

Swiss group helps ease drought pain

Ni Komang Erviani

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Hardship frequently endured by residents of Karangasem regency, 50 kilometers east of Denpasar, during the long dry season, has attracted sympathy from both the people and the government of Switzerland.

Over the past three years, through the Future for Children Foundation, the Swiss have extended a helping hand to Muntigunung villagers by providing them with potable water, Swiss Honorary Consul in Denpasar, Jon P. Zurcher, said Wednesday.

After meeting with Bali Governor Made Mangku Pastika at his office in Denpasar, Zurcher said, "The Swiss foundation has spent almost one and a half million U.S. dollars to supply water to

the Karangasem regency."

He explained the distribution of water to the drought-stricken area had been carried out in cooperation with a local foundation in Bali.

Zurcher said the assistance was intended mainly to help ease the burden on local residents during the severe drought in Karangasem — a regency known to have the highest number of poor people in Bali.

"Without water, the people have no income to live on. With this program, they no longer need to travel to get water," he said, adding that the water supply would be expanded until 2012 and would cover 34 villages.

So far the water supply has reached 850 residents in five villages. Muntigunung, a poor village frequently hit by severe drought, is the main target of the program, he said.

The foundation's project

officer, Daniel Elber, said the water supply program works by converting rainwater into potable water and aims to meet residents daily needs.

"Currently we are able to distribute 20 to 25 liters of water per head per day," Daniel said.

The Swiss foundation has also initiated a community empowerment program through the cultivation of various plants, including rosella flowers (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*) and cashew nuts.

For the distribution of the products, the foundation is collaborating with the Bali Hotels Association, an organization for star-rated hotels.

Governor Pastika warmly hailed the Swiss assistance to Karangasem. He said the program lies in line with the Bali administration's efforts to settle water shortage problems and alleviate poverty.