# Poor antiflood strategies

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So much for the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority’s (MMDA) repeated assurances that it has been actively working on various infrastructure projects to address the metro’s perennial flood problem. The latest Commission on Audit (COA) report has exposed the agency for its “poor strategies” that deprived the public of much-needed benefits.

In its 2023 report, the COA said that 22 projects worth over P510 million under the Metro Manila Flood Management Project Phase 1 were “not completed” on time under the contract. This crucial project, backed by a $415-million loan from the World Bank, aims to rehabilitate 36 pumping stations and build 20 new ones this year. However, only two stations have been rehabilitated and none of the new ones have been completed as of September. The COA said the delays of up to 310 days cost the government P32.9 million, covering five years from 2018 to 2023, in commitment fees—or the nonrefundable charge imposed on borrowers with an unwithdrawn loan balance—to creditor banks. State auditors said these funds could have been used for other priority programs and projects.

In addition, there were 29 projects worth P371.03 million not implemented due to cancellations and failure to hold early bidding activities. “This resulted in the nonattainment of the intended objectives of the projects and deprived the public of benefits therefrom,” the COA report stated.

## Poor strategies

The commission pointed to “poor strategies in the monitoring and implementation of programs and projects, resulting in significant revisions in the target completion time.” And while it approved 22 subprojects for a contract extension, it said that pushing back completion targets “may be an indication of ineffective planning.”

This audit report covers projects that have been ongoing up to last year, but the impact of inadequate flood control infrastructure was certainly felt this year when several typhoons hit the National Capital Region and highlighted the lack of a flood control master plan.

In July, Typhoon “Carina” and the enhanced southwest monsoon (“habagat”) showed the metro’s “antiquated” drainage system, which the MMDA said had been built in the 1970s and was already silted with waste. Ironically, the Carina flooding happened within days of President Marcos’ State of the Nation Address where he reported that over 5,500 flood control projects have been completed between July 2022 and May 2024.

## Not enough

In November, after the onslaught of Severe Tropical Storm “Kristine,” the President admitted that the flood control infrastructure was not enough. “We have flood control infrastructure, but they’re not enough … because in the whole history of the Philippines, we haven’t experienced anything like this,” Mr. Marcos said, attributing the floods to the changes in weather patterns that have brought increasingly severe and unpredictable storms.

According to the Department of Science and Technology’s GeoRisk PH database, eight out of 10 residents in the National Capital Region are vulnerable to flooding while two out of 10 residents are affected by severe flooding that reaches at least one meter high and lasts for more than two days.

The massive floods that were seen last year due to intermittent and heavy rains—not even typhoons—in many parts of Metro Manila should already have been a wake-up call. The government should have applied haste in upgrading and rehabilitating old infrastructure, particularly outdated drainage systems.

## No excuse

There is simply no excuse for inefficiencies in implementing these projects considering that floods in Metro Manila have long been an issue. Some of the causes of delay cited in the COA report, such as customs clearances and port congestion, could easily be addressed by improving the process and removing red tape while reasons, such as changes of design and specifications for custom-made goods and reconceptualization, could be avoided if those in charge of the planning had solid strategy and foresight.

MMDA officials should be held accountable for these delays—nearly half of its 58 flood control projects were stalled. Even worse, the agency only had a 12-percent accomplishment rate for its performance targets for “percentage decrease in flooded areas” under flood mitigation measures.

Legislators must also act on the proposed National Land Use Act, which can help in addressing the flood problems by regulating urban development and institutionalizing proper utilization and management of land resources in the country. The measure has already passed the House of Representatives but has been stalled at the Senate committee level since 2022 despite Mr. Marcos tagging it as a priority since last year.

Unless these issues are addressed, the flooding problem will persist and the same excuses will be repeated every year at the expense of the greater public good.