Background

- In January 2000, an indigenous church planting organization (called Santapan Rohani or “Spiritual Food”) mobilizes previously unorganized Christian believers in a rural community (198 households, 5% Christian and 95% Muslim, unnamed to shield identity) in the Lampung district of Indonesia to meet together.
- Over time, the church grows into an established institution with about 45 regular members.
- Santapan Rohani solicits support from Water Missions International’s Indonesia country program and encourages community to adopt a safe water project.
- A water treatment and distribution center is commissioned in the community on November 27, 2012. Ongoing operation and WASH promotional activities are managed by a safe water committee and supported by the church.
- Over time the local church’s activities (including worship services, household visitations, prayer and children’s ministries) and the safe water project work together to restore community residents to wholesome relationships with God, themselves, each other and creation.

Outcomes

Safe water distribution

WASH Promotion

Key events and activities

1. November 2012
   Church leaders encourage congregation (consisting of community residents) to support a safe water project by collecting and paying for safe water and demonstrating healthy WASH behavior. At this time, “80% of church members collect water on a daily basis and many serve as volunteer WASH promoters (example of church acting as messenger and demonstrator).”

2. February 2013
   Introduction of advanced treatment process improves water quality and increases community consumption from safe water project.

3. April 2013
   Nighttime vision of Jesus leads one Muslim family to seek out church and begin worshipping with Christian believers. Community leaders and residents become infuriated with the Christian church, accusing its leaders of attempting to “Christianize” the community. Safe water project loses favor and begins to struggle financially because community recognizes its connection to the church.

4. July 2013
   Community’s perception of safe water project begins to improve as a result of Water Missions International’s relationship with local and district leaders and vice mayor, who begin to advocate for WASH in the community. Safe water project performance (water quality and cost recovery) and perception of Christian church both improve.

Challenges

- When WASH programs are integrated into local church activities, the successes and struggles of each impact the other.
- This relationship is exaggerated in contexts where the Christian church is the minority.
- In other areas, Christians might find themselves competing for position and thus may lack motivation to engage in socially-minded projects.

Conclusions

- In areas where Christians are the minority, the church is likely to be unified and to have a heart for reaching out to the community in love.
- New converts should be welcomed in a strategic and intentional manner, recognizing the impact that they can have on public perception of the church and WASH program.
- Although the church should be central in WASH programming, relationships with other local authorities such as local government and established community-based organizations should be fostered in order to broaden credibility.