge more for that water. The problem with that is it hurts those who don't earn much, but can't qualify for the lifeline rate. That makes another solution difficult—allowing the concessionaires to develop their own raw water sources. That's something they'd be willing to do, but someone's got to pay for it. That someone should not be the concessionaires, as their rates are already below getting a reasonable return. That someone should be us; we should pay properly for what we use. A higher rate will also encourage us to use less water. The lifeline could perhaps be adjusted to include more of those on the border.

Let us Filipinos do our bit for the environment, too. If we want water over the next six or seven years while we await a new dam, we really don't have much choice.

How about we do our bit for the environment and conserve water? We just don't have water to waste; we are now in a crisis.

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