

# Forty-six Years of Grassroot Cooperation

*'They leave the comforts of the developed world to live among and work together with local communities, mostly in rural settings, and participate in tackling development challenges. Most of them speak good Kiswahili and some even converse in local dialect'*

## Water Sustainability: Drawing Water From the Hills

Lack of maintenance and sustainability still plagues many development projects in Kenya. Such was the case with Nyambogo/Mwechobori Community Water Project that was initiated by a development agency in Kisii district in 2006. No sooner had the project kicked off than it stalled due to lack of maintenance.

In July 2010, Ms. Risa Manaka, a volunteer working as a Rural Development Officer in Kisii District, embarked on rehabilitation and augmentation of the existing water supply. In her quest for success, she formed a Water Management System through a Water Committee that comprised community members. She then sort finances and bought all the materials required. The community contributed labor for the reconstruction of the water supply.

Through regular community sensitization meetings, community members understood the project well and they actively participated in its reconstruction. The water supply system was further improved with more efficient water distribution systems, elevated tanks and additional communal water points to supply water to a wider community area. The project involves drawing water from the hills which is then stored in reservoir tanks spaced downwards the hills. It has eight communal water fetching points.

During the course of project rehabilitation, Ms. Manaka provided technical guidance and supervised the project from July to completion in December 2010. Ms. Manaka notes with pride, that the easy access to water as a result of the project has spurred economic activities, and improved

health and sanitation of the community members. The old and the young alike are being educated on how to manage the water system. Ms. Manaka further mobilized all households in the community to contribute fifty shillings for construction and a twenty shillings monthly fee for maintenance and future expansion of the project.

The community is now able to meet own water needs, leading to more dignified lives through

*JOCV was founded 46 years ago. The success of the program owes in large part to the efforts of the volunteers themselves, local officials and residents of the developing countries where the volunteers work and to the people of Japan who have supported the program.*

*Under the JOCV program, the volunteers live among the people in the communities where they have been dispatched to work. This enables them to ascertain the development needs of those particular areas and hence work with the local people to contribute to the country's socioeconomic development while making effective use of their abilities and experiences. This has always been JOCV's ideal since inception of the program.*

*Since 1965, over 1420 volunteers have served in various fields in communities across the country mainly at the grassroot level. As of March 2011, JICA had 94 volunteers in the country working in the fields of: HIV/AIDS control, nursing of disabled people, rural development, computer technology, automobile maintenance, environment education, social work and, youth activities, among many more.*



better sanitation, increased economic activities and affordable sustainable solutions that they themselves can maintain.

Mr. Enock Makori, a member of the Water Committee says the benefits of this project can be seen in school children who now enjoy better hygiene. "There has been a notable increase in agricultural activities such as farming and livestock keeping which all mean an increase in the income of community members". Community members are very enthusiastic towards community development and there is now cohesiveness among community members," he adds.



*A farmer enjoys easy access to water from one of the communal water fetching points in Kisi.*

### **Community Development: Empowering Women Attitude Towards Business**

Her name is Ms. Yuki Miyazaki but the women in the different women groups that she works with fondly call her Mwende. 'Mwende' works with the Makueni District Social Development Office as a Rural Development Officer and helping women

groups support themselves in income generation and capacity building. Most of the women groups are involved in making handcrafts e.g. sisal bags, soap making, poultry keeping and beadwork.

Before taking up the work, Ms. Miyazaki relished the job in an area regarded as a hardship area. The main challenge was getting clean water. But the enthusiasm to work with the community did not break the interest of pursuing her activities in the community. She finds herself drawing water from the river and harvesting it from her roof top during the rainy seasons just like many families do. To her joy, she finds the communities very kind and very understanding.

Makueni is known for making handcrafts which offer an unending variety of items, intriguing in form and captivating in beauty. The materials used go through a number of processes, like embroidery, giving expression to the craftsman's skills. Some take time to prepare but the exquisite and vibrant designs combine to make beautiful artifacts. The items made in Makueni are so coveted that they are passed on from generation to generation. However, the community does this in small scale and combines it with farming to supplement their income.

'Mwende' confirms that in order to sell, the products have to be exquisitely made, unique, different from anything else in the market, and be something people want. Her work involves training the women on basic book keeping and business skills, such as assessing market demand, calculating profit margins, and value addition. Most of the times, you'll find her in the field checking on the progress of the businesses the women are running.



*Ms. Miyazaki explains basic business skills to members of a women's group in Makueni.*