

The Filipino People's Water Code

IBON Foundation | Water for the People Network

PREAMBLE

Water is life. More than anything else, people need water to physically survive. Further, people need water for a better quality of life – for sanitation, for food production, for production of basic needs, for leisure, and more.

The Philippines has abundant water resources, much more than Thailand, China, or India. Access to potable water should not be a problem for its people but the majority of people face water scarcity, which will increase further in the near future.

Over and above problems of environmental conservation, over-consumption, and degradation of water resources, the people face a fundamental problem of inequity in access to water whether for individual household use or for livelihood as irrigation for farmers or aquatic resources for fishing.

Now the Filipino people face an even greater danger as neo-liberal policies of privatization, deregulation, and liberalization are being implemented in various sectors, including the water sector of the country. Water supply infrastructure like dams, and water utilities and services are turned over to global transnational corporations (TNCs) and their local partners.

Consequently, water has become a commodity for TNC profit. Water resources are now under the control of corporations and allocated for their needs instead of fulfilling the basic human needs for water by the people. As a result of their commercial priorities and increase in water rates, the poor and marginalized sectors that comprise the majority of the people are principally victimized and lose access to water.

Statement of principles

1. As water is most essential to life, the right to water is an extension of the basic human right to life. Every Filipino and every human being has a fundamental, inalienable right to clean, potable, sufficient water for survival and sanitation.
2. Water is part of our national patrimony and should never be subject to exploitation for foreign, private interests.
3. Water should be treated as a people's resource, allocated mainly for the basic needs of the people's survival and livelihood.
4. As a public good, water should remain in the public domain, and conservation of freshwater ecosystems, prevention of over-consumption and degradation of water systems, and protection of watersheds as a public and government responsibility, and the provision of water services as responsibility of government.
5. In the allocation of water resources, there should be preferential treatment and positive action for the poor and marginalized sectors.

6. In the conservation of water resources, the ancestral domains of indigenous communities and national minorities must be given precedence.
7. In the conservation and development of water resources and provision of water services, community management should be promoted.

Conservation and rehabilitation of water resources and freshwater ecosystems

1. Sustainable, pro-people policies and programs to conserve freshwater ecosystems should be put in place. Consequently, corporate logging, large-scale corporate mining and similar large-scale corporate exploitation of natural resources as well as large development projects that destroy freshwater ecosystems must be terminated.
2. Effective conservation and rehabilitation programs for freshwater resources and ecosystems such as lakes, rivers, wetlands, groundwater and the like must be implemented, and renewable freshwater supply developed.
3. Degradation and pollution of water systems by large industrial concerns, large-scale mining, export zones and industrial estates, military bases and camps, water transport systems and the like must be immediately stopped.
4. Because of its particular devastating impact on the ecosystem, the policy and program for large-scale dams must be terminated.

Development and management of sustainable and pro-people water supply infrastructure

1. A new paradigm for infrastructure development for water supply management must be developed and the current paradigms that is premised on large-scale dams that require large investment through official development assistance (ODA) loans and global TNCs participation and control must be ended.
2. In particular, small-scale hydropower systems and community-based and controlled irrigation and water supply systems must be developed as the overall alternative.
3. Large-scale water supply systems for densely populated areas like Metro Manila and Metro Cebu should maximize and develop available renewable water supply based on a rational allocation and sustainable utilization of resources.
4. Multi-purpose infrastructure development projects for lakes, river systems, and wetlands should not dramatically alter or destroy ecosystems nor divert utilization of water resources towards the few.

Water services/utilities is the responsibility of government and privatization must be reversed

1. Institute a policy of public control and management of all water infrastructure, utilities, and services such as dams, irrigation systems, hydropower plants, and public water services at various levels of government down to municipal or barangay level.
2. Government should dismantle, take over or nationalize, as appropriate, the control of private companies over any or all aspects of operations of water-related infrastructure and water services.
3. Government water services must be premised on full respect and realization of workers' rights and welfare.

4. Water as a public good must be upheld. End the commodification of water and water services, such as the promotion of bottled water as basic source of drinking water or regularization of water service fees.

Effectively provide water for people's use

1. The people's interests must be upheld at all times in all matters related to water. In the development and allocation of water resources, public consumption must be the paramount concern.
2. Ensure access to water for all, especially the poor and marginalized. Provide safe and potable clean running water for all households, urban or rural.
3. User fees for water services to households must be scrapped and instead a socialized fee structure that charges for water use beyond basic household consumption should be put in place.

Develop and manage irrigation and promote genuine agrarian reform, as well as freshwater aquatic resources with preference for small fisherfolk

1. Conservation, rehabilitation, and management of freshwater resources such as lakes and rivers should aim to develop aquatic resources to support the livelihood of small fisherfolk, peasants, indigenous peoples, and other marginalized sectors.
2. Regulation of aquaculture must be rationally implemented so that it does not marginalize small fisherfolk, while programs should be developed to promote aquaculture livelihood for small fisherfolk.
3. Municipal/community managed irrigation systems must be developed on a massive scale in order to develop productivity in agriculture while assuring sustainability and peasant and farmer participation.
4. The prevalent practice of user fees and other payments or charges for irrigation must be ended and the policy preference for large irrigation systems that require user fees while destroying ecosystems and dislocating farmers and livelihood should be terminated.

Promote democratic governance in water supply management and water services

1. Consultation of affected communities and sectors must be ensured in the design and conceptualization of water supply infrastructure, and their participation must be ensured in every step of the implementation of such projects.
2. Consultation and participation of affected sectors must be ensured in the operations and policy formulation of water services and utilities.
3. Transparency and accountability in financing and management of projects in the water sector must be ensured. Collusion between government bureaucrats/agencies and corporation involved in construction and water services should be ended and all forms of graft and corruption must be investigated and punished.