

SDC IMPROVES RURAL WATER SUPPLY SYSTEMS IN HAITI:

„YOU HAVE TO BE HANDS-ON IF YOU WANT TO DRINK CLEAN WATER EVERYDAY“



Women and children meet up at a water kiosk in Janen, La Chappelle

Access to clean drinking water and basic sanitation is an essential human right and one of the key components of public health. This was demonstrated in dramatic form by the cholera epidemics following the earthquake in Haiti. The SDC, together with the development organisation Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation, carried out pioneer work in building supply systems in rural areas run by local communities. By 2015, 36,000 people living in precarious conditions in the municipalities of Verrettes, La Chapelle and Savanette will be provided with access to drinking water, basic sanitation and latrines.

In Haiti, drinking water can be bought at kiosks. A simple hut and two taps are the pride of the rural community of Janen, a district of La Chapelle in the Artibonite Department, the rice bowl of Haiti.

Members of the community committee take it in turns to ensure that water is distributed in an orderly fashion from the municipality's own water network. This committee is responsible for the maintenance

and operation of the whole system. The families of those who do not adhere to the strictly regulated opening hours will be left with nothing. But those that queue at the right time with their plastic bucket and also pay a contribution equal to US\$ 25 every week to the water committee need not worry about their water supply.

Before the water supply system was installed, the village had great difficulty in obtaining drinking water, says Olamène Charles, 35-year old mother of three children. She lives in Janen, where with



**For Olamène Charles the water kiosk means more security:
No more fights over water.**

the help of the SDC and Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation, the village community has built its own water system, which it operates itself. „The only water point we had before was not enough to supply water to everyone. It was even harder to have access to the water point during the dry seasons when the flow of water was very weak. Often the water point was monopolised by the first to come along and then it was the law of the jungle,” remembers Olamène. Today she is especially glad that water is available all year round, even in the dry period and that it is always safe to drink. „Now we are safe from infections transmitted by using contaminated water,” she adds.



The project supports the authorities in the construction of a functioning water system at both local and national levels, says Clervil Henrissaint, representative of the local water authorities in Artibonite.

THE WAKE-UP CALL OF CHOLERA

The cholera epidemic that ravaged Haiti in 2010, made the authorities and the population realise the importance of a regularly monitored water supply that works all year round. The cholera pathogen is most frequently spread by water contaminated with faeces. In Haiti, a country where people often practise open defecation, the epidemic spread with lightning speed: 700,000 people were infected and 8,570 died. Olamène Charles is convinced that her village was only spared from cholera because the water supply was working well here and nobody went to get water

from the nearby river:“ We had to watch my mother suffer from cholera. She lives in a neighbouring community. I was really afraid she was going to die.”

RELIEF FOR GIRLS AND WOMEN

The water kiosk in Janen has made life easier for the young women in particular. Traditionally, they are responsible for the provision of water and often have to carry heavy buckets over long distances. Fifteen year-old Wadeline Pierre is relieved that today a water kiosk is in operation opposite her house: „Water is available the whole time. I no longer have backache due to the weight of the bucket and I'm less tired in class which means that I have been able to improve my marks at school.”

37 year-old Maude Mondesir, Janen's water committee treasurer, can also see changes: „The availability of services supplying water and sanitation are starting to transform people's living conditions. Now there are almost no arguments between the community members.” The relief for women is particularly noticeable: „Now that it's easy to have access to water, the women have more time for their families or for some of them for their small businesses. The young girls also have more spare time to concentrate on their education.”

The water projects place particular emphasis on involving women more in the operation and maintenance of the systems and on their active participation in the administration committees. This has

SDC WATER PROJECTS AND THE NATIONAL REFORM AGENDA

With the help of the SDC, by 2015, 36,000 people living in precarious conditions in the municipalities of Verrettes and La Chapelle (Bas-Artibonite) as well as Savanette (lower Central Plateau) should have access to drinking water, sanitation and latrines. At the same time preparations are being made to hand over the drinking water systems to local distributors.

When carrying out its water projects, the SDC works in close cooperation with DINEPA, which was established by law in 2009. The aim of this dialogue is to make the experience gained in the projects in Verrettes, La Chapelle and Savanette available to the national reform agenda so that the water supply can be improved throughout the country. The public authorities should be reinforced so that they are increasingly able to provide decentralised services in the future.

already proved to be successful. Since 2011 the share of women responsible for water distribution at the kiosks has risen from 42% to 48%. More women are members of water committees. Their involvement has risen from 33% to 54%. Whereas before committee presidents were all male, today already 10% of committees have a woman at the helm. The position of treasurer has become female-dominated. In the newly-founded committees, treasurers are today exclusively female.

DRINKING WATER IS NOT FREE

Personal responsibility is important in the supply of drinking water to rural areas. The Haitian water expert Mathias Pierre has been working for Helveta Swiss Intercooperation for years. It is very important to him that once built, a water system should function for years to come: „The active participation of communities is essential to the long life of the system. Priority is therefore given to communities showing a strong desire to participate in both the building work and the maintenance.“ In the rural communities, before building starts on wells, reservoirs and pipelines, project members first conduct a feasibility study in which the resident population also takes

part. Before the first sod is turned, the future beneficiaries must sign an agreement that they do not see the water as a gift but are prepared to pay for it. Two payments have to be made in advance. Communities have to make a contribution, starting with the building work. This is usually five to ten percent of the building costs and consists of labour and materials as well as contributions in the form of money.

Without the Water Supply and Sanitation Committees (CAEPA), neither construction nor the subsequent operation and maintenance can take place. The committee members – usually seven of them – are elected by the villagers. Mathias Pierre explains: „The committees represent the users with regard to the authorities. Their main role is to manage the water systems including the maintenance of water sources, reservoirs and kiosks.

Furthermore they are responsible for raising awareness among the population in terms of protecting water sources and paying for the water supply.“ The water committees are accountable to the entire village community, submitting income and expenditure statements every six months.

CHLORINE AGAINST CHOLERA

To combat cholera, the SDC supports DINEPA by monitoring and improving the water quality throughout Haiti. The „Hypo-chlor“ chlorination system, developed and patented in Haiti, has been successfully implemented in 59 rural water supply systems to date. The water quality is monitored locally by technicians who send the results by text message to the regional centres so that any corrective measures necessary can be taken.



One of the water committees' main tasks is to treat water with chlorine to protect it from cholera and other pathogens.



Testing the water's chlorine content



Women have their say in the local water committees. Thanks to the protection of the source and the plantation of trees Janen's source has multiplied by four its amount of water.

SELF-FINANCING AS LONG-TERM OBJECTIVE

The long-term objective of all drinking water projects supported by the SDC in Haiti is the sustainable self-financing of the operation and maintenance of the systems. On average, users are financing just 25% of their operating costs.

In Haiti's rural areas, the municipal administrations have neither the necessary technical know-how nor the financial means to build and run drinking water systems. The experience gained during the realisation of the project should enable the authorities to develop a strategy for the water services sector and to set rates for the drinking water supply to rural areas.



Wadeline Pierre at the water kiosk: Less water carrying means more time for the family.

Experience has shown the importance of setting up water committees from the beginning of the project: „The process of setting up the CAEPAs is started before building work begins so that the future users understand their involvement in carrying out the work as well as their role in managing and running the system,” says Mathias Pierre. It is also important to carry out thorough technical clarifications prior to the project's implementation. They are conducted with the municipal administration, the municipal district administration council (CASEC), as well as local representatives of the central authorities and the village residents. The plans are based on the water resources available which are compared with the population's needs. Priorities are then made and the various networks and taps distributed over the municipal area. The central government's office for drinking water and sanitation (DINEPA) provides support to rural municipalities by means of qualified municipal drinking water and sanitation technicians (TEPACs).

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