



Rose Akuwam and her daughter Ikimat, Kabokorit, Turkana, Kenya



## ‘Now everyone is getting enough to drink when they need it’: SWIFT brings safe, sustainable water to residents of Kabokorit

### What has changed?

Few residents of the arid county of Turkana in northwest Kenya have adequate access to water. In the past, this included those in the villages that make up Kakuma, such as Kabokorit, where 5,578 residents couldn’t access any water at all because the pipeline was damaged. Many more people in surrounding villages had to put up with a patchy, inadequate service.

‘The only source of water was from the scoop holes we made in the river, says Rose Akuwam, 20, a Kabokorit resident who is married and has two children. ‘We had to dig the holes first and then wait for them to fill with water. The first amount of water was very dirty and we had to scoop that out. Then we had to wait for the hole to fill up again before we could fill our jerry cans.’

As a result, collecting water was time consuming, to say the least. ‘It could take us around an hour to walk to the river. So fetching water could take me around three hours,’ says Rose, describing how various members of her household would go four times a day: ‘early morning, then around 10 am, again in the afternoon and then finally in the evening.’

Rose says she was exhausted by all the journeys back and forth, and often in pain from carrying heavy loads. The situation also led to conflict within the family. ‘You’d get

back home and people would start quarrelling as soon as you brought the water into the house, because they were so thirsty and had been waiting a long time,’ Rose explains. ‘Then if the water got finished too quickly and I had to go back to the river again, I would get annoyed.’

With most residents collecting water from the river and from scoop holes which wasn’t safe for human consumption, there were many incidences of water-borne diseases. Even schools had no choice but to send pupils to collect water from the river for drinking and cooking, which took up a lot of time and affected their studies.

Now, however, residents of Kabokorit can access clean water easily from the three water kiosks in the village, which are supplying at least 15 litres of water per person per day, and the lengthy walks to collect contaminated water from scoop holes in the river are a thing of the past.

### How has the change been achieved?

Under the SWIFT programme, Oxfam is working with the local utility Kakuma Water Services Provider (KAWASEPRO), which is responsible for supplying water to Kakuma’s population of up to 100,000 people.

Oxfam is supporting KAWASEPRO to improve the overall water infrastructure, and in particular to supply

water to the residents of Kabokorit.

Having conducted a survey, Oxfam designed and built a pipeline with a 'tee' connection which separates off the water for Kabokorit and takes it directly to the village. It built an elevated steel tank which holds 108 cubic metres of water and is filled every day, ensuring there is enough pressure for water to reach the furthest parts of Kabokorit. It has also rehabilitated the three water kiosks, from which village residents can now collect their water.

### Why does it matter?

Rose, who accesses a kiosk just outside the compound where she lives, has already noticed improvements in her community's health. 'Since getting the water last month the family are having less diarrhoea and other problems,' she says. 'We used to see cases of typhoid. We haven't seen any lately, so we are hoping...we won't see any more outbreaks.'

Rose says these days she has both the time and the water to carry out tasks such as washing clothes, cleaning utensils and cooking. 'And now the quarrelling has stopped because everyone is getting enough to drink when they need it,' she adds.

Rose's family are also enjoying their new access to safe water.



One of the water kiosks in Kabokorit

'When there was no water, I just had to think of the distance I had to go to get water and I'd feel tired,' says her 17-year-old brother-in-law Ekidor. 'I had to fetch three 20-litre jerry cans in a wheelbarrow. It was very hard. Now I don't have to push the wheelbarrow far I'm celebrating! With the time I've now got, I can do more studying and helping out at home. Science is my favourite subject.'

Meanwhile Rose's grandmother, Atoot, is relishing the fact that she can now take a bath whenever she wants. 'Before, when I went to the river, I used to get

many pains, in my neck, in my chest. I used to feel sick with it,' she says. 'Now, life is different. Now there are no queues - only happiness.'

### What are the challenges?

Oxfam and KAWASEPRO are still completing work on the infrastructure in the area, with the result that at times there are technical problems which result in water having to be rationed.

However, the big challenge now is to ensure the new water system at Kabokorit is sustainable in the long term, and does not break down again as a result of damage to the pipeline or elsewhere.



Rose Akuwam's grandmother, Atoot

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

SWIFT is working with local utility companies such as KAWASEPRO specifically to help ensure the sustainability of its activities in Kenya over the long term. It has carried out assessments to identify areas that need strengthening within the utilities, and is implementing capacity-building activities to address these which will continue for several years, until the programme ends in March 2018.

### ***"Now, life is different. Now, there are no queues - only happiness"***

Annah Ikai, Treasurer at KAWASEPRO, feels that once the technical problems of the past have been resolved, the new water infrastructure in Kakuma can be put on a more secure financial footing that will support its long-term operation and maintenance.

'As the water system improves, people will be willing to pay for the service, and sustainability is possible,' she says.

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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