
**BUREAU FOR DEMOCRACY, CONFLICT, AND HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE (DCHA)
OFFICE OF U.S. FOREIGN DISASTER ASSISTANCE (USAID/OFDA)**

SUCCESS STORY: DEFENDING AGAINST DROUGHT IN KENYA

The climate in Kenya's Eastern Province is marked by extremes, alternating between floods and long periods of drought. When rains are scarce, wells and river beds dry up, forcing inhabitants to walk up to 15 km in search of water for drinking, cooking, and cleaning. Consumption of contaminated water and a lack of sufficient water contribute to the spread of diarrhea and other waterborne diseases.

USAID/OFDA frequently responds to emergency water, sanitation, and hygiene needs in drought-affected areas of Kenya. In addition, USAID/OFDA supports programs aimed at strengthening local populations' ability to cope with and combat the effects of drought, thereby reducing the need for future emergency interventions. Since FY 2007, USAID/OFDA has provided nearly \$3.1 million to implementing partner Welthungerhilfe (WHH)¹ in support of an innovative program designed to turn floodwaters into a source of accessible, safe drinking water, available to communities when other water sources run dry.

HARVESTING RAIN WITH ROCK CATCHMENTS

With funding from USAID/OFDA, WHH assists Kenyan communities to construct and manage rock catchment water systems designed to collect and store rainwater for future use. A rock catchment uses natural rock surfaces to divert rainwater to a central collection area. The collected rainwater passes through a sand and gravel filter and into covered storage tanks that protect the water from contamination and evaporation. Each storage tank is fitted with a tap for easy access. WHH estimates that rock catchments can collect 90 percent of total rainfall in the catchment areas, providing a valuable water supply even when rains are below normal levels. Working primarily through gravity, a rock catchment system requires no fuel or chemicals and has little environmental impact.



The basin of Muliluni Rock Catchment in Makueni District, Eastern Province, collects rainwater to fill the storage tanks below (Courtesy of WHH).

When possible, WHH ensures that rock catchments are built from local materials with local labor. This approach enables village residents to earn income and provides communities with the skills and knowledge needed for future repairs and maintenance of the rock

¹ WHH was previously known as German Agro Action.

catchments and storage tanks. WHH trains men and women from the local community to serve on catchment committees, which are responsible for managing the water supply once construction is complete. Committees charge users a small fee to pay for upkeep and repairs and may opt to offer discounts for the poorest inhabitants. Some water management committees have used the proceeds from water fees to fund other projects for the benefit of the community, such as tree nurseries.

CLEAN WATER MAKES A DIFFERENCE

Between 2007 and 2008, WHH built five rock catchments in Makueni District, Eastern Province, providing safe drinking water to more than 19,000 people. As a result, most beneficiary communities have experienced a significant reduction in the number of diarrhea cases.



A woman collects water from a storage tank at Vololo Rock Catchment in Makueni District, Eastern Province (Courtesy of WHH).

“Before we had water from the catchment, my family members used to complain about stomach aches from waterborne diseases,” said Joseph Musuvi Kamandi, a resident of Vololo village, Makueni District. “The water that we scooped from river beds was contaminated by animal waste. There are no cases of waterborne diseases now.”

The creation of a clean water source close to the village particularly benefits women and children, who usually bear responsibility for collecting water for the family. “The children used to attend school irregularly, because they had to assist their parents in fetching water,” said Margaret Kamene Mutua, vice-chairperson of the Vololo Rock

Catchment Committee. “Now this is not the case when we have water collected by the rock catchment. Before I had to walk to Mbole River, which is 8 km away. Now I only walk 2 km to the rock catchment.”

LOOKING AHEAD

Encouraged by the success of the program in Makueni District, USAID/OFDA and WHH began building rock catchments in Tana River District villages, Coast Province, in September 2008. With further program expansion, WHH plans to build rock catchments and other water collection systems in Mwingi District, Eastern Province, through June 2010, providing safe, accessible drinking water to an additional 70,000 people. Not only do the rock catchments improve the health and quality of life of the people who use them, but stored water from the catchments may help save lives during periods of drought. By enabling the harvesting and protection of a vital resource, USAID/OFDA and WHH strengthen Kenyans’ ability to sustain themselves and their communities during times of drought.