

Safe water project to benefit 350k Filipinos

By Eireene Jairee Gomez

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

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

The SWP components include technical assistance (TA) on water chlorination for local government units (LGUs) and water districts and TA to Local Water Utilities Administration on septage management, which covers the Supreme Court Mandamus for 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.

USAid was prompted to undertake the project amid 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 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," said Israel Helios Inocencio, DENR project evaluation officer.

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.

The project employs the Integrated and Inclusive Water Security 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 and Development Authority is a co-implementor of the project.

As such, a highlight of the SWP is a livelihood component, which includes production training for people's organizations (POs) in Narra, Palawan, in collaboration with private company Sunlight Corp.

Another livelihood component is training for the use of starter kits and farm tools for the ECLOF Organic Farm, a non-profit microfinance institution.

Profiling of a PO in Sarangani for enterprise development will also be implemented. An estimated 150,000 people will be the livelihood beneficiaries.

A total of \$20 million will be mobilized as investment for the sustainable environment operation.

The Environment department also noted that the project will empower LGUs, water service providers and watershed councils on the sustainable management of water resources.

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