

Tzu Chi Sets up Water Purification System in Laos

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation

Wednesday, 05 September 2018 17:26



Volunteers of the Tzu Chi set up a water purification system for an area of rural Laos that had been deprived of clean water by the collapse of a dam. A total of 11 villages had been without a regular supply of water for more than a month.

On July 23, the dam collapsed in Sanamxay district in Attapeu province. It damaged 11 villages, and left more than 100 people dead or missing and caused over 6,000 people to lose their homes. Tzu Chi volunteers from Taiwan, Thailand, and Malaysia arrived to bring disaster relief and survey what help they could provide. They carried with them 143 boxes of relief goods. They surveyed the need to provide clean water, free medical clinics, relief goods, and help farmers to resume cultivation.

When the dam collapsed, it caused flooding over a large area; this contaminated the clean water. Residents could only drink rain or underground water. In addition, they drank bottled water, for health reasons; this led to a large amount of used plastic bottles.



On August 2018, before the first disaster relief survey team left Taiwan, the Water Resources Agency of the country's Ministry of Economic Affairs contacted Tzu Chi and offered two purification systems. The volunteers transported them to Laos. But, due to the poor conditions of the roads, they could not put them to use. So they kept them in a storage room.

On August 28, the volunteers returned to Sanamxay district. Two teams set up a clean water system in a village whose residents had had no clean water for a month. They had had to travel three hours to purchase water, a hazardous journey on roads that had been badly damaged. In front of the new system, the residents lined up with their buckets to collect the clean water. "We connect the water purification system to the water source," said one volunteer. "Then we transfer the water to the storage tank." One villager hurried to try the purified water. He said: "It tastes very good, very sweet."



On August 29, it rained. In front of the storage tank, the volunteers laid wooden boards on the ground, to enable the villagers to cross the muddy roads and fetch the clean water. One was an 11-year-old girl; she walked in the heavy rain with her baby brother tied on her back to fetch the water. When Tzu Chi staffer Liu Zong-yan saw her, his heart ached. Liu rushed to pack candy,

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cookies and instant noodles for her. He reminded her to change her wet clothes after she returned home.

On August 31, before the opening of the water station, residents were already waiting outside. The head of the village came to help; he passed the bottles of clean water to his fellow residents. Young children had big smiles on their faces and cheered loudly when they received the water from volunteers. They had even learnt a little Mandarin, and cheered: "Tzu Chi, I love Tzu Chi."

Between August 28 and September 1, Tzu Chi volunteers operated the water purifying machines and provided a total of three tonnes of clean water.

Report by Tzu Chi relief team in Laos from August 28-31, 2018