Volunteers help tackle kampung's flood woes

To make area safer during floods, 40 of them help villagers build a picket fence and footbridge for a stream

By Alexis Hooi

WITH 40 volunteers from across the island, villagers at flood-prone Kampung Lorong Buang Kok took the first step yesterday in making their hamlet safer.

Recalling the spirit of gotong royong, where people help each other, the villagers and volunteers built a picket fence along a stream that runs through the village and a footbridge over the stream.

For more than three hours, they laboured, indifferent to the blazing morning sun.

They hammered and lashed together pickets to construct a 60m-long fence along the stream linked to the nearby Sungei Punggol - the main culprit of the floods. It is to prevent people from falling into the water.

Planks were also sawed and nailed together to build the 2m-long footbridge to replace one that has become rickety with time.

The changes are the first in a series being planned to improve conditions
at the hamlet aptly called Kampung Selak Kain, as people 'hitch up their sarongs' whenever heavy rainfall coincided with high tides.

Their flood woes are longstanding and were highlighted last month in The Straits Times.

Even a canal built in the late 1970s did not bring relief to the cluster of 28 homes nestled off Yio Chu Kang Road.

What's needed is $10 million which Environment Minister Lim Swee Say said was impractical to spend on improving the flood defences for the kampung.

It prompted village chief Awe Ludin and his people to come up with their own stop-gap measures; and yesterday, help came from some unlikely sources.

Besides Ngee Ann Polytechnic students and Jalan Kayu grassroots leaders, officials of the Public Utilities Board and the National Environment Agency also gave a helping hand to about a dozen villagers.

Ang Mo Kio GRC MP Wee Siew Kim said the additions would also make it safer for people who have been piqued to visit the village after the recent publicity.

He added: 'I'm very encouraged by the response. This allows people to do something for the community and has everything to do with community spirit.'

Also in the works is the plan to raise slightly the ground around the homes to fortify them against floods, said Mr Wee.

Grassroots volunteer Mohamed Nasim, 38, said the picket fence he helped build was completed within two hours, in half the time they had expected.

Said the vice-principal of Peirce Secondary School: 'The volunteer spirit is very good and it's great that we were able to come up with such a group so quickly.'

Village chief Awe Ludin, 69, was understandably grateful: 'All of us are very happy these people came to help us.'

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