

Phylis and Josephine's story

The Tyaa Tito self-help group (SHG) formed in 2016 when members of the southeast Kenyan community decided to join forces to work together on community water projects. The group later sought support from the Africa Sand Dam Foundation (ASDF), our partner in the region, to help them overcome the water shortages they had been experiencing. They have since built two sand dams, providing the entire community with a sustainable supply of clean water for life.



Phylis Kithome

Below we hear from Phylis Kithome, the group's secretary, and Josephine Mwendwa, one of the group's members, about their experience.

Prior to constructing the sand dams, a typical day would see much of it spent in pursuit of water. Phylis recalls the daily struggle she would have to go through.

“Life was never easy in those times. I would wake up early in the morning, sometimes around 4am, and head to fetch water from River Tyaa with my donkeys over 5km away.”

As a mother, Josephine recalled the difficulties she experienced spending hours away from home fetching water.

“I remember one time I had gone to the river in the morning, but as there were so many people I was still there at midday, so my mother-in-law had to bring me my child so that I could breastfeed him from the water point.”

Much of the community were all too aware of the risks of drinking dirty water from the river, but without any alternative solutions, they had very little choice. Phylis said:

“The water was not always safe for drinking, but we had no other choice to use it as it was all we could afford. Several times I got ill and was treated for stomach problems which were always attributed to the use of contaminated water from the river scoop holes.”

Spending hours away from home collecting water each day was also limiting the time they had for other activities. Here Phylis speaks about the impact this had on her business.

“I used to run a small kiosk at the local market, but as the majority of my time was spent in search of water, it meant that the time I spent at the shop kept on reducing day to day, eventually leading to its collapse because of the inconsistent openings.”

Determined to improve life for the community, with support from ASDF the SHG have since built two sand dams, providing a source of clean water just a short walk from their homes.

Josephine is thrilled with the results (see overleaf).



Josephine Mwendwa

“Our biggest achievement has been bringing unlimited water resources to our village through the construction of sand dams and shallow wells. Now it takes us less than 20 minutes to fetch water!”

No longer are they forced to collect dirty river water from scoop holes, which brought with it the risk of carrying waterborne diseases. Already, the community here report a noticeable improvement to their health. Josephine said:

“I have remained healthy alongside my children and husband ever since we started drinking water from the sand dam – it is clean and everyone in the community enjoys it!”

With water nearby, this has saved women and children hours each day, transforming their outlook as they can now use that time to invest in other opportunities.

Phylis said:

“My life has received a major transformation from these sand dam projects. The water struggle has been settled once and for all. I am no longer travelling the long distances in search of water as was the case before, which is saving me a lot of time to engage in other personal development activities.”

As well as providing clean water for drinking and domestic uses, the sand dams have meant that farmers now have a dependable supply of water which they can use to irrigate their crops.

Josephine has since started growing a variety of fruit trees, including banana, orange, lemon and mango – something which was not possible before. “The future looks bright” she exclaimed! She plans to use the income from selling the fruits to help pay for her children’s school fees.

What was clear from the conversation with Phylis and Josephine was the sense of pride and joy in what this community have been able to achieve together. As Phylis concluded:

“I am so happy with the work we have done in implementing these sand dam projects, which will help both current and future generations. The water challenges in our locality have been addressed in totality, much to the joy of all the local community members. I am very proud to have been part of the people bringing about a change in our community.”



Tyaa Tito’s sand dam, mid-construction, December 2020



The self-help group’s completed sand dam, January 2021