The municipality of Santa Maria in the province of Laguna, Philippines has a total population of 32,490 among 25 villages. With a sprawling land mass and a diverse geography from highlands to lowlands, Santa Maris is ideally suited for producing a variety of crops ranging from rice to citrus. Because the major economic driver is agriculture, most of the high-paying jobs are for agriculturalists, soil technologist and skilled farmers. Using traditional farming techniques, locals are now harvesting, coconuts, bananas, coffee, rice and many fruit bearing trees. To celebrate the harvest, Marilag Festival is observed and celebrated in an annual thanksgiving feast. Festivities include costume parades, contests, Filipino games, product exhibitions and other special activities.

On average, 20 typhoons enter the Philippine area annually from June to September, making many areas in the country highly vulnerable to flooding. Santa Maria is among one of the most flood-prone municipalities of the Philippines. Located in a catchment basin where three major tributaries converge, most of the residential houses and commercial buildings are located in the lowlands. During typhoons, most of the villages experience flood heights of up to 2 meters and the local government frequently declares a state of calamity during extreme typhoons. Flooding also severely affects the agricultural business, such as low harvest of rice and other products, disrupts the income most people and causes increasing financial hardship.

Safe drinking water is available in bottles but is unaffordable for many residents. Those who cannot afford bottled water get their drinking water from springs and deep wells. In upland areas, people travel at least 30 minutes to gather water from the wells and springs. Flooding causes contaminants and sediment from runoff to invade the springs and wells, thereby further decreasing the water quality and increases cases of diarrhea among children.
Bagumbayan Elementary School

Thanks to Fred and Barby Siegel, children in rural Philippines town will have clean, safe drinking water

“We have so many reasons to have a filtration system: first, so that students will have a safe drinking water source; second, there are cases when students are absent due to stomachache and finally, there are cases of Amoebiasis.”

–Ms. Ellen Jane S, Montales, 4th grade Teacher
Bagumbayan Elementary School is located in Bagumbayan Village, a rural community of the Laguna, Philippines area. The 515 families that make this community home earn a living from farming activity that includes rice planting and hauling loads of coconut from mountains to be sold in the local market. Most families are living below the poverty line.

The village and school are supplied with water from a spring that serves as the main source of drinking water. Although this is spring water, there are reports of diarrhea and tummy aches among students because the spring is contaminated from seasonal flooding.

There are several small lakes that serve as catch basins during heavy seasonal rains. Several of these cause flooding in the area and become breeding grounds for waterborne diseases, such as skin rashes, fungal infections and other diseases transmitted through water contaminated with human or animal waste.

Teachers buy bottled water from a nearby water station, but this is only for their own consumption because of the cost to purchase for students. The majority of students are drinking from unfiltered water taps. According to the teacher-in-charge, there are several cases of diarrhea at the school – and most common is Amoebiasis.

Water filtration installation and hygiene education program to make a big impact at school

Fred & Barby Siegel

SANTA MARIA, PHILIPPINES
Bagumbayan Elementary School

Number of Students: 310
GPS Coordinates: 14.55642, 121.46244
Village Population: 2,464
Number of Households: 515
Planet Water Foundation is a U.S.-based non-profit that develops strategic partnerships that support Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) efforts that align with four of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Quality Education; Gender Equality; Reduced Inequalities; and Clean Water and Sanitation. Project 24 programs and initiatives support these four SDGs with longitudinal support in each community for five years.

Since 2015, Project 24 is Planet Water Foundation’s World Water Day advocacy and engagement platform the focuses on the world’s critical need to bring an end to water poverty.

“It is one of dream and prayer to have a safe drinking water at the school - all for the safety of the students.”
– Mr. Lope Arriola kinder student father
“Your AquaTower is a big help to the school. All of my school friends will be able to drink water here instead of drinking from the spring and getting sick with stomachaches.”
- Gemma Rose Ingote, sixth grade