



‘Big changes are now possible’: Nakalale Naduat-Lokichar’s women gain access to clean, reliable water

What has changed?

Few residents of the arid county of Turkana in northwest Kenya have adequate access to water. Frequent droughts have exacerbated decades of marginalisation and under-investment, and many of these communities of livestock herders live in absolute poverty, their main source of water the contaminated open ‘scoop wells’ they dig into dry riverbeds.

The women of Nakalale Naduat-Lokichar village used to face two choices when it came to collecting water: to flag down vehicles that could take them 25km to a river near Kakuma, where they could dig scoop holes in the riverbed, or walk 15km to the mountains to dig scoop wells at another river, beginning their long journey in the evening and returning the following day.

The lengthy trek meant they could only carry back a small amount of water - just enough for drinking and watering their goats, with none left over for washing or at times even cooking.

‘Sometimes we had food but because of the lack of water, we were unable to cook it,’ says Etole Natagorait. In addition, the women were exhausted, and had little time to look for food or work.

Now, however, the women of Nakalale Naduat-Lokichar can access as much clean, reliable water as they need at any time of day from a pump situated within the village itself.

‘I used to worry so much during the night about how to get water for my family,’ says Mary Akiru. ‘Sometimes I would wake up in the middle of the night and set off towards the mountains to collect water. In the night there are many animals and insects, and we would often be scared. Now I feel so happy that I don’t have to do that and I don’t have to worry about water.’

How has the change been achieved?

‘Three years ago we women got together, and we took our jerry cans and laid them across the road to block it, so that our plight for water could be heard,’ says Asinyen Lemukol.

When he was informed of the protest, the ward administrator for the area sent a truck of clean water to the village, along with a large storage tank, and the county government arranged for a borehole to be drilled. However, they were unable to equip it, so it was sealed up again and for another three years the women continued their long journeys to collect water.

Finally, after discussions with the county government, Oxfam asked the women of the village if they could get together some hardcore (broken stones that can be used as a base for concrete) ballast and sand. This they did, enabling Oxfam, working through the SWIFT programme, to install a BluePump at the borehole, providing the community with access to water at

long last.

‘When the technician came, he found that we had got all the things he’d asked for and the work could be done,’ says Etole Natagorait. ‘Even the men came and got involved, and others from nearby.’

Why does it matter?

‘The first time we collected water from the BluePump, we kept looking at each other and laughing,’ says Asinyen. ‘We all felt very happy. And we all agreed that this BluePump has saved us a lot.’

The women of Nakalale Naduat-Lokichar feel huge relief at no longer having to make exhausting journeys to collect water, and describe the joy of being able to bathe when they want and wash their children, who previously would ‘go to bed dirty and wake up dirty’, according to Asinyen. They now have plenty of water for their goats, and more time to look for both food and work.



Nabwel Lopua at the BluePump

‘Before, when we had to go a long way, we always felt very tired and would be dozing or falling asleep during the day, even when we had other activities to do,’ says Enon Lokatukon. ‘Now we are rested at night we can do those activities, like making charcoal to sell.’ The women take their charcoal to the side of the road and sell it to truck drivers and other passing vehicles, using the cash to buy food for their families.

Mary believes the arrival of water in the village heralds bigger changes, too. ‘Because of this water, there will be future changes here. Big changes are possible,’ she says. ‘People will come and open businesses selling maize flour, sugar and other things. In the future a school will be started because water is available here. A church will be built because there is water here. And a health centre could come because water is available here.’

What are the challenges?

The challenge now is for the residents of Nakalale Naduat-Lokichar to put in place arrangements for the continued operation and maintenance of the

BluePump, to ensure the long-term sustainability of water in the village. They will need to meet the costs of maintenance, protect the pump from damage, and arrange and pay for any repairs required.



Asinyen Lemukol, Nakalale Naduat-Lokichar

How will the challenges be met and what makes this change sustainable?

The women of the village are ready to rise to these challenges, and clear about how to do so. ‘We women were consulted about the water point and our own responsibilities during the construction,’ explains Asinyen.

‘We want to buy a padlock and chain,’ says Mary, ‘because if it remains like this people may come and damage it.’

‘We plan to have a water management committee to manage (the pump),’ says Enon, ‘and then we want people to pay for the water they collect.’

‘When we start getting money, we’ll be able to hire someone to come and repair any breakages,’ explains Nabwel Lopua.

‘Because Oxfam and the county government will not be here to help us,’ adds Mary. While Oxfam and the county government will continue to support residents in the medium term, the long-term objective of the SWIFT programme is to ensure that the community is self-reliant.

Oxfam specifically chose to install a BluePump because it is more robust and reliable than other pumps, and therefore particularly suited to contexts of high usage and where it is problematic to source spare parts and the skilled expertise needed to undertake repairs. This should make operation and maintenance easier for the village’s new water management committee.

Freed from the need to carry heavy jerry cans long distances and the weariness and pain it caused them, the women are determined to keep the pump going. ‘Now, when I wake up in the morning, I feel very happy,’ says Mary.

Stories and photos collected by Jane Beesley, freelance humanitarian communications specialist, and edited by Emma Feeny (Oxfam).

The SWIFT Consortium works to provide access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene to people in Kenya and DRC, and builds capacity to ensure services are sustainable. It is funded with UK aid from the British people.

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