



Alice Wambui, Dandora, Kenya



'I'm released!': SWIFT brings safe, reliable and affordable water to residents of Dandora

What has changed?

People living in the informal settlement of Dandora in Nairobi often have to walk long distances from their homes to collect water, and queue for lengthy periods. They pay high prices to vendors, and experience low flows due to inadequate supply. In some areas, more than 90% of water produced by the Nairobi City Water and Sewerage Company (NCWSC) is either lost through leakage before it reaches the customer, or is diverted by illegal connections.

Alice Wambui, 50, says the situation in Maili Saba (Mile Seven) was really bad. 'Just a small number of people were getting water, and even then it wasn't reliable. Sometimes water would be available a few days in a week.'

Alice, who lives with her husband and five children, aged between five and 23, used to buy water at a local, privately owned borehole. 'We were buying water from a borehole at 5 Kenyan Shillings per 20 litres. I was buying 18 jerry cans of 20 litres a week. I used the water for cooking, cleaning and washing. We also needed to use the water for the toilet,' she says.

However, the water from the local borehole wasn't suitable for drinking, so the family also had to go to another borehole, a kilometre away, to buy drinking water at the same price. Sometimes there was no electricity at the borehole, which meant the family could

go all day with no water. 'Those running the borehole wouldn't pay for diesel for a generator because they said it was too expensive,' Alice says.

Alice and her family should have been receiving piped water directly to their home, but the supply was interfered with. 'People would block the flow and divert it to others who had money or influence, and there was nothing we could do about it,' Alice explains.

Now, however, as a result of work done under the SWIFT programme, these issues have been resolved; Alice and her family have a reliable supply of safe water to their home, and no longer face long walks, queues and high prices. 'I'm released!' Alice says.

How has the change been achieved?

Under the SWIFT programme, Water and Sanitation for the Urban Poor (WSUP) is working in partnership with NCWSC to upgrade the water supply to Dandora and improve the access of low-income consumers. They are reducing the amount of water that is 'lost' before it reaches the customer; boosting the network with higher water pressures; and increasing the amount of time water is available.

WSUP and NCWSC have also laid nearly 23km of new pipeline in Dandora, and have embarked on a mass promotion to ensure that connections to the network are both legal and metered.

Why does it matter?

Alice, whose husband works for the city council supervising street cleaners, is able to invest the time and money she used to spend on water in building her livelihood instead.

‘Now we have a reliable and good supply of water, and I’m happy because whatever money I was paying at the borehole for water, I can use for something else,’ says Alice, who will receive a water meter when her family is transferred onto the new network. Under the new system, she will pay 34 Kenyan Shillings for 1,000 litres of water – reducing her costs to less than a fifth of the 200 Kenyan Shillings she used to pay at the private borehole.

“We can look forward to a lot of improvements in the community”

She says she is looking forward to being on the metered system. ‘It will save time; it used to take 2-3 hours to collect water before,’ she says, adding, ‘and because the meter is on my premises, I will just be paying for what I use.’

With the extra time she now has, Alice can do more work selling ballast to earn money, and hopes to save enough to buy another plot of land to develop and rent out.

She also has high hopes that the improved water network will lead to a healthier future. ‘I think water-borne diseases will be reduced,’ she says. ‘I think this could mean we can look forward to a lot of improvements in the community.’ The new water network has already triggered the construction of sewerage extensions to plots in Dandora, and work on a community clinic is also underway.



Alice Wambui hangs up her washing

What are the challenges?

Alice is concerned about whether everyone in her community will benefit from the new network. ‘Most of my neighbours don’t have water. They are daily casual

workers so don’t always have money,’ she says.

She is also worried about the possibility that the water supply to her home will be interfered with again, and the effect this will have on her family and neighbours. ‘With the old system, you would have to turn your water off for people further up the street to get water,’ she explains.

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

NCWSC is confident that when the new network is fully operational, everyone in Maili Saba, Silanga and Ogopa villages in Dandora will have access to reliable and affordable water, including those with low incomes. It has established a project task team with members representing all sections of the community, who are able to advocate on their behalf. Field sociologists have been working closely with the task team, landlords and residents to understand potential customer groups, their attitudes, practices, perceptions and preferences, and their willingness to pay for an improved service.



Dandora, Kenya

Their research and the task team itself are enabling WSUP and NCWSC to respond to residents’ concerns, share information and encourage a sense of community ownership, something that is also being done through regular meetings and the distribution of promotional materials. And to prevent a return to the illegal connections of the past, NCWSC has set up a satellite office in Dandora where it will maintain a presence, and is building the capacity of staff on the ground to deal with any problems that arise.

With support from WSUP and other stakeholders, NCWSC’s Informal Settlements Department has been elevated to the status of a fully-fledged commercial region, putting it on a sound, long-term footing. And once all water connections in Dandora are both legal and metered, with landlords and residents paying the official tariff for what they use, the network will be financially sustainable, and the benefits it brings set to last.

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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