

'Safe Water Project' rolled out in Palawan, Negros Occidental

THE United States-funded Safe Water Project (SWP) will be implemented by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) to give access to safe drinking water and sanitation services to 350,000 individuals in Palawan, Negros Occidental and Sarangani.

Project components include technical assistance (TA) on water chlorination for LGUs and water districts and TA to Local Water Utilities Administration (LWUA) on septage management.

The septage management covers the Supreme Court Mandamus for the Manila Bay area. Other components are exploration on diversifying surface bulk water supply in Negros Occidental and assistance in water security plans for Negros Occidental and Sarangani.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAid) has been prompted by water security challenges in the Philippines, including a "growing population, unsustainable land uses and deficient wastewater management."

"At the center of these challenges are the need for an adequate supply of clean drinking water, which has become increasingly elusive in many parts of the country, elimination of open defecation, especially in poorer communities, and increased access to safely managed sanitation services," reported DENR Project Evaluation Officer Israel Helios Inocencio.

Climate change, typhoons, droughts and diseases like Covid 19 are further worsening the level of stress from these water supply threats. These threaten watersheds and the integrity of water and sanitation infrastructure.

Total project cost is P922 million — equivalent to a grant of \$18 million from the United States Agency for International Development. The Philippine government shoulders a fund equivalent to not less than one-third (P307 million) of the USAid grant.

The project employs the Integrated and Inclusive Water Security (IIWS) framework. This is part of the long-term goal to protect the upstream water resources — the forests — where the water comes from. The National Economic Development Authority is a co-implementor of the project.

The project will empower local government units (LGUs), water service providers and watershed councils on the sustainable management of water resources.

Other beneficiaries are communities in Region 4B Mimaropa (Mindoro, Marinduque, Romblon and Palawan), Region 6 (Aklan, Antique, Capiz, Guimaras, Iloilo and Negros Occidental) and Region 12 (Cotabato, Sarangani and Sultan Kudarat).

The Safe Water Project is being implemented over five years until 2024.