

## Aqua Matters

As the world faces pathological and environmental challenges – from the wildfire in Australia to the current Corona Virus Disease (CoViD-19) pandemic – that forced its pace to slow down, world leaders and other sectors try to cope up hit after hit. Some countries cope faster than expected, while other countries have a hard time surviving the crises. It is no secret, however, that while Philippines combat the virus, problems involving its environment get worse. One issue, particularly in Davao City, is a familiar one. Following the fast-spreading coronavirus that stops the bulk water supply project from operating, the remaining water stored in the city's aquifer is expected to deplete faster with the residents' undisciplined consumption. Now, it is at the youth's best interest to contribute greatly to maintaining and conserving the city's healthy watersheds. But the question would be how, given the limited resources on their hands.

There is no doubt that water is everything to humans, it is something that no one can live without. Although water provides no organic nutrients, it remains vital for all forms of life. And so are the watersheds. Watersheds are more than just a place where the people live within; more than just drainage areas in and around the communities. While water quenches thirst, grows food, washes clothes, and powers industry, watersheds provide water supply, support habitat for plants and animals, and even hand opportunity for recreation and enjoyment of nature.

Hence, known for having eight watersheds that are, according to Interfacing Development Interventions for Sustainability (IDIS), “natural reservoirs for the pristine potable water that has been certified as one of the world's cleanest drinking water”, Davao City has been trying to conserve watersheds for the longest time. Through the Davao City Watershed

Management Council (DCWMC), a multi-sectoral government body that is responsible for managing the resources of watersheds, and other non-profit organizations like IDIS, critical areas of the watershed for conservation and protection are being identified. Together, these agencies work with determination to achieve both healthy watersheds and sufficient water supply.

However, as the city indulges in its natural resources – cutting down trees and turning forests into mono-crop plantations – soil erosion and floods have become its frequent visitors. At the same time, the widespread use of pesticides heightens the risk of contaminating local aquifers and water tables. Given these conditions, it can be said that despite all the conservation efforts, if these activities continue, not only will the watersheds turn unhealthy but the Davaoños will also face water scarcity.

Much to the relief of the worried residents, after almost four years of negotiating, the bulk water project where Apo Agua Infraestructura, Inc. (AII) is the project implementer has finally started. But in just a snap, their dream of finally ending the fear of waking up one day with no water coming out of their faucets was robbed. The arrival of CoViD-19 pandemic caused the delay of the completion of the project. Everyone can guess for how long, but only CoViD-19 can tell exactly when.

Going back to the “how?” of the youth’s roles in watershed conservation performing with limited resources on their hands, it is safe to say that while they put an effort to curb the spread of the virus by staying at home, they can still move through their smartphones and use online platforms in first, learning about healthy watersheds advocacies; second, disseminating

environmental-related information; and third, taking part in the petitions, forums and webinars (web seminars) hosted by any environmental (particularly watershed) organizations.

Knowledge, after all, can be earned in different ways. And social media is yet the best ‘available’ choice in this situation. Learning about watersheds helps youth develop understanding and appreciation for the relationship that they have with the environment. As what Barry Lopez has said, “To put your hands in a river is to feel the chords that bind the earth together.” In the same sense, being equipped with digital literacy and having an access to social media, youth are handed bigger role in promoting environmental awareness and social changes.

In this modern time, youth are the prime movers in information flow and dissemination. It is easily observed in social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, where posts and tweets on conservation efforts spread through likes and shares or retweets. In addition, coupled with online forums and webinars (web seminars), it is now relatively easy to engage with other people in topics like environmental issues, societal practices, and legal matters which aid us in our fight to conserve local watersheds. It is important to remember that everyone can make a difference in a simple click or a simple tap, thus the need to be careful on what to say and what to share online. As they say, in order for someone to make a change, he needs to start somewhere. The webinar entitled “Youth for Nature” that the IDIS is about to host on the 30<sup>th</sup> of June can be a good start.

In conclusion, watersheds sustain life, in more ways than one. Keeping them healthy means a quality life for people and the environment. Moreover, using online platforms as alternatives for learning and promoting is a wise choice to engage people of all ages, especially

the youth that are crucial in all conservation efforts, in one goal of conserving healthy watersheds. Given that all of these online advocacies happen inside their houses, a difference can be made without risking anyone's life. But of course, the role of the youth does not end in social media. Their role actually starts at home – being physically involved in the conservation by, in the simplest way, saving water. Finally, in the midst of this trying time, it will feel great for the youth – the catalysts of change – to take with them the words of Autumn Morning Star, “When life places stones in your path, be the water. A persistent drop of water will wear away even the hardest stone.”