

CLEAN WATER THROUGH COMMUNITY EFFORTS: A DREAM HAS COME TRUE

In Alue Bungkoh village, Pirak Timue community, Aceh Utara district, Amina (45 years old) and her daughter Mira (22 years old) reflect on events that have changed the pattern of their daily lives for the better. “We were invited to come to a meeting with all members of the community, to talk about a new project.” The two women were curious. Mira and her husband Heri attended the meeting while Amina watched the children. “People from our three communities of Alue Bungkoh were there. Community facilitators from the Community Water Supply and Health/Earthquake and Tsunami Emergency Support Project explained that our village had been chosen as a water services Project site. If we were interested and wanted to get involved, we could get help from Project and government staff to do something about improving access to water instead of going down to the river which is 1 – 2 km from our homes, like we all were used to do until now. We would also learn about keeping ourselves and our children healthier”.

Amina and Mira say that the thought of other sources for daily water use was almost impossible to believe. “We have been going to the river all our lives, just like our parents and grandparents did. Having water so close to our homes seemed like a dream”. The women attended meetings when they had the time, but everyone was talking about the Project so they knew what was going on. “The Project Staff were so young and friendly – we enjoyed meeting with

them. We even made our village social mapping like they showed us, and laughed a lot about the funny lines we were drawing!”

“It was difficult to decide what we should do about getting water closer to our homes. In meetings we discussed how we might do this. The engineering facilitators from away had recommended piped water from the river but we were afraid that we wouldn’t be able to pay every month and keep everything working. They told the committee that the groundwater in some sites in our village would not be suitable for dug wells, that it would be turbid or even muddy, that during the dry season the wells might even dry up. But the river water we use now is really muddy and many of us figured that we wouldn’t have to pay very much to maintain wells, so we voted for wells.”

Even though the communities are close to one another, the differences in environmental cleanliness are striking: while one community is awash in plastic bags and refuse, the other communities are much tidier with Amina and Mira’s community being the cleanest of the three. “The families were requested to contribute in some way so that the Project could go ahead. We met and decided where we would like the wells to go and who could give some land or help with the digging, cementing and other work. We women talked about this with our husbands, and they passed our opinions along to the committee in charge. We felt it was best to leave the construction details to the men”.

After what seemed a long

time (the women said this was due to the planning process which involved everyone), construction on their village wells started. “We were so excited and couldn’t wait for the work to finish. We watched the workers and encouraged them to complete the wells quickly.” As requested by the women, Mira’s husband helped build sturdy gates to keep the cows and goats and also the young children out from around the well. The men also built bamboo walls surrounding the well closest to their houses, so that the women would have privacy when they were at the well.

“We are very proud of our wells – we don’t have to carry loads of laundry to the river, and we don’t have to stand in river water to get our clothes clean. We can also use the water for bathing, especially for washing the little ones – they get dirty so fast!” When asked whether they were disappointed that the water wasn’t clear, that it was cloudy just as the engineering facilitators had said, the women said “We don’t drink the water, but buy bottled water just like before. With more training from the Project staff, we may find ways to make the water safe for drinking. Right now, the wells for us mean that we have more time to do things at home rather than ourselves or our children trudging to the river. And during flooding, we couldn’t go near the river safely. The wells do not only belong to the committee, they belong to all of us. So we feel responsible for the sustainability of them. Therefore we really want to keep our wells clean and beautiful.”



Amina is busy getting water from the dug well



Mira washing clothes using dug well water