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ACTED Philippines' new project in Eastern Samar: 'Waste is Beautiful'



Jan pleasantly surprised by the conditions while inspecting latrines in rural barangays @ACTED Philippines 2017

ACTED Philippines' new project in Eastern Samar, through support received from UNICEF, is focused on faecal sludge management, not exactly the most common and glamorous project focus. However, Jan Spit, a consultant with WASTE (an NGO / Cooperative based in Holland) convinced ACTED Philippines' team that 'waste is beautiful' during his mission to Philippines in June 2017.

Jan, a civil engineer specialized in waste and faecal sludge management



Jan, a civil engineer from Holland, has more than three decades of experience in waste and faecal sludge management. His passion emerged during his studies at Delft University when he stumbled upon the book *Small is Beautiful* written by E.F Schumacher. The message that western ideas and technologies should not be forced upon others but instead improvement should use local technology and material, resonated strongly with Jan. He saw this in practice during his first field experience in Tanzania, designing improved toilets in the unplanned neighbourhoods (squatter areas). From there, Jan's passion on the subject, practical experience and expertise has taken him all around the world, from India to Surinam, from Benin to Lebanon.

This mission was Jan's first time in the Philippines, where he was taken aback by the beautiful landscape and islands. His mission consisted on a week in Guiuan, Easter Samar, conducting both field visits and meetings with different local stakeholders to understand the faecal sludge management situation in Guiuan and possible system that could be developed to collect and treat faecal sludge, turning it into fertilizer to be sold to local farming communities (via an ACTED supported Livelihood project). It can be said that many people from the different barangays visited were surprised when this tall man from Holland asked if he could look at their latrines and septic tanks. However, it can also be said that Jan's technical insights and enthusiasm about the topic rubbed off on some.








Raising awareness about waste's quality

The mission provided Jan with many insights and information to further develop, together with ACTED, a faecal sludge management system, starting in Guiuan before spreading out to other municipalities. Jan was pleasantly surprised by the genuine interest and enthusiasm of farmers to try out an organic fertilizer made from human faecal sludge within their vermicomposting. He was also impressed by the level of waste separation that already occurs in Guiuan, a local system that can be built upon and strengthened (again, 'waste is beautiful'). However, Jan did notice that there is still an absence of basic knowledge in the principles of a sanitation chain and interlinks

on how it affects the environment. There is a lot still to be done in the area in terms of WASH, especially in terms of the improvement of latrine systems in the area. "People are clearly interested in making a good toilet, not like in some other parts of the world, however they lack the technical knowledge and support. I would love to construct individual vermicast-toilets in the area, they would really succeed in Guiuan" Jan reflects during his last day in Manila.

Jan left the ACTED team in Guiuan with a new enthusiasm for faecal sludge management and a pit full of worms, as during his visit he convinced the team to test out a system to desludge a septic tank and use the sludge through vermicomposting to produce organic fertilizer. A result the team is eager to show Jan upon his next mission to the Philippines.

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