

Health

1.8 million people a year in Africa die of something as simple as diarrhoea – 90% of those are children below the age of 5. The ill-health of a community limits their ability to collect enough water and grow enough food, creating a vicious downward spiral resulting in the death of the most vulnerable. With unclean water being a major source of illness in Africa, sand dams can have an enormous effect on the health of the whole community.

Joshua, Excellent Development co-founder -
'In Meka self-help group which is in Mbitini location, it was one area where we had seen people die. The major issue, everybody died, everybody's speculation was they had AIDS, but it was because they took dirty water from the river, which was flooded with all sorts of diseases. After making those dams, we hardly hear of people dying, because they are getting clean water, they are getting also success from other sources of water like the water tank we have made there – you have seen it. So they are getting clean water and the death rate has reduced, tremendously.'

So, the sand dams built by communities helped by Excellent Development, reduce the instances of diarrhoea by providing a clean source of water. This enables children to go to school too, where Excellent have often built school water tanks, providing clean water during the day as well.

However, Excellent Development improves the health of communities in other ways. 80% of people in rural Africa depend on traditional medicine for primary health care. But many medicinal trees are increasingly rare and under threat, due to over-exploitation for medicines, firewood and building materials. Excellent Development plants long-term medicinal forests to repopulate these trees providing living seed banks to prove they can be grown and encourage farmers to grow them themselves. Once farmers become sustainable in firewood, fruits and medicine, trees can contribute to both income generation and improved health in the long-term

The same principle applies to food crops too. Supported by terracing and sand dams, communities can grow a wider range of crops improving nutrition and providing income generating opportunities from excess production. Whilst water and food are the biggest priorities for farmers in semi-arid Africa – appropriate solutions can protect the long-term health of communities as well.