**Rotary unlocks “capacity to do” and “capacity to be”**

by Jennife DP Dumalag-Borong

My journey towards becoming a water and sanitation (WatSan) professional under the world’s largest water education facility - IHE Delft Institute for Water Education is a means to make amends with the life of a marginalized young girl.

This marginalized young girl experienced multiple burdens and gender-based violence resulting from the lack of access to and control of WatSan. Consequently, this young girl has never enjoyed the joy of the typical childhood as her life revolved around the responsibility of collecting drinking water for her family and other households for survival.

Her story is reflective of my personal circumstances as an island girl coming from a family that is below the poverty line stricken with domestic violence. I am the youngest of four all-girl siblings and the only one who has obtained a degree courtesy of my industry and the magnanimity of other individuals through a scholarship.

Poverty is a nemesis, but I have no other option but to survive and change the course of my life that is deprived of everything, specifically with the right to access a drinking water supply.

I could still recall how I used to navigate barefoot around 10-15 km for an hour or two just to fetch our drinking water. I needed to fill two large containers with water. I was seven years old, with a frail body. I was lanky, weighing 30 kg or less, but forced to carry the water gallons, which were two or three times heavier than my weight.

The sad part of collecting water was that when you reached home, you would be reprimanded or, worse, got whipped as you were charged with playing as the water level in each container turned half. Well, if getting bruises as you off-balanced while carrying those water containers was a form of play, then I guessed I played. I was guilty as charged. It was a brutal play, though.

Accessing water was truly arduous. My fragile body could hardly carry the water receptacles heavier than my weight. But this was quite bearable compared to the psychological impact of being bullied for having a pungent smell, especially during menstruation, and the sexual harassment that I experienced as an adult male water user directed me to undress in exchange for the jetmatic pump handle so I could fetch water.

These life experiences fuelled me to study public administration and law, be involved in developmental works and Civil Society Organizations, and choose public service through the Davao City Water District (DCWD), Philippines.

The lack of access to WatSan breeds multiple gender issues affecting one’s **“capacity to do”** and **“capacity to be”** as clean drinking water and sanitation are essential to realising all human rights.

As such, I am actively involved in mainstreaming gender perspectives in water districts to contribute to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goal No. 6, which is vital in realizing Gender Equality and Women Empowerment (GEWE) within the context of WatSan.

I assisted in accelerating gender mainstreaming by being a certified Gender and Development national resource speaker of the Philippine Commission on Women. However, the journey towards gender mainstreaming remains uphill.

The culture of patriarchy is so strong in the bureaucracy hindering the realization of GEWE, especially in the context of WatSan. The conventional service delivery undermines gender with the assumption that WatSan equally benefits both men and women.

Such drives me to study Water Management and Governance in IHE through the Rotary International Scholarships for WatSan Professionals to address water challenges to mitigate, if not eliminate, the social and economic inequities attached to water quantity and quality.

As I reflect on my life journey through the lens of the marginalized young girl, my mission to serve and contribute to, and participate in the emancipation of marginalized young girls in WatSan oppression is prevailing. This will make amends with the marginalized young girl in me and the rest of the girl children in the global south who resonate with my water tale.

I could have chosen to engage in the private practice of law to earn more, but I have gravitated to my mission. I realized that my service is not exclusive to DCWD. I am seeing myself magnifying my mission in the global south paying attention to my country; promoting WatSan as a social justice tool cemented by the quality of water education, which I will receive from IHE.

With IHE, I am equipping myself to be a WatSan professional ready for the world’s water challenges to contribute to achieving water and sanitation for all and gender equality and women and girl children empowerment.

I am forever grateful to the Global Grant Rotary Scholarship for WatSan Professionals, specifically to the Rotary Club of Waling-Waling Davao, District 3860, District 1580 and most especially to District 1600. God chose them as instruments to realize this one-of-a-kind chance that will unlock my ***“capacity to do”*** and ***“capacity to be”*** both at personal and professional level grounded on the Rotary’s motto that is ***“Service Above Self”***.