

A DAM AND SEVEN WONDERFUL WOMEN

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"Untill last year we had to walk twenty kilometer daily to get our drinking water. We started out at midnight. Upon arrival at the well we had to stand in line. After fetching our water, we walked back and arrived home by midday with ten liters of water. We did that every day almost all year round", recounts Syombua Musya. Her story is acknowledged by six other women.

The homes and fields of the seven women are situated on a hill in Kitui district, 200 kilometers east of the capital Nairobi. It is a poor and dry region mainly depending on subsistent farming.

The daily walk for water belongs to the past since the women build a dam in the river, which runs close to their homes. The river used to contain water only a few weeks a year. The water that fell during the rainy seasons flowed very fast to the lower laying Indian Ocean area without being utilised sufficiently by humans and animals. The newly constructed dam slows down the water. Fetching water is a daily chore of just 15 minutes now.

"Since we have constructed the dam we have more time. We have started to grow vegetables, sugar cane, mango and avocado. In the past we only had mais and beans. Now we are able to sell some vegetables and make some money", says Wayuwa Kisengu, one of the women.

The water in the river is meant for drinking and watering the vegetables.

Irrigation on a large scale is not allowed. The women have set up rules and regulations for their available water. Others, who did not help to construct the dam, can fetch water but they have to pay once the amount of 35 American dollars. "The others have to pay us for the hours of hard labor we put in that dam".

With more time on their hands the women have started to make pottery and baskets. With the profits of those products they have bought a wheel barrow and a donkey. Some of the extra time is spend on community discussions. The main issue is how to invest en prosper.

The husbands of the seven work elsewhere in Kenya mostly as casual laborers. They come home once a year. "We do not really need them. Our men are most utterly useless", says Syombua Musya with a twinkle in her eyes.

"We have build that dam without them. We only had some professional help and guidance from Sasol".

The dam has broken the vicious circle of poverty in which the women were caught. Their courage, hard work and planning are slowly paying off. The seven women have plenty of plans and with their natural perseverance it

looks like they are going to accomplish everything.