



My learning is hooked up to good water and sanitation facilities – a typical cry from children in the highlands of Papua New Guinea

By David Fonzie Glama

Fifteen-year old Peggy Maisa and 13-year old Rachael Watove from Massy village in the Eastern Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea both have dreams of one day becoming medical doctors. These high-spirited teenagers know without a doubt that they will have to do well in school to achieve their dreams and both girls are determined to do their best in school.



Peggy and Rachael attend Okiufa Primary School located some three kilometers out of Goroka town, the capital of Eastern Highlands Province. A mere 10-minute drive from their school takes them into the heart of urbanized Goroka where the Goroka Base Hospital stands. This is where both girls would love to work as medical doctors in the future. Their dreams to

become doctors drive them to pursue their studies seriously and they are keen to be at school every day to learn. But they realize also that their dream may not materialize if the school is constantly being disrupted by a continual shortage of clean drinking water and unhygienic sanitary facilities.



Ending classes early and sending children home due to lack of water and proper sanitary facilities is a regular occurrence at Okiufa Primary School. Despite its close proximity to Goroka, the school's dilapidated sanitary conditions and a lack of good water supply often forces school authorities to send the entire student population of 800 children home very early on a regular basis. The ongoing water and sanitation problems in the school have seriously hampered learning for spirited students like Peggy and Rachael who dream of living better lives than their parents who laboriously toil the land for daily survival.

Peggy says without hesitation that she does not wish to meek out a meager living the way her parents do. "My parents walk long distances to farm and we have to collect water from creeks for cooking, washing and cleaning and I don't want to continue doing that," Peggy laments.

Fetching water for the family's need from a nearby creek is a daily chore for Peggy and Rachael. There are no clean water systems or hygienic sanitation facilities in Peggy's and Rachael's Massy village. The village's population of over 1,000 people depends on the nearby creek for all their water needs. Being the only girls in the family, Peggy and Rachael are expected to ensure a daily supply of water in their homes. Failure to do this means bearing the brunt of their families' anger.

"I've had enough of this kind of life. I don't want to treat my children the same way. I want my children to live a free-loving life. I must be educated enough and live a good life to provide good opportunities for my children," Peggy says with determination.

And now there is hope that Peggy and Rachael may just fulfill their



ambitions to work as doctors at the Goroka Base Hospital. Okiufa Primary School is the proud recipient of two 9,000-liter water tanks (2,000 gallons) now supplying teachers and students with clean drinking water. And very soon the school will be able to use eight newly installed Ventilated Improved Pit (VIP) latrines – four for boys and four for girls. For Peggy and Rachael and all the other students, this means they don't need to be sent home from school early. They can now stay the full day at school. It also



means many girls who stay home because the school cannot provide adequate sanitary facilities will now be encouraged to come to school.

The installation of the water tanks and the VIP toilets was made possible by UNICEF through funding support from the European Union. And while Peggy and Rachael will still struggle with their daily chore of fetching water from creeks for

their families, that is a small price they are willing to pay as long as their studies are not hampered.

The European Union's funding support has enabled UNICEF Papua New Guinea to work with the National Departments of Health and Education in the construction and installation of water supplies and VIP toilets for schools and health facilities in three highlands provinces of the country.

For Peggy and Rachael and the rest of the students at Okiufa Primary School, the new water tanks and toilets are an answer to their prayers. It has boosted the morale of the students and teachers enormously.

"Our small prayers from the small children of Okiufa have been heard", a joyful Peggy say with a glint of emotion in her eyes. "Thank you UNICEF and European Union. We will remember you always.