

## SMWD's Path Towards a More Inclusive and United Workplace

by Jon Mar Cruz



The Santa Maria Water District (SMWD) employees came together for a purposeful three-day capacity-building event from May 9–11, held at Vista Venice Highland Resort in Morong, Bataan. With the theme *"GAD 101: Exploring Gender and Development Towards a More Inclusive Society,"* the program began with a seminar titled "Orientation on Basic Gender and Development Concepts," facilitated by Ms. Kimberly Anne E. Teodoro, an independent GAD resource speaker.



The training aimed to deepen participants' understanding of gender orientations through interactive discussions and group exercises. The seminar emphasized the importance of recognizing gender diversity, appreciating differences, distinguishing sex and gender, and understanding the critical difference between equity and equality. On the second day, the capacity-building activities officially began. Employees were divided into nine color-coded teams composed of members from various divisions to encourage new connections. The day kicked off with a flag-making competition, where each team designed a flag representing their identity.

Beyond giving a creative space and freedom, this activity promoted team bonding and lasting relationships. Each flag expressed powerful messages of equality, openness, and solidarity. Next came the cheerdance competition, where teams showcased their energy and coordination through choreographed cheers.



In the afternoon, a series of games tested both the mental and physical capacities of the participants. The first game, *"Word Puzzle,"* challenged teams' problem-solving and teamwork skills. This was followed by *"Basket and Ball,"* a fast-paced game requiring quick thinking and strategic movement. The third game, *"Card Matching,"* tested mental acuity and physical coordination. Teams then faced a series of *physical challenges* measuring their strength, endurance, and agility. The final game, *"Leaky Pipe,"* required patience, perseverance, and teamwork, as teams competed to fill a leaky pipe under challenging conditions.



The event concluded with a social night and awarding ceremony. The highlight of the evening was the *Mr. and Ms. SMWD* pageant, in which each team was represented by a candidate. From the initial nine contestants per category, five finalists were selected to proceed to the question-and-answer portion, where they addressed thought-provoking topics. In the end, the Pink Team's representative was crowned *Ms. SMWD*, while the Grey Team's representative took home the title of *Mr. SMWD*. For the capacity-building competition, the Violet Team emerged as the overall champion.



The entire experience was a worthwhile endeavour showing the value of workplace respect, diversity, and unity. More significantly, it showed that effective communication and team dynamics are crucial for success in addition to individual skills.