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Water utilities' role in climate resilience

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Information and Knowledge Management Division

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Heavy rains drenched large parts of the Philippines in the first half of January with much of the country recording above-normal rainfall, the state weather bureau said.

According to Anjo Pertierra's report on Unang Balita on Wednesday, data from PAGASA covering January 1 to 19 showed wide swaths of Metro Manila, most of Luzon, and large portions of the Visayas that were marked in blue.

This was an indicator of rainfall totals that exceeded normal levels for this period.

PAGASA said extreme northern Luzon and parts of Central Luzon also experienced above-normal rainfall, heightening the risk of flooding and rain-related disruptions early in the year.

Meanwhile, areas shaded green on the rainfall map which signified near-normal rainfall were observed in parts of Mindanao, Central Luzon, and the Visayas, and localized areas in Batangas, Laguna, Leyte, and the Cordillera Administrative Region.

The state weather bureau attributed the persistent rains to several weather systems that affected the country in recent days, such as then Tropical Depression Ada, the Northeast Monsoon, and the shear line that enhanced cloud formation and precipitation across multiple regions.

PAGASA advised the public to remain vigilant, monitor official weather updates, and take necessary precautions especially in flood-prone and landslide-susceptible areas.

This is amid changing weather patterns that continue to influence rainfall distribution nationwide.

MANILA BULLETIN

Sustainability: By all and for all

By: Wilma C. Inventor-Miranda

The reason some people do not care much about sustainability is rooted in misconception. For instance, many believe it is only for large corporations that must comply with regulatory reporting. In reality, sustainability is about our very lives; it significantly affects not only us but our children and our grandchildren.

Others dismiss it as a “boring” issue, yet if they delve deeper, they will see the critical role it plays in every aspect of our existence. Some cost-conscious individuals worry it is expensive, but little do they know that the costs incurred now can result in exponential savings in the long run.

There is also a common notion that sustainability is strictly about the environment, climate change, natural farming, or recycling. While important, these are just parts of a broader system. Sustainability encompasses economic development and social responsibility within the context of the “Earth's carrying capacity, ecosystems, biodiversity, occupations, behavioral patterns,” and more (Source: reesaafrica.medium.com).

This is why the 2025 FINEX Environment Committee—chaired by Goody Hernandez, together with the editorial board consisting of myself as Project Chair and Editor-in-Chief, Albert Gamboa as Copy Editor, and Liaison Director Flor Tarriela—produced the FINEX Sustainability Handbook.

Our initial plan was to create a “Volume 2” of the handbook published years ago by the same committee, which focused on climate change and natural farming. However, we decided to title this edition simply Sustainability to encompass the full breadth of the topic. We are now in the final stages of production. We hope that everyone—rich and poor, FINEX members and non-members—will benefit from this book in both their professional and personal lives. The project is sponsored by a large financial institution dedicated to helping farmers, particularly those in need, as our topics cover natural farming, climate change, and environmental awareness, as well as governance for the business community.

The handbook will be released soon and distributed for free, primarily to farmers and FINEX members. Those of us working on this project share a united purpose: that through this publication, we can help preserve the Earth’s resources and ecosystems, protect the planet from further destruction, and promote sustainability at all levels of society. By empowering every individual to be disciplined enough to do what is necessary for the planet, we can create the awareness needed to protect our only home for the benefit of both present and future generations.

People are becoming more conscious of sustainability because of the recent adverse situations in our country: catastrophic floods, global water scarcity caused by prolonged droughts and

growing populations, and the damage brought about by global warming and altering ocean chemistry. These issues do not just affect our personal lives; they impact small and large businesses alike. Sustainability concerns are slowly creeping into the financial system, food production, government budgets, and even the political landscape.

How individuals, businesses, governments, and non-profits handle sustainability today—not just through rhetoric, but through real action—will determine if tomorrow's adverse impacts can be mitigated or significantly reduced.

As defined in 1987 by the United Nations Brundtland Commission, sustainability is "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." A single person's contribution, no matter how small, becomes a powerful collective effort when we all do our part.

MANILA STANDARD

World Bank trims Philippine growth forecasts amid governance, climate concerns

The World Bank lowered its economic growth forecasts for the Philippines through 2027, citing persistent governance concerns and weather-related disruptions despite a boost from artificial intelligence-driven exports.

In its January 2026 Global Economic Prospects report, the Washington-based lender said it expects the Philippine gross domestic product to expand by 5.1 percent in 2025, 5.3 percent in 2026 and 5.4 percent in 2027. These figures represent downward revisions from previous estimates of 5.3 percent for 2025, 5.4 percent for 2026 and 5.5 percent for 2027.

World Bank officials said that while planned structural reforms are expected to improve productivity and investment, the outlook is clouded by institutional challenges.

“In the Philippines, planned structural reforms are likely to boost investment and productivity, but concerns around governance remain,” the World Bank said.

The report said the economy faced setbacks from a contraction in public investment and frequent climate shocks.

However, the industrial sector remained a bright spot. Industrial production increased in the Philippines, Malaysia and Vietnam, spurred by global demand for semiconductors required for artificial intelligence (AI) applications.

On a global scale, the economy has shown resilience against trade tensions and policy uncertainty. Last year, activity was supported by a surge in AI spending, strong risk appetite and the stockpiling of traded goods as firms adapted to rising barriers.

This recovery from the 2020 recession has been the strongest in more than 60 years, but the World Bank warned of a sharp divergence between nations.

While 90 percent of advanced economies have surpassed pre-pandemic per capita income levels, more than 25 percent of emerging markets and developing economies remain below 2019 levels.

Global growth is projected to slow to 2.6 percent this year as temporary supports fade. The World Bank expects trade growth to weaken as companies reduce inventory accumulation and the effects of tariffs intensify.

Near-term risks remain tilted to the downside, with growth potentially faltering if trade tensions escalate further or financial market sentiment deteriorates. Growth could be supported if AI-related activity broadens or if firms prove highly adaptable to new trade conditions, it said.

The report said global efforts are necessary to ease financing constraints, improve the trade environment and mitigate climate risks to ensure a more equitable recovery.

PHILIPPINE NEWS AGENCY

Measures underway to boost RE transmission capacity

By: Joann Villanueva

Measures are being undertaken to ensure transmission lines nationwide can accommodate the growing share of renewable energy (RE), an official of the National Transmission Corp. (TransCo) said Wednesday.

RE now accounts for about 25 percent of the energy mix, in line with the government's target of 35 percent by 2030 and 50 percent by 2040.

In an interview on the sidelines of Energyear Philippines 2026 in Mandaluyong City, TransCo President and Chief Executive Officer Fortunato Leynes said transmission bottlenecks persist due to delays in project implementation, mainly from right-of-way issues and capital expenditure approvals.

He said these challenges and corresponding solutions will be identified under the Smart and Green Grid Plan, which forms part of the Philippine Energy Transition Strategies under the Philippine Energy Plan 2023-2050.

Leynes said the plan would determine the facilities needed to support new RE projects and is expected to be finalized "before the middle of the year."

Earlier, officials of the National Grid Corp. of the Philippines (NGCP) cited the need to assess transmission capacity amid the rising share of RE.

While the NGCP said it has contingency plans to address capacity fluctuations, it noted that proper measures must be in place to ensure an uninterrupted power supply.

THE MANILA TIMES

Climate change fuels disasters, but deaths don't add up

Climate change is turbocharging heatwaves, wildfires, floods and tropical storms, but how deadly have extreme weather events become for people in their path?

Annual climate reports released last week show the last three years have been the hottest since the pre-industrial era, with no let-up in sight as the world continues to burn fossil fuels.

Experts warn that rising global temperatures are bringing hotter summers, more frequent flooding, stronger storms and increasingly devastating wildfires and droughts.

But what about deaths? The maths are not simple.

Overall, mortality from extreme weather disasters has fallen over recent decades.

But the picture varies by hazard and region: heatwaves have become deadlier, while people in low-income nations are far more at risk than elsewhere.

More than 2.3 million people died from weather-related events between 1970 and 2025, according to an AFP analysis of EM-DAT, a global disaster database run by the Belgium-based Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED).

The death toll between 2015 and 2025 reached 305,156, down from 354,428 in the previous decade, the analysis showed.

"It's not because the events haven't become more dangerous. It's because we have become a lot better at coping with them," Marina Romanello, executive director of the Lancet Countdown, a climate-health monitoring programme, told AFP.

Heatwaves: 'silent killer'

Heat is called a "silent killer" in part because it can take months or longer to calculate the death toll, with the sick and elderly particularly vulnerable to its effects.

Last year, half the planet experienced more days than average with at least strong heat stress, or a "feels-like" temperature of 32C or above, the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service said last week.

It is "very clear" that extreme heat is becoming deadlier, said Theodore Keeping, researcher at Imperial College London.

He said that for extreme heat events, there are robust scientific studies and models that can attribute additional deaths to the specific increase in temperature caused by climate change.

Almost 61,800 people died from heatwaves around the world in 2022, with the toll falling to around 48,000 in 2023 and rising again to 66,825 in 2024, according to the EM-DAT database.

But the figures are much higher than in previous years as data on heat-related deaths, especially from Europe, became more accessible after the Covid-19 pandemic, CRED senior researcher Damien Delforge told AFP.

There is still a year-long delay for CRED to add heatwave deaths to its database, he said.

Heat-related deaths are also underreported.

According to the Lancet Countdown, global heat-related mortality reached an estimated 546,000 deaths on average per year between 2012-2021, up 63 percent from 1990-1999.

Better prepared

While a flood or cyclone can cause massive casualties, countries are better prepared with early warning systems, storm barriers and improved building codes.

Floods killed 55,423 people between 2015 and 2025, down from 66,043 in the previous decade, according to the EM-DAT database.

The death toll from storms totalled 36,652 in 2015-2025 compared to 184,237 in the preceding decade.

"We have these early warning systems that can protect lives, but the peril stays, of course, very, very, very high," chief climate scientist at German reinsurer Munich Re, Tobias Grimm, told AFP.

Discerning an annual pattern is tricky, as a single disaster can make one year much deadlier than another.

In an annual report last week, Munich Re said deaths from floods, storms, wildfires and earthquakes rose to 17,200 last year, distinctly higher than the 11,000 fatalities recorded in 2024.

Thousands of deaths from major earthquakes in Myanmar and Afghanistan caused the death toll to spike year-on-year.

But the Munich Re figure was below the 10-year average of 17,800 deaths and 30-year average of 41,900 fatalities. The data excludes droughts and heatwaves.

There is "no clear trend" when it comes to deaths from natural disasters, Grimm said.

"What we do know for a fact is that the weather events are becoming more frequent, more intense, depending on the type of event," the Lancet Countdown's Romanello said.

"While so far we have managed to bend the curve on mortality in many cases through outstandingly better infrastructure... there's a limit to how effective that could be when these events happen one after the other and you don't offer time to recover between one and the next," she said.

CCC IN THE NEWS:

NEWSLINE PHILIPPINES

CCC to water utilities: Climate-proof Mindanao's water systems now

With droughts, floods, and extreme weather increasingly disrupting water supply across Mindanao, the Climate Change Commission (CCC) is urging water utilities and essential service providers to align their operations with the country's national climate goals—warning that climate risks are no longer distant threats.

CCC Vice Chairperson and Executive Director Robert E.A. Borje said climate impacts are already being felt in regions like Mindanao, where prolonged dry spells, typhoons, and watershed degradation directly affect water availability for households, farms, and industries.

"Climate action does not succeed on policy alone. Nor does it succeed on infrastructure alone," Borje said during the 1st Manila Water Sustainability Leadership Talk in Quezon City. "It succeeds when institutions, communities, and individual Filipinos move together."

Why this matters in Mindanao
Across Mindanao, water utilities face mounting challenges—from El Niño-driven shortages to flooding that damages pipes, pumping stations, and treatment facilities. Rural and upland communities are especially vulnerable, as deforestation and land conversion weaken watersheds that supply major towns and cities.

Borje stressed that water utilities play a frontline role in protecting communities.

"We must ensure water security despite a changing climate by climate-proofing infrastructure, diversifying water sources, and integrating nature-based solutions for watershed management," he said.

For Mindanao residents, this means fewer service interruptions during droughts, better protection against contamination during floods, and stronger safeguards for rivers and aquifers that sustain both cities and farms.

Aligning with national climate plans

The CCC urged utilities operating in Mindanao to align investments with the Philippines' Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) and National Adaptation Plan (NAP)—the country's main frameworks for cutting emissions and adapting to climate impacts.

Borje said water companies can contribute by:

- shifting to energy-efficient and low-carbon operations,
- improving wastewater treatment to protect rivers and coastal areas, and
- building resilient, risk-informed infrastructure designed for stronger storms and longer droughts.

Private sector's role

Water firms, including large concessionaires and local water districts, were encouraged to treat sustainability as part of daily operations—not just long-term planning.

Manila Water President and CEO Roberto Locsin said water service providers have direct opportunities to act on climate change through how they run and upgrade their systems.

The Sustainability Leadership Talk serves as a platform for dialogue among government, industry, and academe on how essential services can remain reliable amid climate uncertainty.

Communities at the center

The CCC reaffirmed its commitment under the Paris Agreement to work closely with the private sector and local stakeholders—particularly in climate-vulnerable regions like Mindanao.

For many Mindanaoans who have experienced dry taps during droughts or muddy water after floods, the message hits close to home: climate resilience is not an abstract goal.

It is about keeping water flowing to homes, farms, schools, and hospitals—especially as climate extremes become the new normal.

SUNSTAR

Water utilities' role in climate resilience

During the 1st Manila Water Sustainability Leadership Talk in Quezon City, I underscored the urgent need for essential service providers, including water utilities, to align their business strategies and investments with our national climate commitments.

As vice chairman and executive director of the Climate Change Commission (CCC), I addressed the systemic nature of climate risk for our water-stressed and disaster-prone archipelago. I emphasized that managing this risk requires coherence between sectoral agencies, private operators, and the communities themselves — who act as active agents of resilience. My message was clear: climate action cannot succeed on policy or infrastructure alone; it succeeds when our institutions, communities, and every individual Filipino move together.

I highlighted that for water utilities, climate action is not just a policy matter — it is a governance and operational priority. Climate impacts directly threaten water availability, the integrity of our infrastructure, and the continuity of service. To ensure water security in this changing climate, we must:

• Climate-proof our existing infrastructure.

• Diversify our water sources.

• Integrate nature-based solutions into our watershed management.

Guided by the policies of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., I pointed to the Philippines' Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) and National Adaptation Plan (NAP) as our core frameworks for addressing risk and advancing development. Water companies contribute to these national targets through:

• Mitigation: Improving wastewater treatment, increasing energy efficiency, and adopting low-carbon operations.

• Adaptation: Implementing risk-informed planning and building resilient infrastructure.

I told those in attendance that when their sustainability strategies align with the NDC and NAP, they are doing more than just complying with policy — they are translating national commitments into daily realities for millions of Filipinos.

Manila Water president and chief executive officer Roberto Locsin affirmed this view, noting that every operational task and decision can be transformed into direct climate action that shapes resilience for future generations. This inaugural talk, themed "Bridging Sustainability and

Resilience for a Climate-Smart Future," served as a vital platform for the CCC to engage with leaders across government, academe and industry.

The CCC recognizes the private sector as a crucial partner. We are actively leveraging bilateral partnerships and our system of contact groups to ensure that our collaboration remains a continuous loop of action and ambition. In line with the national climate agenda and the Paris Agreement, we reaffirm our commitment to working with all stakeholders to safeguard our essential services and advance a climate-resilient future.

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