

► Technical Brief

Impact Study on Water and Gender: The Philippine Experience in Maguindanao del Sur

October 2023

Highlights

- **Significant number of women in water governance:** In the Looy and Romongaob villages, a deliberate effort was made to involve women in water governance. Women, who are mainly responsible for domestic water and household sanitation, were given a platform to participate in decision-making concerning the management and maintenance of the water utility. This approach allowed men to acknowledge and respect their decisions. Through an inclusive environment, the diverse experiences of both genders were leveraged, leading to better water supply services for the users.
- **Synergistic effect:** The provision of a water system in Timanan Central Elementary School in Romongaob village, has driven a synergy among development actors to establish the **Inclusive and Supportive Center for Learning (ISCL)**. The center is a model learning hub designed to provide relevant and responsive education to individuals with disabilities, those who have been displaced by conflict, and those from far-flung villages in the Bangsamoro region. This is a remarkable outcome following the school's achievement of the **Recognition Award** (three-star level) for successfully meeting the national standards of the WASH in Schools (WinS), accomplishing 75 to 100 per cent of the WinS indicators.
- **Potable water supply services expansion:** The Ke'Minanam-Luwey Wayeg Association (KLWA) has achieved a significant milestone by establishing a sustainable institutional framework for the operation and maintenance (O&M) of the water system project in Looy Village. As a result of this accomplishment, the association has been able to expand its potable water supply services to encompass four of the seven enclaves in the village, covering 60 per cent of the previously waterless areas. It is notable that the funding for this expansion was generated from the revenue earned during the association's first year of operations.
- **Support to peace efforts:** Part of the programme for normalization¹ of the Philippine Government is the provision of support for the decommissioned combatants of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), their families, and other vulnerable individuals. The water project in the MILF Camp in Reina Regente village helped create an atmosphere that is conducive to the strengthening of their spiritual foundations through practices like ablution and washing. An improved access to clean water has also been vital in improving their WASH practices and accelerating the village-wide ongoing efforts towards achieving a Zero Open Defecation (ZOD) status.

¹ The Comprehensive Agreement of the Bangsamoro framework outlines Normalization as vital to the peace process between the Government of the Philippines (GOP) and the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF), the non-state armed group of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Normalization expounds the process for the laying down of weapons by the BIAF. As part of the process, is the provision of support for the decommissioned combatants residing in the recognized camps in the Bangsamoro region.

Background

The study on water and gender was carried out in three (3) villages located in the Province of Maguindanao del Sur highlighting the experience of the beneficiaries and systematically examining the impact and success factors more than a year after the completion of the project *“Improvement of Water Supply Equipment Management Capacity for the Establishment of Peace in Mindanao”*. The latter was implemented in the mainland provinces of Maguindanao, Lanao del Sur, and the Special Geographic Areas (SGAs) of North Cotabato in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) of the Philippines. Funded by the Government of Japan through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it was designed to promote decent work and help alleviate poverty in communities prone to conflict through improved access to safe and reliable water supply and sanitation services. Roughly a three-year project, it started in April 2019 and concluded in March 2022.

The study's particular focus was to underscore gender-inclusive solutions to water scarcity in rural settings. The findings offer valuable insights useful for the enhancement of water policies, employment creation, and infrastructure development for lower-income and conflict-prone communities. The results merit subscription to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) specifically on the elimination of poverty in all its forms (Goal 1), promoting healthy lives and well-being for all (Goal 3), advancing gender equality and empowering women and girls (Goal 5), ensuring sustainable management of water and sanitation for all (Goal 6), and reducing inequalities (Goal 10).

Study areas	Project Beneficiaries	Situation before project implementation
Romongaob Village and Looy Village in South Upi town	Tedurays: These are major Indigenous Peoples (IPs) in Southern Philippines.	Availability: Water scarcity disproportionately affected women and children. Sources of water were rivers, springs, and deep wells. Households and schools had poor hygiene and sanitation facilities.
MILF Camp in the Village of Reina Regente in Datu Piang town	Decommissioned combatants of the BIAF and their respective families:	Accessibility: Distance required for water collection was between 500 meters to 7 kilometers. Queueing took between 30 minutes to 8 hours per day. Affordability: Estimated expense for potable water purchases was 13% of a household's earning per week. Quality and acceptability: Unsafe for drinking (E. Coli positive). Substandard water quality caused waterborne diseases (diarrhea and skin disorders).

Project impacts

Availability: The project provides safe and adequate basic water services to three schools, benefiting about 2,100 students each academic year and 427 households across three villages. The impact on women has been positive as they no longer bear the physical and mental burden of water collection, which has improved their health and well-being. This has allowed them to perform their daily tasks more efficiently and effectively, while also boosting their self-esteem and individual dignity. Men have also benefited from the project as they no longer spend time and energy collecting water, enabling them to focus on more productive activities to support their families. Improved sanitation and hygiene facilities in schools create a better learning environment for children. With clean drinking water readily available, children no longer carry heavy water containers long distances, minimizing physical damage. This eliminates the need to spend school time fetching water, especially in the morning. Additionally, having safe and easily accessible water promotes a healthy mindset among children, who may otherwise resort to negative coping mechanisms due to the stress of long queues at water points or the struggle to obtain water in competition with others.

Accessibility: The tap stands are strategically located within 1,000 meters of households, resulting in significant time savings from water collection ranging from 28 minutes to 6 hours per day. This has enabled households, especially women, to have more time for skill development, income generation, care work, and leisure. Access to water is pivotal for maintaining the Zero Open Defecation (ZOD) status of Romongaob and Looy villages. For the MILF Camp in Reina Regente, having water access accelerates their achievement of the same status.

Affordability: The project has addressed the issue on water scarcity and water cleanliness of mothers with infants and young children, freeing them from the financial burden and concern of obtaining clean water from private vendors. At most, the weekly water bill has improved, constituting roughly 2 per cent of the weekly earnings of a single household earner. This enables women and men to allocate their attention and resources towards other essential household responsibilities and expenses such as food or medicine. The water utilities were designed to be easily maintained and managed through the village-based water associations where women are included in the decision-making process, ensuring their priorities are considered. They are afforded with a platform to decide on service standards and fees that do not unduly burden the poorest and most vulnerable members of the village, providing equal access to the facilities.

Quality and acceptability: Harmful organisms and impurities are effectively eliminated with the integration of a chlorinator into the design of the water system. This mechanism continues to ensure that the quality standards of the utilities are met including water appearance, taste, and odour. The women who are more likely to report water quality concerns find satisfaction on the water from the taps. There have been no significant cases of water-borne illnesses reported among the water users.

Inclusion: Access to affordable and quality water is open to all community members, without discrimination to women and girls, PWDs, IPs, and other vulnerable social groups. Women are also given the opportunity to further their leadership skills through direct participation in the management of the water system. With women comprising most tap leaders, their contribution and effectiveness as community managers is well recognized.

Sustainability: The community-based water associations and building their capacities in the maintenance and operations of the water system ensure its upkeep and sustainability. The oversight function and participation of the local governments at the village and town levels are added sustainability mechanisms that help expand the benefits of the project to other hard-to-reach enclaves and communities.



@ ILO / A. Origenes
Handwashing area for school children in the Timanan Central Elementary School in Romongaob village.



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One of the 19 fully functional tap stands in Looy village.

Lessons

1. **On bridging gender data gaps:** A comprehensive sex-disaggregated data is crucial for reporting progress in water and gender. However, its absence and methodological limitations in impact studies pose significant obstacles. Standardized data sets are essential for cross-country comparisons and quick assessment of contributions to achieving the 2030 WASH and gender-related SDGs. Harmonized databases on gender and water can help in quickly assessing the comparative situation of women, men, children, and other vulnerable

groups across global settings. Such databases can then inform policies and laws to reduce country-specific gaps in WASH aids and public investment priorities for remote waterless areas.

2. **On gender and inclusion:** While the project design incorporates the mainstreaming of gender in water access and management, measuring women's participation solely in quantitative terms is insufficient. UN Water underpins women inclusion as key to improving the efficacy of water projects by six to seven times compared to those without it. It is then imperative to prioritize their involvement in all aspects of the project, and in particular, the sustainability processes of the water facility. When women's concerns, needs, and aspirations are given due consideration, it fosters empowerment and transformation, not just within their own families, but also throughout their respective communities. Facilitating women and other marginalized groups with a platform to articulate their viewpoints and develop as leaders engenders inclusion, which is pivotal to contributing to the achievement of SDG 5.
3. **On future-focused water operations and maintenance:** Transforming water associations into professional organizations, with the appropriate support from local government units, is a crucial step in ensuring the sustainability and availability of water utilities. These organizations must possess the ability to innovate and position themselves as community-based commercial water service providers, while still maintaining efficient, reliable, responsive, and inclusive water systems. This transformation is essential for the development of more resilient water supply and services that can benefit a wider range of waterless communities in the long run.

Key actions

Taking off from the results of the three case studies that highlight the experiences, impacts and lessons in community water system implementation and management, the study offers the following key actions for consideration:

Key Action 1: Bridge the water and gender data gap by dedicating resources for collection of high-quality, timely, and reliable data to permit participation and contribution to the global assessment, monitoring, and reporting of progress specifically on SDGs 5 and 6. Tools to also account and assess the commitment to 'leave no one behind' should also be adopted.

Key Action 2: Conduct a parallel study to develop and/or enhance ILO's implementation framework that highlights the connections between water, gender, social inclusion, and peace, leading to the development of a comprehensive 'theory of change' that would guide the implementation and monitoring of water system projects in conflict-prone settings.

Key Action 3: Conduct a follow-up impact study with a wider project scope to capture the higher-level transformation occurring at the community level after two (2) to three (3) years arising from the provision of water utilities. This will conclusively determine the contributions made towards achieving SDGs 1, 3, 5, 6, and 10.

Key Action 4: Improve programme and project strategy by integrating relevant universally defined and endorsed impact indicators at the outset of the project implementation to suffice efficient tracking of progress and contribution to the achievement of SDGs on water and gender by 2030.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54394/EGAZ4333>