

The water company from the Dutch province of Drenthe (WMD) is committed to doing its bit and taking its share of responsibility for the Millennium Development Goals. The Dutch drinking water system is of a high standard and WMD wants to share its know-how and experience with other countries. Providing clean drinking water does not stop at the Dutch borders, certainly not in a world with polluted and contaminated water, too much or not enough water. WMD is currently working in the Indonesian archipelago and in Africa.

Pastoral tribe in charge of water supply

Training with respect for culture and traditions



WATER FOR THE MASAI PEOPLE, KENYA

The pastoral Masai tribes people live in the Kajiado district in the south of Kenya, between the capital Nairobi and the border with Tanzania. In 1997 the Water for the Masai Project was set up, in which WMD and Amref Flying Doctors collaborate. As a result of this collaboration over 60,000 nomadic people and hundreds of thousands of cows, goats, sheep and donkeys now have daily access to clean drinking water within their close surroundings. From 1997 to 2003 over forty water wells were rehabilitated. From 2003 to 2007/2008 a Masai association will be set up to ensure that the Masai are able to take charge of their own water supply after 2007.

Daytime temperatures here rise to over 30 degrees Celsius. Water levels in the rivers vary greatly according to the season. During the rainy season, surface water is contaminated with the excrement of cattle and wild animals. In stagnant creeks and puddles water is contaminated to such an extent that it is unfit for human consumption. Outside of the rainy season there often is no water at all. For a great part of the year most rivers are dry. Occasionally there's not enough water, even during the rainy season, and the Masai and their cattle rely on water wells (if they are working). Many wells have been dug in the past, funded by well-intended donors. But many wells no longer work, as a result of ignorance, poor maintenance or a lack of spare parts. Consequently herdsmen, their wives and children and their cattle often need to walk for miles to reach water.



ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN THE PROJECT

More often than not simply sending money or equipment to developing countries doesn't yield the desired benefits. Like others, the Masai have received free equipment in the past. But when the machinery broke down the donor was nowhere to be seen and it quickly got neglected.

In contrast, the Water for the Masai Project's carefully thought-out formula yields permanent benefits. The Masai pay 25 percent of the cost of diesel engines, pumps and water pipes, giving them responsibility and ownership of the equipment. The Water for the Masai Project pays the remaining 75 percent and all expenses for training, salaries for Amref and car expenses. When a Masai tribe is interested, the project starts with training.

Education and training

The first step is to train the technical staff of Amref Flying Doctors at WMD in the Netherlands. Next, in every tribal village about ten people receive training from WMD and Amref. The tribe is taught how to maintain equipment, carry out minor repairs, collect water charges and to set up a democratically elected water administration, among other things. The following step is that in every village a water administration needs to be created and a bank account set up. Most water administrations consist of ten people, six men and four women. The participation of women is mandatory. The technical staff of Amref will initially stay on for major repairs and maintenance, but they will also train the Masai to take over the entire project at a later date.

Cooperation with the Masai is part of the project as much as the collaboration with Amref, for the Masai are partners in the project. In forty villages the water supply has been rehabilitated. In every one of those villages ten people have been trained as water administrators to maintain the water supply and collect water charges.

The following factors have played a key role in this process:

- Respect for Masai culture and traditions
- Building mutual trust

- Cooperation
- Active participation of women in the project
- Children should be able to go to school as much as possible
- Education and training are the foundation of the project

Umbrella association

In the next few years the Masai will take over the entire project from WMD and Amref, its organisation and its finances. The area the Masai people inhabit can be divided into seven subcultures, each with its own culture and dialect. For every subculture a cluster administration has been established to set up the association and each of those is represented in the umbrella association administration. The seven cluster administrations are the main driving force within the whole set-up. Their representatives are close to the people and are the focal point for the different tribes to get used to each other. Administrations in one cluster are part of the same subculture, sharing a common culture and dialect, but until recently did not work together.

Keeping an eye on things

The Masai first started paying contributions towards the association in 2004. Initially they paid 12 percent of the budget, but that will increase to 100 percent over the next few years. These funds serve to enable the Masai to run the association on their own in the near future, including payments for car expenses, costs for technical staff, stores etc. Amref will continue to keep an eye on things by taking a place in the umbrella association.

