



Kaku Mwey, Patuke Matidia, Chief Kambale Njala and Kakule Mathe Macholi, Soya, North Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo



## ‘We need everyone’s participation’: SWIFT supports Soya’s community-led committees to transform their village

### What has changed?

Soya is a rural village in North Kivu, in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo. In the past, the community relied for water on a source a 20-minute walk away, but this was only available during the wet season. During the dry season, villagers collected water from a stream.

Few families had access to a latrine; most would defecate in the bush near their houses, and hand-washing was rare. Illnesses such as diarrhoea, stomach aches and skin problems, on the other hand, were common.

Now, however, as a result of work done through the SWIFT programme, the community in Soya has access to safe water all year round. Many families have a latrine with a ‘tippy-tap’ where they wash their hands, and a pit where they dispose of their rubbish. The health of the village’s children in particular is reported to have improved significantly as a result.

### How has the change been achieved?

The Healthy Villages and Schools (Villages et Écoles Assainis, or VEA) approach is a step-by-step process of village mobilisation that is supported by DRC’s Ministry of Public Health and UNICEF. Under the SWIFT programme, Oxfam is supporting Soya to implement the approach through local partner Hydraulique sans

Frontières (Hyfro).

Since September 2014, Hyfro has constructed four new water points in the village, from which clean, safe water is always available. It has helped the community set up a water users’ committee, of three women and six men – including the village chief - whose job it is now to collect money from households and use it to maintain the system.

‘We deal with all things to do with the water. We maintain the system and our aim is to make it function permanently,’ says Kaku Mwey, the president of the committee. ‘We collect money from the users to help maintain the system in the future, in case anything breaks or there are problems. Each household pays 300 Congolese Francs (£0.22) a month.’

Hyfro has trained ‘community motivators’ in hygiene awareness, and has assisted the village to upgrade latrines, dig rubbish pits, and promote hand washing. It has also helped Soya elect a management committee, to monitor and oversee the process of reaching ‘healthy village’ status.

There are two women and five men on the management committee, including the local pastor, Jean Kambale.

‘We have had a lot of information and different trainings from Hyfro; for example, how to sensitise people and mobilise them, as well as information

about hygiene,' Jean Kambale says. 'We also monitor people's involvement and deal with any challenges that come up.'

### Why does it matter?

The setting up of community-led committees to manage the changes being implemented in Soya will ensure the sustainability of those changes, and the improvements to residents' health that have resulted from them. Those involved are keenly aware of the importance of their roles.

'I was elected by the community to be on the committee and now I need to do this job properly, as it's very important and I don't want to let the community down,' says water users' committee member Kakule Mathe Macholi.

'This water has been provided to us and now we need to try and maintain it, or we will lose it and it will go back to where it was before,' says the vice-president of the committee, Paluke Mafda.

'I wanted to join the committee because I want to see the people in good health and to be able to drink good, safe water,' says the village chief, Kambale Nlala.

### What are the challenges?

The biggest challenge currently facing the community of Soya is that a minority of residents are unwilling to pay for the water they use.

'We started collecting money last month. We work closely with the management committee, who help and support us with our work,' explains Kaku Mweyu. 'Most people give the money and there is no problem, but 30% are refusing.'



Pastor Jean Kambale

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

Kaku Mweyu is confident that this minority can be persuaded to pay for their water, once they understand the importance of maintaining the system over the long term.

'Everyone is working to try and get the 30% to pay,'

he says. 'Besides the water committee, the village committee, and the head of the village, the 'RECOs' (community motivators), nurses and the pastor are all helping to persuade them, and we are getting support from Hyfro. Eventually I think most of them will pay.'

Pastor Jean Kambale says he has raised it with his congregation, and is now hoping to see a change in attitudes.

'If things are said in church, people take notice,' he says. 'In the past, getting water was difficult for the people here and we, the church, want to be involved so we can support them... We need everyone's participation so we can maintain the water system, and not go back to how we were before.'

The involvement of women and young people with the village's committees will also help ensure the long-term sustainability of the changes being implemented in Soya. Healthy village management committee member Kyakimwa Rezeline says it is good that women have a voice.

***"This is something for our future, so it's important for young people like me to be involved"***

'It's important for women to be involved on the committee because we are more involved with water and hygiene in the home than men,' she says. 'We can talk about the issues that might concern women that men might not know about, especially when it comes to the children.'



Kyakimwa Rezeline, healthy village management committee member, Soya

Similarly, 22-year-old Kakule Matato Ezdna feels he can discuss the issues with other young people.

'This is something for our future, so it's important for young people, like me, to be involved,' he says. 'I can now train others about the importance of safe water and talk to others within my social group.'

The commitment of Soya's committee members to their new roles and to long-term change bodes well for the village's 'healthy' status in future.

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.**