

Peninah's Story

Building a brighter future with sand dams

Last month the Africa Sand Dam Foundation (ASDF) – our partner in Kenya – spoke with Peninah Mutisya, Treasurer of Ngiluni self-help group. Ngiluni recently started working with ASDF, and are hoping to build their first sand dam later this year.

During the conversation Peninah spoke about the difficulties the community have been experiencing with regards to water access. The mother of six said life was much easier in her younger days.

“The rains were a lot more dependable, and the soil yielded enough food. Though we still had to spend hours looking for water, it was a lot cleaner and safer to drink.”

Now though, she says life is incredibly difficult.

“During the drought seasons, having water in the house can be a matter of life and death. My daughter and I have to leave the house and go looking for water as early as 3am, and only return once our search has been successful. Since we live near the forest, we not only face the danger of attacks from other humans, but also of wild animals which wonder the night searching for food and water.”

Accessing water has been a great challenge for Peninah's community. When it does rain, water does become available via their nearest river, a 30 minute walk away (which relieves some risks of trekking for hours overnight), however the water is dirty and unsafe to drink. The problem is accessing clean water on a regular basis, especially during dry seasons, as Peninah says:

“It is impossible to say we are safe from drought, as we lack adequate facilities to store water.”



Peninah Mutisya, Treasurer of Ngiluni self-help group in southeast Kenya, returning home after fetching water for her family from the nearest river.

Giving hope for life after COVID-19 with clean water

Peninah went on to talk about the impact of COVID-19, and how the increased need for water has brought new concerns for the future.

“We are very worried what the future looks like, with COVID-19 now a reality. We are especially worried how communities without a reliable source of water will cope with the situation, and how the lack of water may impact the spread of the disease in rural areas.”

Peninah said that whilst COVID-19 hasn't yet reached her local community, her family, like many others, have been experiencing difficulties as a result of the pandemic.

“Currently I have to work harder, as I have two children in school, and no-one to support me to raise their school fees. Before the outbreak of COVID-19 my four older children were working in Nairobi, and were able to assist me with their siblings' school fees. But now also they are relying on me, sometimes even for food.”

The long-term water shortages have taken its toll on this community. As Peninah says:

“We are grateful to God for his preservation, but this is not the kind of life I want. I have suffered all my life for lack of water. I have borne the pain of offering my children dirty and contaminated water to quench their thirst for years, and as a mother, this is a very painful thing to have to do.”

Determined to overcome the chronic water shortages the community were experiencing, Ngiluni reached out to ASDF, and with support

from the Foundation, will begin implementing their first sand dam project later this year – the prospect of which is already offering much hope for the future.

“This sand dam project is an answered prayer to us as a community, but more so to me as a mother, because I never gave up hope of living a life free of water scarcity. The availability of clean, safe and adequate water would take away all the worries I have to endure as a woman and as a mother.”

Once built, the sand dam will provide Ngiluni community with a year-round source of clean, safe drinking water. No more will Peninah and her daughter have to trek during nightfall in search of water. Instead, the sand dam will provide the community with water just a short walk from their homes, even during periods of drought.

Peninah spoke about her hopes for the sand dam, and how she plans to use the water:

“I will just stop worrying and live my life as I should have. I won't have to struggle so much as I will have easy access to water. I will be able to water my garden so that I can produce enough food, and I will be able to take care of my livestock. Life will be paradise.”



Peninah starting to prepare stones which will be collected and used to construct her community's sand dam.