

KEYNOTE ADDRESS
National Water Resources Board

CEO Lory Tan and VP Ed Tongson of WWF-Philippines, GM Ed Manda of LLDA, our friends from other government agencies and the private sector, participants to this Second Water Resources Summit, ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

It is indeed a great pleasure and an honor to deliver the keynote address in this summit with the theme "Managing Water Resources for Sustainability and Equity in the Santa Rosa Watershed;" This is a fitting event for the forthcoming World Water Day 2009 on March 22 and the celebration of the Philippine Water Week on March 23-28, 2009 through various activities spearheaded by DENR and its attached water-related agencies.

Close your eyes for a few seconds and imagine this: a world without water or more specifically, a country like the Philippines, without water. This is impossible but may possibly happen if we cannot properly manage our water resources.

Now with your eyes wide open, try to visualize how water, which is the vital source of life is also the source of human conflict. We fight over water. Simply, we worry a lot if we don't have water to use for our daily consumption and definitely, we can't do many of our activities if there's no water.

With no water, we surely have problems. With too much water, we likewise have problems. Imagine, with much of it, this can damage our homes, properties and our agricultural crops, and even our lives.

Water resources become issues of conflict. How do we properly manage our water resources for sustainability and equity? What technologies can we use? These and other relevant topics will be presented and discussed in this gathering of experts and representatives from the water sector.

One very important water resource is groundwater. This is practically water under the ground. Although it is only one percent of the world's total water content, it is an integral part of the earth's water cycle. We can find more freshwater under the ground than we can find in lakes and rivers. Freshwater stored as groundwater can be found within a kilometer from the ground's surface.

Groundwater is a major source of water for domestic, industrial and commercial use. However, the quality of groundwater is rapidly deteriorating. Increase in population plus the increase of human activities, industrial wastes, chemical contaminants, abuse and misuse of this water resource are some causes for changes in the quality of groundwater. These factors affect not only the lives of people and other living things but also the proper functioning of the earth's ecosystem.

The main reason for undertaking the Master Plan Study in 1998 was the overextraction of groundwater in Metro Manila and Cebu that resulted in the lowering of the water table and a consequent increase in salinity.

Aside from being an important resource for water supply, groundwater can be stored in large quantity; it is cheaper to develop and requires little treatment. Likewise, it can be tapped where it is needed. Such advantages often lead to exploitation of its use beyond its natural recharge rate. As a result, a phenomenon called subsidence or the sinking of the ground surface occurs. Land areas where there is subsidence suffer from flooding.

In addition to subsidence, overextraction, saltwater intrusion, pollution and contamination are other dangers that our groundwater resources face. This is where groundwater management comes in. The natural rate of recharge of aquifers and the rate of groundwater withdrawal must be balanced carefully.

Hence, the National Water Resources Board has clamped down on illegal wells in Metro Manila. Illegal extraction of groundwater greatly affects our aquifers, a major source of our water needs.

We need to admit that these are presently shortcomings in the management of our water resources. For instance, there has been too much focus on developing new sources of water supply rather than on managing existing ones better.

To holistically address the deficiencies of the water sector, not just from the demand side but also from the supply side, requires the coordinated development and management of water, land and related resources within the hydrological boundaries in the lowest appropriate level, the watershed. This inter-sectoral and collaborative approach to decision-making must combine authority with appropriate responsibility for managing water resources. The responsibility for water resources management rests on each and everyone of us.

All of us have to work together to overcome the two greatest challenges that we face as regard to water. These are; providing safe water for the needs of the present as well as the future generations; and maintaining our ecological integrity and preserving the biodiversity of our environment.

Just a piece of advise to our resource speakers..... let's target not only the minds of our summit participants but also to touch their hearts. Provide information and education to raise awareness on water issues. Encourage participation in water development, management and conservation among water users, planners and policy makers. Let the information that you give keep into their minds and hearts, because oftentimes, it is the heart that dominates the mind.

On behalf of our beloved, Executive Director, Dir. Ramon 'Dondi' Alikpala, may I take this opportunity to congratulate the summit organizers for this initiative which is aligned with the implementation and localization of the Integrated Water Resources Management in the Santa Rosa Watershed.

Thank you and Mabuhay!