



IT'S ALL ABOUT WATER

Water and Sanitation DSG from 8 clubs in District 5100 Oregon

***Site visit to villages in West Sumba by members of Rotary Club Bali Ubud Sunset July 1 – 3
2011***

ANECDOTAL REPORT



Background

In arid West Sumba, water is the most precious commodity in the long dry season. There are no permanent rivers in this area. Households collect rainwater in the wet season but in the dry season, which can last 8 months, they have no way to store water. Trucks sell water, but without a storage tank the villagers can't access it. Women and children walk for miles several times a day for water that is used for drinking and cooking; in the dry season many children are not bathed for months on end.

The Grant

Simple water storage tanks paid for by eight clubs in District 5100 Oregon ensure year-round access to water. Each 5 cubic meter tank supplies about 50 people. The 2011 project will build about 15 of these tanks. Toilets are extremely rare in poor rural areas and their absence contributes to diarrhoea, skin diseases, intestinal parasites and other illnesses. The DSG will provide about 70 toilets. The project buys materials that need to be purchased such as sand, cement, rebar and nails. The villagers provide all the labour as well as local stone and wood, and are responsible for building the toilet superstructures. Due to the very long rainy season, the construction of water tanks and toilets began only in June.

The Site Visits

Rotary Club Bali Ubud Sunset IPP Sue Winski, who was president when this project was approved, visited

West Sumba in July 2011 with Rotarians Cat Wheeler and Gabe Monson to check the progress of the project. Ann McCue, founder of executing agency Project Hope Sumba, accompanied us for the full three days as did Niko, the NGO's technical expert who helps the villagers design and build the tanks and toilets and monitors progress. Over three days we visited many villages and extended family settlements to view projects in process and those that were built with the MG last year.



Rtn. Gabe bonds with village women

We were warmly welcomed by the villagers of Kampung Mata Loko, our first stop. As the car pulled up a group of women began ululating a traditional song while one of the men danced with a parang (long knife). Hand-loomed scarves were placed on our left shoulders, the ingredients for chewing betel were poured into our right hands, and the women rubbed noses with us in the traditional Sumbanese greeting. Then we were led into the best house in the village and served coffee. One of the men explained that as guests we were required to chew betel and eat together. Fortunately the presentation of the betel ingredients was considered sufficient. The men asked us detailed questions about our grandchildren, which was a bit awkward as three of us were single and childless, but we invented some additional family members. The concept of middle-aged, unmarried women is beyond understanding here.



*Man in front of unfinished family
toilet*

We were then led up the mountain to view the beginnings of the 16 toilets which were being built. For some of the way we followed a newly constructed irrigation channel. Villagers explained that this allowed them to irrigate their fields all year round and produce fresh food even in the dry season for their own consumption and for sale. It will increase the prosperity of the village measurably. So irrigation is another potential water project to consider in the future.

We examined several toilets under construction on the mountainside. There is just a thin layer of topsoil over limestone bedrock here. The stones and cement for the project are carried up the steep hill. On returning to the house, a ceremonial meal was served to cement our new friendship. It consisted of local rice, boiled vegetables and roasted dog. It seemed like a good time to become vegetarian.

After the meal we drove further into the countryside to visit an extended family which had received a water tank from the MG last year. The family gathered around as the head man told us, "We thank you for the water tank, and are sorry that we have nothing to give back to you. We hope God will repay you. We consider Pak Niko as part of our family, helping us. We all worked together on this project. We have just enough for survival here."

At another village I took a video interview of a village woman who said (please note that all translations are loose!), "We used to make three trips a day to carry water, so now we have more time. We use it to plant vegetables near the houses. This has improved our diet and we can sell the surplus and use the money for the children's school fees and books. With the toilets we are all healthier and the compound us cleaner. The children's health is much better;— before, they had diarrhoea, parasites and skin diseases. Now malaria is our only health problem."

We visit a compound where tanks and composting toilets were built with the MG last year, and the villagers here are also very happy with their permanent water supply and with the toilet. A woman told us, "Before the tank, we had to work all the time carrying water, leaving at five in the morning to climb down to a spring deep in a gorge. We could only carry two buckets at a time, on a stick across our shoulders. Now we can grow vegetables for sale and use the money to buy water in the dry season..."



An old Sumba house. There are many like this.

At another village it was a steep climb downhill (all the springs seem to be in deep ravines!) to the project site where several men were digging out a foundation in the soft earth. Children carried chunks of limestone down a steep path; it was the school holidays, and they were helping. Later we climbed a rocky goat path to a little house where lunch was being prepared (eggs, rice, greens and papaya flower stew – no dog, thank heaven!). There were children everywhere -- the population growth rate here is 4% a year -- and one of the boys climbed 50 feet up a coconut tree to throw down some nuts for us to drink.

After lunch, Niko addressed the men of the village. "This water tank should have been finished by now. Look at all these old grandmothers who have come from far away to see the project, and it is still not finished!" We old grandmothers nodded sadly, and the men immediately pledged to have the tank finished within the week. Niko is the catalyst that keeps the projects on track. He is liked and respected by the villagers, and has an encyclopaedic memory of every tank and toilet that has been built.

We visited the house of a midwife who delivers most of the babies in the district – without a permanent water supply until their water tank was built. We talked to many women who explained how access to water near their homes has changed their lives.

SUMMARY



This young girl just couldn't stop pouring water over her head. Such luxury!

In West Sumba, it's all about water. Few can take it for granted in this arid province, and the time, energy and money that go into accessing it are a cruel burden on the poor. These projects transform the simple lives of these people the quality of life is much improved as is the family's health, and the spare time created by not having to carry water is being used in income-generating activities that benefit all, especially the children.

Water tanks and toilets are two elements in addressing access to water and sanitation in West Sumba. Others include permanent wellheads/springheads where people can gather water, bathe and wash clothes, and irrigation channels that allow them to grow crops all year round. Perhaps these needs can also be considered in future projects.

It's all about water. It's a few bags of cement and some sand. It's communities that pull together on projects that benefit all. It's the vision and dedication of Ann McCue, who was honoured by the Queen of

England for her service to the people of Sumba in 2010. It's the commitment of local staff in the field. And it's the generosity and open hearts of Rotarians far away that make a profound and lasting difference in many lives.

With deep thanks to Rotary Clubs in District 5100:

Seaside, Wilsonville, Salem, Milwaukie, North Tillamook County,

Southwest Pacific County-Peninsula, Oregon City and Lake Oswego

Submitted by Cat Wheeler, RC Bali Ubud Sunset