



Kenya embraces Dutch solution for clean water access

Mudavadi: 'This is a gigantic step forward'

"Access to clean drinking water is a fundamental constitutional right", says Deputy Prime Minister Musalia Mudavadi of Kenya, with regard to a new statute passed at the beginning of August. This new statute compels the government to place fundamental human rights such as clean water, shelter and education high on the political agenda.

Text & photography: Brigitte de Swart



We meet the Deputy Prime Minister in Nairobi, during the launch of an ingenious water purification system designed by the Dutch Multi Purpose Industries (MPI). This company is specialized in the sanitation of landfills, the transformation of waste residues into energy and the conversion of contaminated water into clean drinking water.

With the compact Multi Purpose Water Unit the company launches a high tech solution for the global drinking water problems. Starting in

Kenya where water management is still in its infancy, despite the country's economic growth.

Picture:

Deputy Prime Minister Musalia Mudavadi: "The new statute will mean nothing at all if people continue to die from a lack of clean drinking water."

Water crisis

"The local authorities in Kenya, responsible for supplying drinking water, have problems ensuring the provision of clean water", says Musalia Mudavadi. "Believe it or not, but as a minister I still have to buy my own water. Even then I have to keep my fingers crossed that the water I have paid for is indeed clean water. There is a real water crisis here. The solution that MPI offers is a gigantic step forward in ensuring the availability of clean water for all Kenyans. For a very reasonable amount one Multi Purpose Unit can produce up to 60,000 litres of water a day. You can imagine what that would mean for schools and hospitals now struggling with a water shortage. The new statute will mean nothing at all if people continue to die from a lack of clean drinking water."

More than 70% of all hospital admissions are linked in some way to water-related diseases. The shanty-town dwellers, especially women and children, suffer greatly from the lack of clean, safe drinking water. We take a look in Kibera slum, the biggest slum area in East-Africa. From a distance this slum resembles an ant hill, in which the 'ants' are swarming onwards in a criss-cross fashion. Scarcity prevails, especially with regard to healthy food, sanitary facilities and clean drinking water. Outside, in front of one of the numerous corrugated iron shacks that provide shelter to over one million people, a mother wipes her young daughter's bottom. Human excrement is left lying on the ground, amongst all the other waste that litters the area. A little bit further along the same road a young woman breastfeeds her baby. Hygiene clearly doesn't play a role here.



Child mortality



Laetitia van den Assum, the Dutch Ambassador in Kenya, tells us that despite the last few uneasy years, a lot has been done to develop Kenya further. "The country is clearly enjoying economic growth, child mortality has decreased and there is an increase in the numbers receiving primary education. Unfortunately there is not enough being done to ensure that these growth areas benefit each and every Kenyan. For the slum dwellers life is extremely hard, having to live without any facilities at all. Trying to buy a litre of

water with a scarce income, if any at all, is virtually impossible. This makes the situation even more heartbreaking. These people know all too well the benefits of clean drinking water. They just don't have the means to purchase it."

According to Van den Assum the Dutch water unit contributes towards the empowerment of the Kenyans. "Each unit can provide up to ten jobs. This means that the young unemployed -and I hope also women- have the chance to make a new start. This country has a very young population but they have very little chance of employment. Local community involvement makes a big difference. It gives those involved a feeling of responsibility for themselves and others"

The Dutch Ambassador also believes that it is not a coincidence that the key to clean water access has come from the Netherlands. "It sometimes seems like the Dutch have water, instead of blood, running through their veins. Our country's history is dominated by the building of dams to regulate the flow of water, in order to use it and to purify it for the use of the wider community. We are respected as the worldwide leader in this area. The water purification unit demonstrates how strong the combination of Dutch creativity is on the one hand, and the needs and ability of the local population to embrace this new technology on the other hand. Furthermore the price that will be paid for the clean drinking water is a fraction of the cost that people have to pay at present."

Picture:

Dutch Ambassador Laetitia van den Assum: "It sometimes seems like the Dutch have water, instead of blood, running through their veins."

Climate change



"Water is a gigantic problem in Kenya", confirms James Wambua from the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology in Nairobi. "Climate change has repercussions on the availability of water. It is no longer possible to predict the quantity of water available for agricultural and household use. Recently we carried out research here in Nairobi on water usage by small scale farmers. Owing to lack of work, and therefore money, the farmers have to cultivate their own personal crops to feed their family. This can only

take place on vacant government-owned ground. The problem is that the only water available for irrigation on this ground is sewage water, containing large amounts of heavy metals. Our research showed -and this is really shocking- that the amounts of metals in the crops are many times higher than are permitted by the World Health Organization. People are therefore exposed to these poisons and become ill. But what is the alternative if your family is starving?"

Wambua, referring to the Multi Purpose Water Unit, says: "If there is a way to remove the poisonous substances from the water that people use for drinking and cultivating crops, then that will be a great blessing for Kenya. Even just looking at the health costs such a water unit can mean an awful lot to a multitude of people, especially those living in the slums. This water is even much cleaner than the bottled water in the shops."

Picture:

James Wambua from the Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology: "This water is even much cleaner than the bottled water in the shops."



International conflicts



It is expected that clean drinking water, also known as the 'blue gold', will lead to international conflicts in the not too distant future. According to Jennifer Shamalla, Country Coordinator of the Pan African Strategic and Peace Research Group, this is already happening on a small scale. "On the micro-level communities are fighting amongst themselves in order to gain access to clean water. Especially in a country such as Kenya where there are, on the one hand, local cattle breeding communities and on the other hand, arable farming communities. The arable farmers need enough water and land to grow their crops; the cattle farmers have their eyes on fertile grazing land. This causes conflicts between the two types of communities, whilst clean drinking water is a fundamental right for everyone"

Any solution that can end these conflicts and help empower people is more than welcome, according to Shamalla. "This is especially important for women, who are often seen as the underdogs of society. For them life becomes a vicious circle. To move forward and to be able to stand up for your rights, you need economic empowerment. So it is often a matter of what comes first: the chicken or the egg? You can be aware of your rights, but without economic empowerment there's little you can do to demand those rights."

Picture:

Jennifer Shamalla, Country Coordinator of PanAfric: "This is especially important for women, who are often seen as the underdogs of society."

Development



The Kenyan Lornah Kiplagat, four times world athletic champion, sees the Dutch water unit concept as 'the light at the end of the tunnel'. "It is not only about clean drinking water. We are talking about health, empowerment and development of the country. The more people receive safe and clean water, the healthier the population becomes. I am convinced that the Kenyans will greatly welcome the water unit."

The top athlete, who lives both in the Netherlands and in Kenya, is planning to contribute to the development of her country of origin by starting her own 'Lornah Kiplagat Sports Academy'. The aim of the academy will be to improve and develop the sporting abilities of young underprivileged Kenyan girls, as well as providing a good quality education. Once the finances have been arranged, building will commence in 2011 in a place close to Iten. MPI has already promised to place a water unit at the sports academy. "I feel honoured to receive such a pledge", says Kiplagat. "This will definitely contribute to the social awareness of these girls, the future mothers of Kenya."

Picture 5:

Lornah Kiplagat, four times world athletic champion: "It is not only about clean drinking water. We are talking about health, empowerment and development of the country."

Facts & figures



- One Multi Purpose Water Unit produces 60,000 litres of water per day and provides 12,000 people with 5 litres of drinking water every day.
- The golden formula lies in the decentralization of water supply, the innovative treatment of polluted surface water (fresh *and* salt) and the low cost of water.

Picture 6 One Multi Purpose Water Unit produces 60,000 litres of water per day and provides 12,000 people with 5 litres of drinking water every day.



- Furthermore decentralized water supply units prevent high investments in new infrastructure.
- The unit also prevents water related diseases, resulting in a reduction of medical costs.
- It is equally important that the local community is involved in the maintenance of the unit, as well as in the sales and distribution of the water. This is to ensure sustainability.
- The total investment to start one Micro Water Company (building the water technology, service, maintenance, training and local management) amounts to € 150,000. These MWC's will be created together with local entrepreneurs.
- Multi Purpose Industries' goal is to provide one million people in Kenya with clean drinking water within one year, through governments, business to business and franchising.
- Target spin-off effects: knowledge transfer, employment, boosting local economies and extra boosts to agriculture.
- There is a TV documentary available about the launching of the Multi Purpose Water Unit in Kenya. For more information please contact Robbert Frank Hagens of the 1We-TV Positive Media Group, +31 6 53437891 or robbert@1we.com.
- For more information about MPI Clean Water and the Micro Water Companies please contact Michèl Evers, +31 6 20506614 or m.evers@mpi-group.eu



Picture:

From a distance Kibera slum resembles an ant hill, in which the 'ants' are swarming onwards in a criss-cross fashion.

Information

www.1we.com

To find out more about how you can support this initiative of MWCs, please get in touch with:

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