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Only 67% of households have access to running water – SWS

By JANVIC MATEO

Amid a looming water crisis in the country, results of a recent survey released on Thursday found that only seven in every 10 households in the Philippines have access to running

water.

A Social Weather Stations (SWS) survey conducted last Dec. 10 to 14 found that only 67 percent of Filipino households have access to running or piped water, translating to an estimated 17 million out of over 25 million

households in the country.

The 67 percent is composed of 58 percent who said their running water is billed and nine percent who said it was not billed.

For those whose running water is billed, their average expense is at P320

per month. It was highest among those in Metro Manila at P500 per month, followed by those in the Visayas at P340, the rest of Luzon at P312 and Mindanao at P300.

Those whose running water was not

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billed said they spend an average of P300 per month. It was highest among respondents in Metro Manila at P400 per month, followed by those in the rest of Luzon and the Visayas at P300 and those in Mindanao at P225.

The survey had 1,200 respondents and an error margin of +/- 2.8 percent.

The United Nations recognizes access to water and sanitation as a human right.

No water crisis

A ranking official of the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System gave assurance there will be no water crisis in 2023 but admitted that the MWSS cannot confirm nor deny the warning of former MWSS chairman Ramon Alipala that a crisis was likely next year.

In a radio interview, MWSS Deputy Administrator Jose Dorado Jr. said that based on the projection, the level of Angat Dam will reach 197 meters or 2011 meters by the end of December.

"We are doing this (simulation) on a monthly basis that is why this April, we will conduct another simulation to determine if there will be a water crisis next year," he said. He added that as of 6 a.m. on Thursday, the water level of Angat Dam was at 198.49 meters.

On the other hand, the National Water Resources Board (NWRB) is set to decide today whether to grant the 52 cubic me-

ters per second allocation being requested by the Maynilad Water Service Inc. and Manila Water.

The NWRB has earlier approved 50 cubic meters per second allocation for the two water concessionaires until April 15, 2023.

El Niño

A ranking official of the Department of Agriculture (DA) yesterday identified at least 16 provinces to be severely hit by the El Niño phenomenon as the DA revived the inter-agency task force to address the possible impact of the drought on the agriculture sector.

In an interview, Agriculture Assistant Secretary and deputy spokesman Rex Estoperez said the 16 provinces include areas in Central Visayas (Region 7), Eastern Visayas (Region 8), Zamboanga peninsula (Region 9), Caraga (Region 13) and Calabarzon (Region 4-A) — some of which are known big producers of palay.

"These are top producing provinces but there are also vulnerable areas because of climate change. We need to identify these vulnerable areas. Just like Mindanao, it is now affected by the flooding and typhoons," Estoperez said.

President Marcos has ordered the revival of the inter-agency El Niño Task Force to minimize the damage of the dry spell to the farm sector.

"The task force will be represented by representatives from bureaus and attached agencies," Estoperez said.

— With Bella Cariaso



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Kaliwa Dam needs more serious attention to solve water shortage



OUT IN
THE OPEN

RAY S.
EÑANO

POLICYMAKERS should revisit the Kaliwa Dam project and weigh the consequences if it remains in the doldrums for a longer period.

The Philippine population is marching toward the 120-million mark and the demand for water naturally from residents and commercial users alike will increase exponentially. Water is a finite resource but the government and all stakeholders can manage and maximize its use to avoid wastage—and with the least impact on the environment.

The Kaliwa Dam in the Sierra Madre mountain ranges occupying the provinces of Rizal and Quezon offers the best solution to the water shortage now gripping Metro Manila and nearby provinces. The administration of the late President Ferdinand Marco Sr. proposed the construction of the Kaliwa Dam in the 1970s. Its rollout, however, was stalled because of the opposition of local stakeholders, especially from the environmentalists and indigenous peoples (IP) sector.

Environmental issues, a funding controversy and the disturbance on the way of life of the indigenous tribes should not outweigh the water security of the Philippines and the overall economic benefits of the project.

The sole source of water for Metro Manila is the 56-year old Angat Dam. Unfortunately, the Angat Dam can no longer keep up with the demand of Metro Manila residents for water. The Angat Dam can only provide 4,000 million liters a day to the National

Capital Region, where 2,400 MLD is allotted for the west zone and 1,600 MLD to the east zone.

The demand figures could be an underestimate. Updated data from the Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System show water demand for Angat Dam in 2010 was already at 4,395 MLD while 2020 demand reached up to 5,680 MLD. The rising demand is the reason behind rotating water interruptions in the National Capital Region. To put it simply, water from the Angat Dam can no longer meet the demand.

The MWSS in January this year predicted that Metro Manila would experience a water deficit in 2024 because of increasing demand brought about by booming urban population and the rapid opening of Philippine economy after the pandemic.

The construction of Kaliwa Dam, thus, must start as soon as possible. Upon operations, the dam is expected to generate 600 MLD. Its water conveyance tunnel can further produce an estimated 2,400 MLD.

Reduced burden

The supply water supply boost from the Kaliwa Dam will reduce the burden of Angat Dam. The operation of the new dam is also timely—water supply is not only affected by urban household demand but by other factors such as climate change, global warming and over-pollution. Kaliwa Dam's operation will benefit 17.46 million people living in Metro Manila, Rizal and Quezon.

Opponents of the dam construction

claim it will destroy ancestral forests and displace 5,000 IPs from the Dumagat/Remontados tribe and 100,000 residents living downstream.

These groups acknowledge the need for water security but believe that there are other alternative sources and ways to address the water problem, such as rainwater collection and the adoption of new technologies to convert wastewater into potable water.

The proposed alternative sources for water security will only provide temporary relief and may even be too expensive to implement. The MWSS in 2019 ruled out the desalination option for the Philippines because of its high costs. If an average Filipino household is already complaining over the P40 price of water, what more if households will carry the costs of desalination treatment amounting to P90?

Compensation

The MWSS fortunately addressed the concerns of the affected indigenous peoples. The agency has already obtained from the elders of the Dumagat-Remontados tribe the free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) required by the National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP). These tribes under an agreement will receive P160 million in disturbance fees. About P80 million will go to Tanay Dumagat-Remontados Ancestral Domain Development Inc. in Rizal while the other half will benefit the Pinagtaanan ne Dumagat/Remontado de General Nakar in Quezon.



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The construction of the Kaliwa Dam must be finished as soon as possible because water supply in Manila is being continuously depleted due to rapid urbanization, big demand from households and businesses, over-pollution and the wide-array effects of climate change.

The IPs, meanwhile, can still preserve their culture since the physical, tangible objects needed to animate indigenous culture are still available in other locations.

With the imminent threat of climate change, IPs should acknowledge the possibility that their ancestral lands and material culture will also be altered and destroyed. But this does not mean the end of their civilization. Pacific Island nations, for one, are exerting efforts to preserve their culture while preparing to migrate to other countries since their homelands are expected to be consumed by the ocean in the coming decades because of global warming and climate change.

But the construction of the Kaliwa Dam cannot be overestimated. The water security to be provided by the Kaliwa Dam is needed for the sustenance of the Philippine economy.

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GSIS invests ₱1.46 B in Nickel Asia shares

State-run pension fund Government Service Insurance System (GSIS) has invested ₱1.46 billion in mining firm Nickel Asia Corporation (NAC).

In a disclosure to the Philippine Stock Exchange, NAC said the GSIS investment involved a purchase of a total of 233.55 million common shares, done through a block sale approved by the PSE last April 12.

"GSIS' investment in NAC shows that it is possible for a company to grow responsibly. Our commitment to sustainable development is something we take seriously, and we are happy to attract like-minded entities that believe in the value of responsible mining and renewable energy," said NAC President and CEO Martin Antonio Zamora.

GSIS President and General Manager Wick Veloso said "GSIS continues to look for ways to lengthen its fund life through viable investment opportunities such as the successful vertically integrated mining ore production and processing businesses of NAC."

"Our decision to invest in NAC

supports the goal of safely growing our funds for our members' benefit, while positioning strategically to aid both the Electric Vehicle industry and nation-building," he added.

By 2025, NAC aims to achieve its twin goal of becoming a premier ESG investment in the country and becoming one of the top 25 companies in the Philippine Stock Exchange in terms of market capitalization.

NAC recently bagged the right to be the exclusive mining service contractor for two properties in Davao Oriental that have already been issued Mineral Production Sharing Agreements.

The firm disclosed to the PSE that Hallmark Mining Corporation and Austral-Asia Link Mining Corporation have accepted NAC's Letter of Intent (LOI).

The LOI will make NAC or its wholly-owned subsidiary the sole and exclusive mining service contractor for Hallmark's MPSA covering 4,999.71 hectares located in Mati and San Isidro, Davao Oriental. (James A. Loyola)



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TPGI PROJECT

CORON TO GET NEW SEPTAGE TREATMENT FACILITY

By Meg J. Adonis
@MegINQ

Water utility company Tubig Pilipinas Group Inc. (TPGI) plans to build its first septage treatment plant in Coron, Palawan province this year as it seeks to expand its business and provide potable water outside Metro Manila.

The Pure Energy Holdings Corp. subsidiary on Thursday said it would partner with Coron Rural Waterworks and Sanitation Association (CRWASA) for the project, which is set to broaden TPGI's service connections in the municipality, a popular tourist destination because of its beautiful beaches and diving sites.

"We currently cover around 400 to 500 service connections [in Coron] and we're looking to increase that to about 1,000 to 2,000 through the water improvement project," TPGI chief operating officer Mark Roxas told reporters.

A septage treatment plant cleans human waste and wastewater by removing sludge and keeping disease-causing organisms from

entering the environment.

The construction of the Coron treatment plant, which Roxas said would cost "a few hundred million pesos," is part of TPGI's expansive goal of providing clean water to 100 million Filipinos outside Metro Manila.

TPGI president Ryan Yapki-anwee said they recently secured funding from one of the country's top conglomerates to help achieve this goal and reach underserved communities, noting that 57 million Filipinos lacked access to reliable and safely managed sources of water.

This funding is on top of a foreign-backed environment, social and governance (ESG) fund that TPGI expects to close in the coming months.

"We have been lucky to be recognized by some foreign funds. These foreign funds are classified under ESG funds and we fit exactly into their profile because for you to qualify, you have to have environmental and social impact," Yapki-anwee said.

TPGI works with CRWASA and the Coron local government to protect the municipality's main water source. INQ



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CCC: PH SHOULD USE MORE E-JEEPNEYS

THE Climate Change Commission (CCC) expressed support for President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.'s renewable energy and multimodal transportation system goals.

The GCC favors the use of more e-jeepneys to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

"Reducing dependence on fossil fuels through increased electric vehicle production will be instrumental to our goal of a 75 percent decrease in GHG (greenhouse gas) emissions by 2030 as part of our commitment to the Paris Agreement on climate change," CCC Vice Chairman and Executive Director Robert Borje said in a statement on Wednesday.

As of 2015, the Philippine transport sector's GHG emissions have increased by 29.68 percent compared to 2010.

The three major sources of GHG emissions in the country are land transportation (87.88%), water-borne navigation (9.17%) and domestic aviation (2.95%).

"It will also bring positive consequences by decreasing the danger of disruptions in energy supply from exporting countries or the potential for economic losses due to price volatility," he added.

Borje said the issue of shifting to renewable energy must be viewed from global and inter-generational perspectives.

"Although the Philippines' carbon footprint is almost negligible compared to bigger developed countries, it is our duty to the future generations to be able to experience the resources we have in view of inter-generational responsibility," he said.

Marcos said that the country will transition to renewable energy under his watch, noting the use of renewable energy sources such as hydro, geothermal, solar and wind will slow down the effects of global warming.

KRISTINA MARALIT



Reflections on the climate crisis

I'm not a religious person. I'm also not the type who will post Bible verses on my social media accounts. This past Lent week, however, I was able to do some "spring cleaning" of the multiple email accounts I have. In the process of sorting my Environment Section email inbox, I had what experts call "eco-anxiety."

Aimee Oliveros, engagement lead and Luzon coordinator of the Climate Reality Project Philippines, wrote that eco-anxiety is "characterized as the overwhelming feelings of fear and worry about climate change impacts and the effects of extreme disasters and weather events, affecting our way of life and daily functioning. It can also be associated with feelings of guilt about our actions that impact the environment, as well as feelings of helplessness, and even hopelessness in fighting climate change."

If you see my inbox, it is filled with the words "climate crisis," "marine disaster," "environmental collapse," "biodiversity challenge," etc. Stories, photos, video links are replete with horror stories on how mankind's activity has destroyed our one and only home. Again, I'm not a religious person but I suddenly had the urge to utter a prayer for our planet. I don't know if it's too early for me to have a mid-life crisis but I was filled with fear for the future, guilt for some trash-throwing incidents I did when I was younger, and regret for not doing much more for the environment.

I felt privileged that in my unique position as Manila Bulletin's Environment and Sustainability editor, I could use this platform to amplify more messages for the planet. But, at the end of the day and after much reflection, I felt inadequate. The climate crisis challenge

is so colossal that I, alone, couldn't even make a dent to demolish all the misconceptions and misinformation about saving the planet.

How much more the others? How about the solitary forest ranger guarding hectares of a virgin forest? The coast guard patrolling millions of miles of waters replete with marine life? Or members of an indigenous tribe saving their ancestral land from unsustainable mining? It would be too preposterous of me to claim awareness of their plight as I don't feel their fear as they hold on to the last remain-

In the battle against climate change, there is no single bullet to solve all of the problems associated with it. More so, it is not up to a single human being to save the world.

ing natural resources we have. The least I could do is to know them and tell their stories.

With all these eco-anxiety inducing incidents, what can one do to counter it? Aimee asked co-members of her group on tips how to cope with eco-anxiety. I'm sharing some of it here in the hope that you will be able to take it "one-day/one-moment" at a time and reflect on how we, as part of this planet, can do our share.

From Ana Michaela Reyes: "Exploring my core through meditation and reflection exercises helps me in

dealing with eco-anxiety. Connecting my body and soul with nature helps me be grounded and feel deep empathy for each creature. In the battle against climate change, there is no single bullet to solve all of the problems associated with it. More so, it is not up to a single human being to save the world. Our individual selves may seem negligible to the vast sea of problems but concerted efforts and a community of like-minded individuals can surely create ripples of change — little by little, slowly but surely."

From Nicole Limlengco: "Breathe. When things get overwhelming, it's okay to take a step back. Use what you have. You don't have to go and buy the latest eco-friendly product. Making full use of the things you have right now is perfectly fine. Switching and maintaining a new lifestyle doesn't have to be all or nothing. Taking baby steps is the key to sanity. Start with the little things such as bringing a packed lunch to school or work instead of always ordering or eating out; use any refillable container for your drinks, bring your own eco-bag or container when shopping, etc."

From Rey Sario: "Living a simple lifestyle is excellent for our health. It is beneficial to our physical and mental health. Staying connected with nature is very important and relaxing. It helps me value what is there and thank the Creator for what I have. I am blessed, alive, and enthusiastic."

(Johannes L. Chua is editor of the Environment and Sustainability section.)



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JOHANNES L. CHUA



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Govt workers get

P1-B rice aid

BY JANINE ALEXIS MIGUEL

A ONE-TIME rice assistance to national government employees was approved by the Department of Budget and Development (DBM).

The DBM has allocated P1.18 billion for the assistance project, through the Special Allotment Release Order and corresponding Notice of Cash Allocation.

"As directed by President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., we shall ensure the welfare of

our government workers by giving them assistance for their household needs and, at the same time, boosting the production of our rice farmers," Budget Secretary Amenah Pangandaman said.

Close to 2 million government workers will benefit

from the project, including job order and contract of service personnel who were in government service as of Nov. 20, 2022.

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. signed Administrative Order 2 that provides 25 kilos of rice to each qualified

government employee.

It was reported earlier that the retail price of rice could go up by P5 a kilo in the next few weeks after the Department of Agriculture projected a lower import volume and high farm production costs.



Rains to continue as Amang weakens

By ROMINA CABRERA

Tropical Depression Amang has weakened into a low-pressure area (LPA) but will continue to bring scattered rains over the country today, according to the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAGASA).

The state weather bureau said that the LPA was monitored around the vicinity of Infanta, Quezon yesterday afternoon. The LPA will bring rain showers over Metro Manila, Central Luzon, Calabarzon, Mimaropa and Camarines Norte.

Light to moderate and at times heavy rains are forecast over Rizal and Quezon particularly. The remnant low and localized thunderstorms will also bring isolated rain showers over the rest of the country.

PAGASA warned of possible flash floods and landslides during at times heavy rain.

Amang made landfall in three areas – Panganiban in Catanduanes, Presentacion and Lagonoy in Camarines Sur – as it traversed the eastern side of the country. Tropical cyclone wind signal no. 1 was the highest signal raised over the course of Amang.

Displaced families

Amang has affected and displaced at least 81 families or some 280 persons in the Bicol region alone, according to the National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC).

The NDRRMC said 78 of the families or 275 persons were served inside five different evacuation centers, while others had decided to move in with relatives elsewhere.

The NDRRMC said necessary assistance are being provided to affected residents from at least seven barangays in Camarines Norte, Naga, Camarines Sur and Albay.

Bad weather conditions also caused floods and affected seven bridges and caused the cancellation of two domestic flights. Twelve seaports were also affected, stranding 3,395 passengers and

635 rolling cargoes.

Operations in port areas resumed yesterday after the Philippine Coast Guard lifted the suspension of sea trips in Baseport Legazpi and the ports of Tabaco and Pio Duran in Albay, along with the ports of Virac and San Andres in Catanduanes, as well as Matnog and Bulan in Sorsogon. Meanwhile, the Philippine Ports Authority said over 100 passengers remain stranded.

As of yesterday, the NDRRMC said there have been no reported deaths or injuries in affected provinces where floodwaters are already subsiding.

Class suspensions

In-person and online classes remained suspended in several areas on Wednesday due to the effects of Tropical Depression Amang.

Classes in public kindergarten to senior high schools were automatically suspended in all areas under tropical cyclone warning signals.

Among the provincial governments that suspended classes in all levels, public and private, were Laguna and Camarines Sur. Classes up to senior high school were also suspended in some areas in Batangas, Rizal and Quezon.

P12 M agri damage

Agriculture damage due to Amang in Bicol reached P12.34 million as many farms were submerged in floods, the Department of Agriculture (DA) said.

In an interview, DA Office of the Director for Field Operation Services officer-in-charge U-Nichols Manalo said that based on field reports, of the total crops affected, P8.07 million were rice fields covering 1,017 hectares.

"Tropical Depression Amang made three landfalls in Bicol. As a result the affected number of farmers and fisherfolk totaled to 1,200 mostly in Camarines Sur and Sorsogon," Manalo said. He added that damage to high value crops reached P4 million. – With Michael Punongbayan, Janvic Mateo, Robertzon Ramirez, Bella Cariaso



'Amang' weakens, leaves CamSur towns flooded

More than 2,700 families still in evacuation sites in Bicol; agri losses at P12.3 M

By Ma. April Mier-Manjares,
Delfin T. Mallari Jr.
and Jordeene B. Lagare
@Team_Inquirer

LEGAZPI CITY—Some towns in Camarines Sur were still submerged in floodwaters while more than 12,000 residents remained in evacuation centers on Thursday due to heavy rains dumped by Tropical Depression "Amang," which weakened into a low-pressure area as it grazed the eastern seaboard of Luzon.

At least 2,711 families or 12,658 people were still in evacuation centers a day after Amang dumped heavy rains in Bicol, the Office of Civil Defense (OCD) in the region reported on Thursday.

In a report, Gremil Alexis Naz, OCD Bicol spokesperson, said that as of Thursday afternoon, 2,570 families (12,066 people) were still in evacuation areas in 12 towns in Camarines Sur, 83 families (392 people) in seven towns in Camarines Norte and 57 families (199 people) in Guinobatan town in Albay.

Naz said most of the families were from communities prone to flooding and landslides.

At least 131 areas in the region were hit by floods and as of Thursday, 105 were still submerged in floodwater, he said.

He said landslides were also reported in a village in Labo, Camarines Norte, and four villages in the towns of Baao, Bula and Pasacao in Camarines Sur.

In Minalabac town, the main road going to Barangay Borongborongan in neighboring Milaor town was impassable while its alternate route in Bagongbong to Irayang Solong was also submerged in knee-



ROAD CLEARING A government team on Thursday clears the landslide-hit section of Inoyonan-Itagon Road in Bula town, Camarines Sur province. Heavy rains brought about by Tropical Depression "Amang" also triggered flooding in several areas in Camarines Sur. —PHOTO COURTESY OF BULA MDRRMO

deep floodwater on Thursday morning.

Some villages in Naga City were also flooded, prompting the local government to suspend classes and work in government offices on Thursday.

Roads blocked

In Barangay Laganac in Balatan town, motorists were advised to take precautions after tree branches fell and debris from a minor landslide covered a section of the road on Thursday morning.

The Department of Public Works and Highways Bicol said as of 2 p.m., the Sto. Niño-Pal-song-Topas Road in Barangay Sto. Niño, Bula town, was impassable to vehicles after a section collapsed due to heavy downpour.

Disaster response officials started road clearing operations on Thursday morning after debris from the landslide blocked the Inoyonan-Itagon Road in Barangay Inoyonan, Bula.

The spillway in Barangay

Panoypoyan also in Bula was rendered impassable to all types of vehicles since 5 p.m. on Wednesday because of about a meter-high floodwater that rushed from the overflowing Panoypoyan creek, the Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Office (MDRRMO) said. The spillway in Barangay Lubgan was also impassable.

Sea trips to and from the ports of Masbate, Catanduanes and Sorsogon resumed but 43 passengers and six cargo trucks were stranded at Pasacao port in Camarines Sur as of 8 a.m. on Thursday, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) Bicol said.

While classes at all levels in public and private schools resumed on Thursday in most areas of Bicol, those in at least 20 towns in Quezon province remained suspended as Amang was expected to bring heavy rains.

The local government of Panukulan on Polillo Island also suspended work in government offices on Thursday.

On Wednesday, heavy rains triggered floods in Lopez town and at least 100 families from four villages were forced to evacuate, the Quezon DRRMO reported.

On Thursday, the PCG in Quezon suspended sea travel at the ports of Calauag, Lopez, Plaridel, Quezon, Perez, Alabat, Mauban, Gumaca, Atimonan, Real and Polillo due to the weather disturbance. Trips at the Lucena City pier, however, continued.

Farm damage

The Department of Agriculture (DA), in a report, said agricultural damage stood at P12.34 million as of Thursday, affecting 1,324 farmers, mostly in the rice sector.

Amang hit 1,096.6 hectares of agricultural areas in Camarines Sur and Sorsogon. The volume of production loss was pegged at 663.9 metric tons (MT).

Citing its initial assessment, losses were recorded in rice, high-value crops and livestock. These are subject to validation as the agency is assessing the extent of the damage caused by the storm.

U-Nichols Manalo, officer in charge director for DA's Field Operations Service, said the weather disturbance mostly hit seedlings planted in rice fields since the wet cropping season was at its early stage.

"The sector can still recover because our production in Bicol remains high. But again, the wet cropping season has just started," he said in Filipino.

"The planting season officially started last March 16 so it's almost a month ago. Affected rice farms in Bicol can still recover as farmers can plant again," he added. INQ