

# WB project brings power to remote barangay

"Sana po magka ilaw na kami (we hope to have electricity soon)," children of Aramaywan Elementary School in the municipality of Quezon, Palawan shouted in unison, not once but four times.

Barangay Aramaywan is a remote village about five hours away from Puerto Princesa on mostly gravel roads. It takes pride in being the site of a national high school and has its own public elementary school sprawled over more than a hectare of land.

Like other barangays in Palawan, Aramaywan's land stretches as far as the eyes can see and all these lands serve as playground for children. But as early as 5 o'clock in the afternoon, they have to walk home, do their share of the household chore, and study their homework before the sun sets and everything turns pitch black.

"Without electricity, children and even the rest of the family have to finish whatever they are doing before it gets dark. It is difficult to work with a candle or kerosene lamp," said barangay captain Alma Alana. Even their health center cannot deliver effective services without electric power.

But excitement is building up in Aramaywan. The municipality of Quezon in Palawan has opened its doors to rural electrification through the use of solar photovoltaic installation.

In partnership with the Rural Power

Project (RPP) of the Department of Energy, the local government unit is anticipating a new beginning for this barangay as well as for barangays Isugod and Tagusao. RPP supports the government's pro-flagship program which aims to improve the quality of life in rural areas of the country through the provision of adequate, affordable and reliable energy services, in partnership with the private sector. The project is being funded by the World Bank and the Global Environment Facility.

"We waited so long for electricity for these barangays. This has been an appeal of the heart of our people that is coming true and we are excited," said vice mayor Ray C. Nueva Espanola who found the whole thing overwhelming. The local government officials said they are ready to do their part to ensure the success of the rural electrification. They see the development of a sense of ownership among the beneficiaries as crucial to the operational success of the solar installation.

"We are looking beyond electricity in the homes. We are looking forward to increased people's productivity and children's learning ability as they will now be able to work and study more at night," says *Kapitana* Alana. With other officials of the barangay, she believes economic productivity will spur their village to growth.

In the town of Bataraza which is also accessible through a seven-hour drive on

rough roads from Puerto Princesa City, ten barangays will benefit from solar electrification. Majority of the beneficiaries are Muslims who form the bulk of the population in these barangays.

"I am very happy that electricity will finally benefit my constituents," said Bataraza Mayor Abraham Ibba.

As a young local executive, Ibba believes that his municipality's development is anchored on rural electricity that will boost people's productivity, help ensure peace and order, assist in children's education, help the local health units keep vaccines and other medicines, and enable them access to basic news and other important information.

"Yes, let's work together for this very crucial development," said Ibba.

The entire RPP is a massive private-public-community partnership with solar service providers and micro finance institutions investing in the project. But an important component is the barangay's willingness and commitment to maintain and operate the solar installation in public facilities such as health center, street lights, and public school.

Ibba and Espanola agree that it is a small counterpart compared to the tremendous benefits rural electrification offers.