JICA, NGO Launch Project for Safe Farm Produce in Benguet

“Filipinos can now look forward to safe strawberries year-round”, announces Mr. Yoichiro Kawasaki of the Japan Agricultural Exchange Council (JAEC), a Japanese non-governmental organization (NGO), as JAEC and the province of Benguet begin a two-year project to teach farmers to grow safe strawberries and vegetables.

“‘Safe’ means ‘reduced chemicals’”, explained Mr. Kawasaki, “we changed the term from ‘organic’ to ‘safe’ to avoid confusion.” Although the products developed under the project are not 100% organic, lessening the chemical application to a safe level is nonetheless good for the health of consumers and for the soil. Ms. Felicitas Ticbaen, municipal agriculturist of La Trinidad, explained that chemical pesticides and fertilizers increase soil acidity which results to poor soil.

La Trinidad served as the pilot site for an earlier project which ran from April 2007. “Because of its success, we requested for this project to be expanded to other municipalities in Benguet. When we were informed by Mr. Kawasaki that JICA approved our request, we were very happy”, Governor Nestor Fongwan said in his speech at the project launch held Wednesday, January 27, at the capitol building in La Trinidad.

The JICA-funded project will directly benefit farmers in eight (8) municipalities in Benguet, namely Atok, Buguias, Kabayan, Kibungan, Mangkayan, Tuba, Tublay and La Trinidad. “This is a timely project because the demand of the market now is organically produced”, the governor added.

“We hope that this project will contribute to the Philippines’ food security,” First Secretary (Agriculture) Takehiko Sakata of the Embassy of Japan expressed his support of the project. (continued on p.4 JICA, NGO…)

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"Hindi na kami iigib sa malayo dahil nasa bahay na mismo yung tubig (We don’t need to go out and fetch water because we can get water right inside our homes)", exclaimed 60-year old Francisco Ramos, a resident of a fairly remote town of Lobo in Batangas province. From his faucet flows potable water, one that he can proudly serve to his guests without worrying that it might have sediments settling at the bottom of the glass and a rusty taste because it was sourced from the artesian well. Lobo Water District installed his connection in December 2007.

Arcadia Hernandez, 54, a widow who supports her family through pot making happily molds her first flowerpot for the day; she had to make another nine to meet a local school’s order. These pots would line the school’s perimeter to serve as foyer attraction. All stages of masatera (pot)-making require water – from cleaning the sand, molding and finish painting.

Ten units, therefore, was already a bulk order but Hernandez was quite confident that she could finish everything in a week what with the continual gush of water from her faucet to sustain her livelihood. No need for her to stock drums and pails of water so she would not be disrupted in her work. Hernandez was among the first residents who applied for a service line in the water district in 2007.

The young Dionas family of Barangay Mabilog na Bundok were all attentive to the needs of their youngest and newest addition. The mother, Belinda Dionas, just finished bathing the two-month old baby, recalled the extra work and expense they had to cover to provide water to their three older children. Her husband installed a motor pump so they have supply inside their house but this meant bigger electric bills. Also, she doubted the water purity.

So when they heard that Lobo Water District was already laying pipes in their area, Belinda’s husband immediately applied for a line. Now, Belinda claimed that taking care of a baby is easier nowadays. She claimed that “mas madali ang pagsapalipog sa bata kasi direktos sa gripo” and “mas magaan sa katawan dahil bawas sa igib (it’s easier to bathe the kids because water is drawn straight from the faucet and less work for them because there is no need to fetch water).” She also trusted that her children can drink the water seeing that its clear and bears no odor.

Ramos, Hernandez and the Dionas are among the 399 households being supplied by the Lobo Water District with potable water.

Five years back, Lobo Water District could not surmise ways on channeling water in the barangays of Ramos, Hernandez and Dionas because the areas are far from the identified water reservoir and the water district lacked funds to finance further ground works.

Lobo Water District General Manager Dani Perez reckoned that his small water district’s minimal budget could not go so far. He labored day in and out to seek funding for its stalled activity.

Then came the technical cooperation between the Local Water Utilities Administration (LWUA) and the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) dubbed as “Small Water District Improvement Project” or SWIDP in 2005.

SWIDP targets to improve the capacity of the small water districts through facility improvement and accelerating service and management capacity of the district’s staff.

Lobo enjoyed a P5.7M grant to complete its facilities. They used it to expand their reservoir, construct a pump house, install a tank and lay transmission pipes.

The project also equipped the district with office equipment such as computer set and photocopier to ensure office operations. The district is now able to issue computerized water bills to its clients instead of manually computing and writing the breakdown of the charges.

Now, Lobo Water District is among the best performing water districts assisted by the project. LWUA and JICA gave it a target of 200 serviced households by 2009 and the district doubled this expectation by registering 399 households as clients. Perez and its staff has reported 99% collection efficiency and now looks at expanding its service areas to 12 more barangays. The district also boasts of potable water supply with regular testing conducted by Batangas Water District.

Clearly, access to water is a hard-earned right for Lobo. But Lobo Water District knew that it can rise up from this frustration and would reap multiple rewards. And so, the passé when it rains, it pours would not hurt describing the success of the small water district.

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**Project Title:** Small Water Districts Improvement Project  
**Proponents:** Local Water Utilities Administration (LWUA), and 54 small water districts nationwide  
**Implementation Period:** 2005-2010  
**Scheme:** Technical Cooperation Project
Louella Rose Dabatos, or Wella, is a 28-year-old public school teacher. She teaches special kids at the Mandaue Central School in Cebu. One of the classes she handles through team teaching is a group of young adults with mental retardation. “We help them become more productive members of the society”, Wella said referring to her fellow special education (SPED) teachers and their students.

Mandaue Central School has a sheltered workshop for these special students, a bakery that supplies healthy, affordable snacks to the pilot school’s thousands of students. In the bakery, differently-abled students learn not only skills but also work ethics to help them become self-sufficient.

The bakery used to be just a small room, with a few manual equipments. Through the help of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) for grassroots projects, the bakery was expanded and more and better equipments were added.

The teachers likewise received training to operate the bakery with its special workers. However, Wella, being a new teacher then, was not able to join the training.

JICA’s support for the school was completed in 2008. Nonetheless, JICA kept doors open for future cooperation with the school.

Wella did not have to wait long. Last November, Wella was selected to join the Training Programme for Young Leaders (TPYL) in Japan. She joined 16 other promising young leaders in vocational education to see how Japan’s vocational programs are like.

“In Japan, we visited a sheltered workshop similar to ours; but instead of bread, they serve bento (lunch box) for schools”, Wella said. “They have printing services, too, like for greeting cards”, she added. She noted the enormous support that the people with disabilities (PWD) receive not only from the Japanese government but also from the community, as Wella said, “the citizens consciously help the PWDs”. (continued on p.4 There are…)

Project Title: Self-Reliance Support Project for the Mentally Disabled
Proponents: NGO Cuore Shichinohe and Mandaue Central School – Special Education (SPED)
Implementation Period: 2005-2008
Scheme: Technical Cooperation for Grassroots Projects
Groundbreaking
(From left) President and CEO Keiji Sasabe of CTI Engineering International Co., Ltd, JICA Project Formulation Adviser for Mindanao Ms. Yukiko Sano, Congressman Pedro Romualdo of the Lone District of Camiguin, Mayor Alex Jajalla of Mahinog Municipality and JICA Chief Representative Norio Matsuda during the Groundbreaking Ceremony of the Japanese Grant Aid on the “Project for Flood Disaster Mitigation in Camiguin Island” on January 7, 2010.

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Department of Agriculture – Cordillera Administrative Region (DA-CAR) Director Cesar Rodriguez, however, emphasized the need for support from the farmers and the partner local government units in order to realize the success of the project. “Any type of support we get from others, from our Japanese friends, will not succeed without our cooperation,” he said.

Mr. Kenzo Iwakami, JICA Senior Representative, congratulated the local government of Benguet for recognizing the importance of soil improvement in vegetable production and for taking steps to achieve this. He likewise mentioned that JICA has long been a partner of the Department of Agriculture in developing farming techniques to counter challenges like climate change. JICA supports other development initiatives in Benguet including improvement of health services.

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Inspired by what she saw in Japan, Wella said she will continue supporting Mandaue’s sheltered workshop, intensify information campaign in the community, and add more skills training for her students for additional products like greeting cards.

Ms. Delia Minoza, the head teacher at Mandaue Central School’s SPED section who is Wella’s supervisor, thanked JICA for JICA’s continued support. She likewise expressed interest in inviting a Japanese volunteer to be assigned in their SPED school, when she learned that JICA also facilitates the dispatch of Japanese Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV).

Aside from the JOCV, training and grassroots programs, JICA implements loans, grants, development studies, experts dispatch and technical cooperation to address various needs of the society, including education for all.

About JICA: JICA is an agency of the Government of Japan responsible for implementing the technical cooperation, grant aid and yen loan programs of Japan's ODA to developing countries such as the Philippines. JICA is the world’s largest bilateral aid agency with about USD10.3 billion in financial resources and a network of more than 100 overseas offices around the world. Its core professional staff work hand in hand with dispatched Japanese personnel, experts and volunteers and local staff in the overseas offices in promoting human security which is incorporated in about a hundred on-going cooperation programs.