



## Soroptimist International of Kenya: Social accountability of water provision, Mvihoko Women, Kenya

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### The organisations:



Soroptimist International Kenya Union was established in 1995; at present there are 12 clubs with 150 members in different parts of Kenya, including Nakuru Club.

Soroptimists International is a world wide women's service organisation empowering women and girls in the sectors of education, human rights, water and environment, and advocacy.



Mvihoko Women Group is a local grassroots women's organisation in Ndibai village of Miti-Mingi, Nakuru Country Kenya. The 22 members came together to jointly address the water situation in their community and to provide sufficient and safe water at reasonable distance for their families and their communities, thus relieving their burden to walk long distances and freeing their time for economic development.

### The situation in Kenya

In 1974 Kenya launched the National Water Master Plan to ensure availability of potable water at reasonable distance to all household by the year 2000. A number of institutional arrangements has been made to achieve this target. Despite the government's ambitious

water supply development programme over half of the rural population does not have access to potable water to date<sup>1</sup>.

The deficit of water for basic needs affect women in particular. To help alleviate the stress women encounter in accessing water SI Kenya Union has, under the WfWP umbrella, implemented a number of water projects including the Mwihoko Rainwater harvesting project supervised by the SI Nakuru Club.

There are 660 households in Ndibai. Most households get their water from the local river which is at least 20 minutes' walk from the nearest household. Alternatively, households have to purchase water from water sellers at 10Ksh for 20 litres. Water is brought up from the river on peoples' backs, by bicycle or donkey cart. When the river is dry, people tend to dig holes in the riverbed at night and return in the morning when the holes have filled with some water. There is an issue with water quality in this area, since the water apparently has high salt and fluoride content.

### **The role of the Mwihoko Women Group**

While the Mwihoko Women Group was founded to address the water issues of the women, the project was designed and managed by a local Kenyan NGO and the Mwihoko women were marginalized after the initial pilot stage. Coached and trained by Soroptimist International Kenya and Nakuru Club, the Mwihoko Women Group have assumed leadership, contributed funds and labor, and engaged the community and the village leadership, making the water & sanitation provision a joined effort of community members with local authorities. This way they have curbed corruption and ensured that the project reached the intended beneficiaries and are sustainable.

### **The role of the Soroptimist Nakuru club**

The role of the Soroptimist Nakuru club initially was to monitor the project implementation on behalf of WfWP, and to coach the Mwihoko women so that they would gradually take the lead in their local process. Seeing that the project management was failing, that project deliverables did not benefit the intended beneficiaries, and that the Mwihoko women were not involved by the local NGO, Soroptimist Union of Kenya took over the project management and intensified training and coaching positioning the Mwihoko women as leaders in the local process. This has turned this project around from a potential failure into a blatant success and has ensured that the project output is sustainable.

## **Main achievements during the Water for Life Decade**

### **Policies, legal frameworks and institutional mechanisms**

Community members are now fully aware of their rights and responsibilities; they have turned from beneficiaries into partners. An open communication and cooperation has been

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<sup>1</sup> Albert Mumma: Kenya's New Water Law: an analysis of the implementation of Kenya's Water Act 2002 for the rural poor. University of Nairobi, Kenya; Faculty of Law

developed with the local authorities to ensure that the water provisions will be managed and maintained properly. A community resource centre was built as part of the project, and is available to the Mwihoko women group.

### Service delivery

In 80 households a rainwater harvesting system was established: 40 received a tank of 5.000 litres and 40 households one or two tanks of 2.500-3000 litres, including filters,



serving 480 people. In 5 schools a rainwater harvesting system was established of 10.000 litres, providing at least 2.040 school going children with water. As a pilot sanitation component: 3 eco-toilets and a shower room were constructed to assist the women in Miti Mingi area access decent sanitation and clean water a rainwater catchment tank (10.000 litres) has been installed, to improve their sanitation and as an income generating

activity for the women group. The group contributed money and raised Euros 2336 which they used to purchase land (1 hectare) on which the eco toilet has been constructed.

### Women's empowerment, capacity development

Positioning Mwihoko Women as WASH leaders in their community is a continuous process of empowerment and capacity development. The role of the Soroptimists of Kenya as a strong and influential women's network in the country, has been indispensable this process and is on-going.

### Spin-off

Once the Mwihoko women had taken the lead and responsibility for their project, they



initiated a Revolving Fund. The money was used to purchase 22 dopers goats, one for every member. Each member furthermore received two hens and a cock. The eggs are used by families to improve nutrition and excess is sold. Proceeds from the sale of eggs and sheep will be re-invested to ensure continuity of production. Furthermore, a Resource centre /

Production shed was constructed for training purposes and the production of materials for project implementation. It is managed by the women.

### Challenges

Positioning the Mwihoko women as project owners and partner in the implementation has been the prime challenge. The remote location made it difficult to communicate frequently with the Mwihoko women. This allowed the project manager to dominate the women, to withhold vital information and to exclude Mwihoko Women Group from decision-making leading to corruption and finally to removal of the project manager. The intervention and continuous coaching of the Soroptimists of Kenya has rebuilt trust and cooperation of the local partners and jointly they have managed to overcome all these obstacles.