

A village owned water company to manage our water

Location

Lendang Nangka,
Kec. Masbagik,
Kab. Lombok Timur, NTB

Contact Person

H.M Tahir,
Ketua BAPAMDES
"Asih Tigasa"

Supratman
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Beneficiaries

744 households
(2,976 people)

- 60% of the community in eastern Indonesia with the lowest incomes does not have access to clean water.
- There are areas in eastern Indonesia which have their own water sources but do not manage them well
- The paradigm that 'water will never run out' is a obstacle that that must be overcome in developing a water management strategy that is sustainable, protects the water catchment area, distributes water well, and involves the community by providing incentives.

"There is freedom in this water."

H.M Tahir, *Chairman of the Asih Tigasa Village-managed Water Company*

Clean water is a freedom, a freedom which manifests as better health, increased productivity, conflict resolution and a better standard of living for all members of the community. The story of clean water in Lendang Nangka began in 1976 when UNICEF came with pipes, bringing water from the source into the village directly, covering a distance of around 1,800 meters. The water was then stored in 8 tanks and community members came to the tanks to collect their water. The water rates at the time were Rp 1,500 per family but no-one was responsible for maintenance or repairs.

Lendang Nangka is surrounded by sources of water; one nearby source is even used by the Regional Water Utility Company (PDAM) of Lombok Timur district to supply 5 sub-districts, but Lendang Nangka itself has never gained access to the PDAM system. Therefore, in 2002, the community decided to build on the pipes laid by UNICEF and create its own village- managed Water Company, the Asih Tigasa Water Company, or PAMDES. The initial meeting was attended by all groups within the community and the process was open and transparent from the beginning, a fact which is continually identified by stakeholders as being a key to the success of the PAMDES.

The community began construction of a new reservoir and laying pipes in late 2002. The community did all the work, even digging out two meter deep trenches for the pipes. Entirely funded by the community, with an initial donation of 280 water meters by the BAPPEDA of Lombok Timur district, the physical system was created within three months. One of the major strengths of the system is the clear rules, regulations and use of funds. These were all formulated and agreed upon by the community during community consultations sessions. In 2005, the existence of the PAMDES was institutionalized even more formally through Village Regulation (Keputusan Kepala Desa Lendang Nangka Nomor 01 dan 02 Tahun 2005).

Beginning with 502 households, in 2010 the PAMDES supplies 744 households. Each PAMDES customer has a water meter (this can be shared between two to four families) and the rate is Rp 200 per cubic meter of water, a much cheaper rate than the PDAM rate of Rp 600-700. In the beginning the rate was only Rp100 but it was increased at the beginning of 2010, after public consultation. The most any family pays is Rp 10,000. Of the money collected (usually around Rp 6-7 million per month), 45% goes directly to the mosque of Lendang Nangka village. Each month, the financial report is read out during a Friday prayer session. Lalu Gafar Ismail, who first suggested the idea of using water meters, said, "The water therefore 'belongs' to the mosque in the community's eyes and therefore no-one will steal from the mosque". He considers this a unique point of the PAMDES. The rest of the money goes to staff, the village budget, the village council, and to administration costs.

PAMDES staff (12 in total) are not paid wages, but rather incentives or percentages of total payments collected each month. This works out to about Rp 50,000 per person. There is also an 'enforcement' team, often referred to as Team 9, consisting of nine people who are responsible for resolving issues of non-payment. While it is rare for cases of non-payment

to arise due to the fines imposed, which are greater sometimes than the payment, occasionally customers will stop paying. In that case they are given warning letters and if they still do not pay their water is cut off. Once they pay they are reconnected to the system. The PAMDES is led by Haji M. Tahir, an 80 year old retired school teacher. He has often tried to step down and hand his duties to a younger community member for the sake of renewal but the community continues to ask that he stay on as head of the PAMDES.

None of the staff have had formal training. All are self taught or use skills they learnt in school or from cooperative experiences, but that doesn't prevent them from providing excellent service. Reports of leaks and interrupted water supply can be made directly to the mobile phone of the maintenance staff who, often within hours, will attend to the problem. Payment must be made before the 20th of each month, and administration staff standby from 8am- 12 pm in the office in the center of town to take and record payments, based on their water meter record books. There is one water meter reader in each hamlet.

The benefits of the water company are many. First, it has reduced the level of conflict in the community over water resources. Second, the health benefits are marked. Community members speak of the decrease in gastro-intestinal diseases and skin diseases from unclean water. The water is tested regularly by the Health Clinic and has very low levels of contaminants. Indrawati, a staff member at the Lendang Nangka Puskesmas, said, "with the PAMDES, we've seen access improve to toilets. Before that was people's excuse not to build toilets, because they had no water." She also spoke of the decrease in cases of gastro-intestinal diseases. In fact, the Lendang Nangka Puskesmas prefers to use the PAMDES water supply over the PDAM supply because the PDAM supply often runs dry.

Another benefit has been the greater opportunities for home enterprise, including car and bike washing businesses and ice making. One woman, Baiq Rauhun, has an ice making business that nets her around Rp 300,000 a month. She makes plain ice and sweet ice for local kiosks. The head of the PAMDES, Pak Tahir also notes the environmental benefit. "Before people would use water indiscriminately and make ponds and water their yards, now people are more conservative in their water use," he said.

PAMDES Asih Tigasa is no longer accepting new customers due to the limitations of the reservoir. This a major obstacle to future development; expanding the current reservoir would cost around Rp 100 million. Although, expanding the reservoir would also have to take into account the water users who take water directly from the sources for irrigation. Currently the balance between village water use and irrigation is balanced.

So far maintenance has not been an issue. Of the original 300 meters, only 20 have had to be repaired or replaced. To replace a meter, the customer pays 40% of costs and the rest is paid by the PAMDES. Eventually the pipes will have to be replaced, but for the time being the issue of leaks is not a worry. However, the book-keeping is still entirely manual and the PAMDES would like to computerize it in the future. An additional venture the PAMDES is thinking is the production of bottled drinking water (*air galon*) to sell to neighboring villages.

Neighboring villages and hamlets are experimenting with similar systems, often with higher prices for water. None have been yet able to create an integrated system like Lendang Nangka's. ■

Notes
