

Water for Life Program of the Municipality of Bani, Pangasinan

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Uses of Water

In the world today water, as an indispensable resource, calls for prudent utilization and sustenance.

In our local setting, fresh water that is used domestically, is mainly supplied by the Local Water District in 13 barangays (Villages), domestic water is also drawn from springs, rivers and cisterns by townspeople. Bani's irrigation requirements are drawn from small water impounding projects and farm reservoirs while some residents construct cisterns to facilitate their fresh water fishponds.

In Bani we are blessed to have fresh spring water unlike some other coastal towns in Pangasinan where ground water has high salinity which affects taste and function.

Issues and Concerns

In 1998, Bani first felt the impact of an imbalanced demand for potable water caused by a growing population. The local water district was forced to ration water resources in certain areas; Poblacion (town proper) was the only barangay to receive water from 5 am to 9:00 p.m during this time. The population was approximately 40,000 people in Bani and water supplies were only able to support about 10% of the populace! The rest of our town managed their water needs by drawing water from dug wells, artesian wells, jetmatic pumps and by utilizing underground cisterns to store rainwater. These techniques were especially important in coastal areas.

Another concern is the denuding forest caused by cutting for the production of charcoal. This problem is perpetuated by the attitude of private land owners wherein they believe that they



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own the land and have the right to cut trees in their own property. In our town alone an average of six thousand cubic meters of timber is being cut and converted into charcoal yearly.

Even more detrimental to the water source is the proposed Agno Cement Plant. If this proposed project comes into fruition, almost all of the upland watershed area which supports our source of spring water will be quarried for its operation. Moreover, the national, provincial, and congressional governments are all in consonance with the project.

Proliferation of illegal settlers in the coastal area is also considered a threat. Indiscriminate waste disposal contaminates ecosystem in coastal areas. Equally alarming is the clogging of rivers by multitudes of fish traps, making them barely navigable and preventing speedy ingress and egress of water. These factors contribute to the siltation and make Bani vulnerable to destructive floods every rainy season resulting in damage to crops, property, and worst of all, loss of lives.

What We have Done

Bani recognizes the need to protect and develop its water systems and water sources or lose the ability to develop at all! It is impossible for an area to develop without a sustainable water supply.

Because we strongly believe that our water sources will be directly affected by the proposed Agno Cement Plant's operation, Bani fought against the proposal in the Office of the Secretary of Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), in the Halls of Congress, and finally won a decisive victory in the Senate in a public hearing before its Committee on Natural Resources. We are able to provide technical evidences that the project would bring more of destruction rather than of development.

The process took six years, but Bani's water source was saved.

The LGU also provided credit to the water district in the amount of one million pesos to improve and expand their system. This financial assistance enabled them to expand their services to nine barangays which are home to more than one thousand households.

We have been fortunate to develop partnerships with Peoples Organizations and NGOs (UPMERF and SLGP) who assist in the management of our coastal, riverine and water resources. We also mobilized our local Development Council to allocate budget for our environmental programs such as: Rehabilitation and Development of Forest Farms, Coastal Resources Management Program, Solid Waste Management Program and the Water for Life Program.

More than 200 fish traps were dismantled that were clogging our rivers causing the perennial flooding that destroys considerable amount of crops, personal property and even loss of life.

After initiating environmental programs, many concerned individuals and NGOs were able to contribute support in many different ways. Recognitions, awards, citations and grants came in until we finally received our CRM Certifications. The National government also granted Bani three million pesos to be focused towards a Water System Project. The funds were used to provide water to barangays with brackish waters, to develop our springs and to provide water in other coastal areas.

Difficulties and Barriers

Despite hard work and enthusiasm, we have met many challenges while implementing programs. The former Mayor was sued for issuing an executive order calling for the dismantling of illegal fishtraps. This was later dismissed due to lack of merit, but he lost votes in barangay where the programs were implemented. However, more of the townspeople supported him and he was able to win that election despite negative reactions to his drive for improving water resources.

While we have programs focused on reforestation, we do not currently measure the direct impact of it. Though we won in the issue of the proposed cement plant and have dismantled fishtraps, many questions still lie unanswered. How much water do we need to supply all households? Where are they? How they can be utilized? Do we have enough water to supply the next generation? These are just some of the few concerns yet to be resolved!

How We Overcome

We go back to the basics of public participation, we encourage people to participate in the Water for Life Program. We research locally, climb our mountains, go through our caves, we test existing dug wells to find solutions for unforeseen water deficit. Through these actions we have finally found the answer – The National Irrigation Administration (NIA)!

They have assisted us (LGU) in the conduct of a groundwater survey. The barangays (villages) helped to locate the possible sources of water in the area. Members of the community welcomed the team, they even donated animals and prepared food, just to support the program. The budgetary requirement for the research was subscribed by different stake holders.

After 4 years of intensive study, forum and scientific interventions, we have mapped out our freshwater aquifers. We have found where the aquifers are, how much water is there, how clean it is and where the water comes from. We have completed the data on our water resources. We made monuments to concretely mark them and have had the land owners confirm their support by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), this signifies their knowledge and support for the conducted study.

As a result of the study, we formed the Water Sanitation Council who will oversee the protection, utilization and sustainability of water resources in our town. We also made our data base map on saline intruded areas, freshwaters areas, and the 458 study sites!

We have also supported the Bani Water District by providing them with the needed pipelines to deliver water to barangays without freshwaters deposits and who are underlain by brackish waters.

Bani also has private individuals that are directly involved in the protection and development of our 168 has. communal forest. We have institutionalized the Bantay Dagat (Deputized Fish Wardens) to protect our MPAs and also enacted a Solid Waste Management Ordinance to efficiently manage town waste.

Through the participation of my concerned citizens we are able to do this effectively, efficiently, and communally. Through the Water for Life Program residents of Olanen and Surip and of barangays Dacap Sur and Centro Toma respectively enjoys free water from a developed spring. Reforestation in the communal tree farm initiated in Virga Forest now shows promise of becoming a tourist attraction.

In order to develop the correct plan for Bani, we conducted preliminary Participatory Resources Assessment, conducted focus group discussions, and involved stake holders to define feasible alternative and supplemental livelihood projects.

Our Legislators are now enacting our environmental code which includes the Water for Life program and the Coastal Resource Management program, we do this is in hope that these programs will be institutionalized and be ensure that it positive work will continue even after political terms have come to an end.

We will let the people know the real situation of our water resources. We will further research and implement the prudent utilization of our water. We will also determine what activities or livelihood programs and projects can be undertaken in our locality in relation to our water resources. We will also try to delineate identified solution channels, water shed areas and recharge areas to completely seal and sustain our water resources.

Through the help of able facilitators, cooperation of local folks and a political will, we will efficiently do this not only for the current residents of Bani, but for the generations to come. So God help us!