

# Clean Water: the Source of Life and Livelihood

Dirty water almost turned the island of Boracay into a ghost town. Today, potable water keeps locals and tourists safe from water-borne diseases and attracts investors.

An island like Boracay can die without clean water. The island, with its powdery white sand beaches and deep blue waters, is paradise to throngs of tourists; these visitors have made tourism the lifeblood of Boracay and its people.

When coliform bacteria contaminated the island's swimming area and groundwater in the late 1990s, many tourists hurriedly cancelled their tour and resort bookings. They feared for their health. Swimming in water teeming with coliform bacteria or drinking contaminated water, exposed them to risk of gastroenteritis. The disease is characterized by watery diarrhea, stomach cramps, low-grade fever and nausea. The alarming news almost turned Boracay into a ghost town.

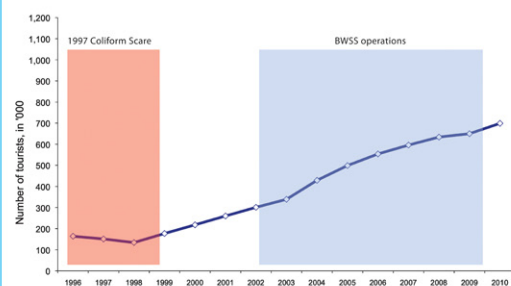
For the island's residents, the coliform contamination was bad news indeed. And since most of them earned

a living from providing goods and services to tourists, their incomes dropped when tourists stayed away from Boracay.

Coliform bacteria are found in human and animal feces; these wastes seeped through Boracay's porous soil and septic system into the groundwater and seawater. The coliform crisis led the Philippine Tourism Authority (PTA) to draw up a plan to improve the island's water supply and sewerage facilities. To put the plan into effect, PTA obtained funding from JICA in 1995.

Upon operationalization of the project in 2003, the water facilities supplied clean water to 9,000 people. By the time the project was reviewed and evaluated in 2005, the number of people served increased to more than 14,000. And there was no trace of coliform in the water distributed in Boracay.

## SAFE WATER PUTS BORACAY BACK ON THE MAP



When coliform bacteria tainted the island's groundwater and seawater in the late 1990s, many tourists cancelled their tour and resort bookings. They feared for their health. Swimming in water teeming with the bacteria, or drinking the dirty water, exposed them to the risk of gastroenteritis.

With the crisis, the Philippine Tourism Authority (PTA) drew up a plan to improve the island's water quality and water sewerage facilities. With funding from JICA, the construction of the facilities has since improved water quality and consistently complied with the country's water quality standards. Now, tourists are swarming back to Boracay Island.

## BORACAY ENVIRONMENTAL INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECT

### PROJECT SITE:

The island of Boracay in the province of Aklan

### OBJECTIVES:

- To improve and expand the water supply, sewerage, and solid waste disposal facilities on Boracay
- To provide infrastructure that is vital to the tourism industry while safeguarding the island's natural environment

DURATION: 1995 to 2002

IMPLEMENTING AGENCY: Philippine Tourism Authority

COST: 1.3 billion yen

Water quality at the water treatment plant, the major reservoirs and nine sampling points are found consistently compliant to the Philippine National Standards for Drinking Water; reports the Boracay Water and Sewerage System (BWSS). BWSS is PTA's water supply and sanitation operational arm. PTA has since entered recently into a joint venture agreement with Manila Water Company, Inc. (MWCI) in 2009 establishing the Boracay Island Water Company, Inc. (BIWCI). MWCI, one of the more successful private water concessionaires in Metro Manila has since operated the island's facilities through BIWCI demonstrating efforts by government to promote public-private sector partnerships (PPP) in the water supply and sanitation sector.

Jewani Buenafe and Maricel Gelito and their families are reaping the benefits of safe water supply on Boracay. Gelito and her sister rent rooms to people who are employed at various resorts in the island, as does Buenafe's mother-in-law. The roomers boost their income by 5,500 pesos a month.

"There are many employees who need a place to stay," says Buenafe. "They work at jobs brought in by the many investors who are drawn by the tourism opportunities bolstered by steady supply of potable water in Boracay."

Andok's Litson Corp. is one of those investors. Andok's mainly sells roast chicken. But the company has expanded into other businesses in Boracay with

seven branches of its restaurants, a hotel, a laundry shop, and an ice plant. It employs 100 regular and 200 seasonal employees on the island.

The stable supply of clean water is one of the reasons Andok's ventured into Boracay, says Grace Lipata, administrative officer for the island of Panay. "We use a lot of water," she says. "Every month at the laundry shop, we consume an average of 1,000 cubic meters to wash 30,000 kilos of clothes and linens. At the ice plant, we use up about 500 cubic meters a month."

If the water were filthy, according to Lipata, the company would have had to buy costly equipment and chemicals to treat it. These costs would have added to their overhead and turnaround time. Instead, the company saves time and money and produces consistently good products. "Clean water results in pure spotless laundry and crystal-clear ice," she says.

Safe water has put Boracay back on the map. The regional office of the Department of Tourism reports that 607,537 foreign and domestic tourists visited the island in the first nine months of 2010. This figure is a 19.85% increase over tourist arrivals for the first nine months of 2009.

Tourists who frolicked on Boracay's white sand beaches in 2010 spent a whopping 11.1 billion pesos for goods and services during their stay. The island's turnaround shows that clean water is vital to life and livelihood.



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