

Building communities from sharing tap stands

A potable water project in Torrijos, Marinduque

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For the residents of the two remote barangays in Torrijos, Marinduque, the operation of a PEF-funded potable water project has not only spared them from expensive yet unclean sources of drinking water but has helped build communities otherwise obscured by poverty and deprivation of social services.

Now serving a combined number of 255 households, the Matuya-tuya-Suha Water System project has built a total of 34 tap stands for the two neighboring Barangays of Suha and Matuya-tuya, located 13 to 15 kilometers (respectively) away from poblacion Torrijos and 45 kilometers from Marinduque provincial capitol.

Photo of the water tank that supplies potable water to both Brgy Matuyatuya and Suha

In 2006, the Torrijos Municipal Employees Association (TORMEA) developed a proposal that resulted in PEF's almost P2 Million worth of fund support to the project. While the need for potable water was apparent, TORMEA at that time had to work harder to make the project gain support from community leaders.

"At first, we had hard time convincing the barangay captains to support the project because of their failed experience in the past water project," TORMEA president Meynardo Basco recalled.

How the project was built and how it is now managed and maintained can be credited much to the social preparation work facilitated by PEF's local partner, the Torrijos Municipal Employees Association (TORMEA), and the renewed enthusiasm of community members in helping bring potable water to their backyards.

DIRECT PROJECT BENEFITS

After a timeline covering the second half of 2006, the project had developed a new water source in between the two barangays, and installed a power supply that pumps and brings chlorinated water from the newly-



constructed ferrocement water tank to the pipelines and tap stands. It has now significantly reduced the distance and amount of time that residents have had to endure with their previous water sources.

"We used to travel 10 kilometers before to fetch water from the closest spring here. Otherwise, some of us had the options to either buy water from mobile water vendors for P35 per drum or from the usually contaminated deep wells," said Noel Quintero, elected president of the reorganized Matuyatuya-Suha

Waterworks System Association (MSWSA). Quintero is from Barangay Suha which, because of its location in the coastal area, makes it highly impractical for anyone to build water wells in their backyards.

In both barangays, diarrhea and parasitism were listed among the leading causes of morbidity in the community which residents blamed on the poor hygiene and sanitation caused by the poor quality of water supplied to them by peddlers.

These conditions are now things of the past for the 255 household beneficiaries who only have to pay an average of P10 per month for unlimited



Prime movers of TORMEA and MSWSA: Noel Quintero (left) and Meynardo Basco (2nd from left)

access to clean water, in the comfort of their neighborhood.

Unlike the untreated water they used to bring home, the new facility ensures water potability with the construction of perimeter fence for the pump house and periodic chlorinization of water prior to their distribution.

These tangible benefits made the project easily 'marketable' to the beneficiaries, Quintero said.

STRENGTHENED COMMUNITIES

MSWSA was formed in 1967 but inadequate funds and poor management of their previous water systems rendered those facilities, and therefore the association, dysfunctional.

The new project has revived the MSWSA with new breed of officers strengthened through the conduct of TORMEA-facilitated training on financial management as well as project operation and maintenance. The association now maintains an increasing collection of funds for the facility's maintenance needs and possible future expansion. It also employs one local resident as maintenance operator, (and therefore less costly to compensate), who happened to have been trained by the Philippine National Construction Corporation before. In addition, they have assigned people for tap stand



meter reading, distribution of bills, and collection of water usage payments.

Basco recalled that TORMEA initially planned to manage the project for the succeeding six months after its completion in 2007. But the sense of responsibility demonstrated by the association had changed the plan.

"We were surprised with how prepared they easily became in managing their project," Basco said. "Maybe because for the first time, the community had something they can call their own. We felt readily confident in turning over the project to them ahead of schedule."

TORMEA, Basco said, made sure that no project activity or major decisions were made without the consultation and participation of the community and their leaders. At the outset, it was the barangay residents who were involved in testing and looking for the best site of the water source/pump installation.

PRODUCT OF COLLABORATION AND SHEER DEDICATION

TORMEA took pride in being able to mobilize local groups and agencies including government offices to contribute to the project. Basco said that when they needed more funds, it was a big advantage that the mayor showed full support by making contributions.

"Not only did he allow his employees (TORMEA members) to work beyond their usual workload, he also in fact delegated the Municipal Engineering Office to provide technical training and assistance to the project," Basco said. In addition, the Municipal Agricultural Office assisted in the community organizing work. This, Basco said, was despite TORMEA's reputation of not

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being allied with any municipal administration, which comes with being a workers union by nature.

At the provincial level, the office of the Department of Public Works and Highways (DPWH) volunteered to assist in the construction of the facility.

Purita Libay, former TORMEA treasurer and a Matuya-tuya resident who handled the fund disbursement for the project, remembered how the project expanded her already stressful office workload, but found great reward in seeing communities enjoying the clean water today.

“For community projects like this to succeed, we would have to do away with thinking how we much we can earn. It is about how much we can help,” Libay said.

TAP STAND COMMUNITIES

Accessing water through a tap stand can be more rewarding than expected, as shared by local tap stand leader Corazon Raza.

Raza leads 20 members/users of Tap Stand No. 23 in Barangay Suha. Among her main responsibilities is to determine how much each member

has to pay based on the total tap stand water consumption (as indicated in the water meter).

When water from the main tank is scarce, Raza makes sure it is still equally distributed to her members. “Usually, we make each member get a bucket of water first before we allow more containers to be filled,” said Raza.

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During the month of May 2008, for example, their tap stand bill barely reached P1,000 but during the collection day, Raza said members agreed to pay more than their share, in order to have group savings. She collected P1,400.

“In this way, when one of us is broke and could not pay on the succeeding collection rounds, we have something to lend our members,” Raza said.

The concept of savings was initially aimed at ensuring on-time payment of water usage to the association, but Raza’s group envisioned something bigger out of it.

“Maybe, we can put up a group business out of our tap stand savings. Who knows?”, Raza said in humble optimism. ()

