

Water priorities

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A discussion paper published by government think tank Philippine Institute for Development Studies, found the country unlikely to meet the United Nation’s goal of attaining universal access to clean water and sanitation by 2030 as our water resources industry remains fragmented and ill-equipped to deliver on that obligation.

After decades of water problems and two years since the serious supply crisis that hit Metro Manila and adjacent provinces, there is still no central authority that would regulate the water sector. The creation of a so-called apex body for water concerns was supposedly made a priority – identified by Malacañang as such and referred to Congress – in early 2019 amid public clamor for secure water supply and reliable water services.

The PIDS study published on December 2020 finds that the water sector remains fragmented “primarily due to ambiguous and overlapping institutional mandates.” It added that “obstinate fragmentation” in the water sector was particularly so in local government water systems.

The study also showed that weaknesses in institutional mandates both caused and exacerbated the lack of consistently and regularly reported data. This, in turn, poses challenges in monitoring and evaluating the water service providers as the basis for sector reforms.

They noted that until now, there was “no single water-related planning agency that keeps track of progress and investment.”

It was recommended that various rules and regulations relating to the sector be streamlined and aligned.

The residents of the National Capital Region may have managed to survive the water supply crisis of 2019, but without any institutional improvements put in place, there is no guarantee that it cannot happen again. And because there is a finite supply of clean water, the same applies for all other areas in the country.

As we wait for the continued lack of a central authority for water concerns to be addressed by national government, it is up to local governments to work closely with the private sector to put in place the necessary regulations and reforms that can ensure the proper management of a resource as important as water so they can prevent the crisis that hit Metro Manila in 2019.*