

SAND DAMS IMPACT ON RURAL URBAN CENTERS: THE CASE OF MBITINI MARKET¹

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Water vendors of Mbitini market have various sources of water depending on the needs of their customers which include quantity required, nature of use and the time of the year. During the wet season, drinking water was sourced from Ilangilo- Kanyululu springs (about 4 km from the market) and scoop holes in Kisiio stream (about 2 km) before the sand dam project. However, water from Kisiio is usually salty. Large quantities of water were sourced from Nzeeu River, which is about 12 km from Mbitini town.

As the dry season encroached, water vendors would fetch both large and small requirements of water from scoop holes along Nzeeu River and Kisiio stream. "Queuing for water and water rationing was a rule", says Munyalo Kang'utu a posho mill operator in Mbitini since 1993. People were allowed to fetch a fixed amount of water in a day. "As the scoop hole became deeper and deeper, some people would queue through out the night in Kisiio stream" adds Munyalo. Due to reduced pressure as household to the east of Mbitini market turn to sand dams, Mwalimu Mwinzi Ndivo, a teacher in Mbitini Primary says Kanyululu springs also provide water during the dry season to household to the west, where the sand dam project was not implemented. "If we could get *Ming'eeto* along Kaveta stream (about 4 km from Mbitini), households to the west would benefit too" advices Mwalimu Ndivo.

Households or groups of related households own scoop holes. Water vendors source water from the scoop holes where their families get water to meet their domestic requirements. However, during the dry season as the water table lowers, water vendors were discouraged from fetching large quantities of water for selling.

Water for building and watering of animal during the dry season was fetched from earth dams among other sources. These dams include Kasung'wa and Kwa Kasoa. Households living near these dams would sometimes use and still use them (dams) as sources of drinking water. However, they complain, as the dams start drying-up, the water becomes greenish and acquires a bad smell even after boiling.

"Nowadays, water is not a problem in Mbitini market and the cost of water has stabilized at Ksh 5/= per 20 litre jerrican during wet and dry season", comments Mzee Mwambu Wa Mwango, a

¹ Interview carried out on 21/01/2002

businessman in Mbitini since 1957. "This is because vendors engage in price competition to capture large market share. Fresh water from Nzeeu river would cost Ksh. 15/=, but with competition from other emerging sources, the price has come down to a maximum of Ksh 10/= per 20 litre jerrican".

Water vending is purely on contractual basis with customers to ensure guaranteed market. Most of the water vendors have specific customers depending on their (customer) requirements and pays at the end of the month. It was noted that every Tea Kiosk makes arrangements with a specific supplier of water at a reasonable price. Large-scale vendors like Mzee Wanyamu Mathuku, sell water from their business premises. Mzee Wanyamu draws water for sale from Nzeeu River using a lorry.

"We make water arrangements with water vendors whom we know and trust", says a Tea Kiosk respondent who sought anonymity. "Our water vendor gets water from Kwa Mung'we sand dam in Kisiio stream. We are afraid, Kwa Nzau sand dam was abused, somebody washed inside that source", she adds. Kwa Nzau sand dam is not yet filled with sand.

Private initiatives aimed at ameliorating water problems were also reported. Some households have build water tanks to take advantage of rainwater while others more resourceful have dug ground wells. Households with excess water from wells are also selling it in Mbitini market. In Mbitini one need to dig about 47 feet to strike water. Mbitini Girls' Secondary School acquired a permanent solution to water problems by digging a private well in 1999. Before this effort, the school owned donkey-pulled cart that was used in drawing water from Nzeeu River.

Another respondent who sought anonymity reported that Kyang'aa sand dam had been privatised. The land adjacent to the sand dam has been bought and fenced by a certain individual (name withheld) who claims that the buying price was inclusive of the cost of sand dam. The land formerly belonged to Chief Mutia wa Muasya. The respondent appealed to the Government or the sponsor to intervene. This is because the sand dam remains a common good as they all participated in its construction and this incident would have a negative bearing in future as far as community participation is concerned.

Farmers along Kisiio stream supply vegetables and fruits in Mbitini market after the sand dam project. The deficit is sourced from Kalundu Market in Kitui town, but the cost has remained low owing to this other alternative source.