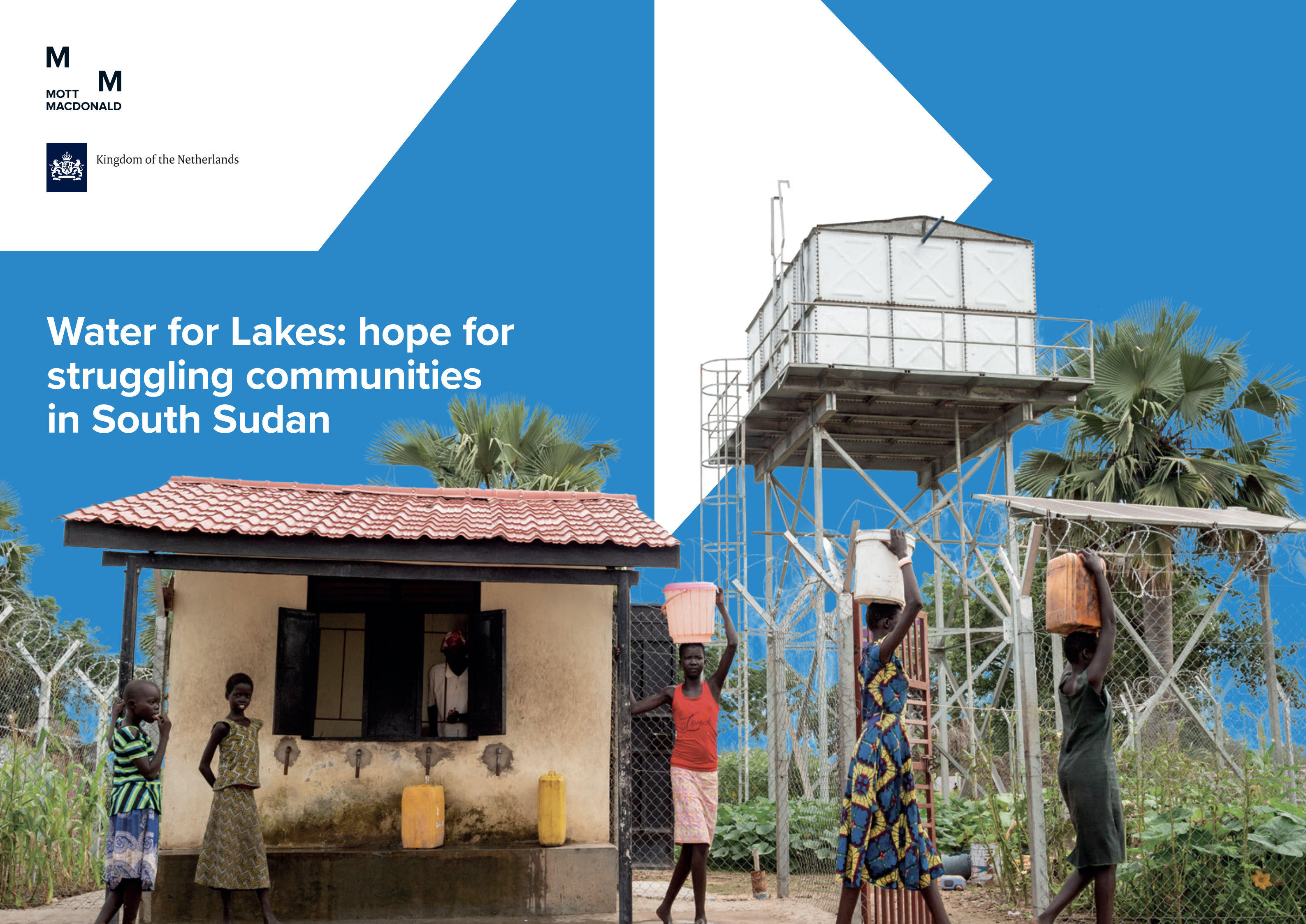


Water for Lakes: hope for struggling communities in South Sudan



Introduction

Despite its name, many communities in the Greater Lakes region of South Sudan lack easy access to water. The Water for Lakes (WfL) programme is putting water management in the hands of the people who rely on this precious resource for their health and livelihoods. Providing access to water is the first step to economic growth and improved health, helping to reduce tension and conflict in the region.

Mott MacDonald is implementing WfL, a multi-year initiative funded by the Government of the Netherlands in the three states of South Sudan's Greater Lakes region – Gok, Eastern Lakes and Western Lakes. Local government specialist VNG International is supporting the programme.

By working closely with local communities, the programme is demonstrating the potential of economic development as tool against aid dependency and conflict.



A key goal of WfL is to stimulate economic development and improve livelihoods by unlocking the potential of integrated development and management of land and water resources for agriculture and livestock. Its other main objective is to improve health by providing access to safe water, sanitation and better nutrition.

The programme has three main components:

- Water for economic development
- Safe water and improved sanitation
- Integrated water resources management

The WfL team has demonstrated enormous commitment to improving the livelihoods of the people in Greater Lakes despite the backdrop of poor security and challenging logistics. We have developed an effective programme, focused not only on the provision of hardware – water yards and boreholes with hand pumps – but also one that empowers communities to take responsibility for sustainable water provision. We do this through technical training and by helping communities to develop income-generating activities. Before WfL, as many as 1200 people would use one borehole. Now the average is 650, shortening time spent on fetching water, something that really benefits women and girls, who are the main fetchers and carriers.

We work with local organisations to develop the capacity of communities to manage and maintain water by helping to establish user committees and providing members with appropriate training. The revenue gained from local water users is invested back into maintaining the facilities as well as into the community through a Village Association. These offer low interest loans, stimulating the economy surrounding water facilities. Communities are also trained in personal hygiene and safe water handling, helping to reduce disease and illness.

Every month, our team visits 550 new and rehabilitated water points, offering mentoring to members of the local community. More than two-thirds (68%) of communities involved in WfL are considered proactive and almost 300 have started income-generating activities, such as vegetable growing, keeping goats and opening small businesses, including a bakery.

The images and stories on the following pages focus on the component of WfL.



Improved access to water helps to wage war on hunger

“If WfL can provide facilities, people will migrate to this productive land because people follow water.”

I travelled widely after becoming a soldier in 1979 at the age of 17: Egypt, Yemen, Iraq, Libya and France. When I returned to Khartoum from Iraq in 1983 I joined the rebelling Sudan People's Liberation Army in the bush.

I didn't go back to Khartoum until 2005 when the peace agreement was signed to end the second Sudanese civil war, paving the way for a referendum on independence for the south.

During the conflict two of my children were murdered. My wife escaped with the other but eventually she was forcibly married and my child died of natural causes. It was the most painful time of my life.

I rebuilt my life in Rumbek East. I have remarried and have more children. Now I am the chairperson of the water user committee. People have been fighting over water in this area since our grandfathers were children. They fought over shallow wells and pools of water and many were killed. This doesn't happen now. We don't need to fight over water.

WfL has resolved the region's water-related problems and our lives have improved. We rate it as the number one project working in Greater Lakes. Other organisations have given us food, oil and cows but, in the absence of water, they are worthless.

As soon as WfL provided water facilities we started to farm vegetables, including carrots, cabbage and okra, and I planted mango, pawpaw and guava trees. We could do these things only because we had access to water.

There are areas where the water supply needs to be extended so that more people can produce food. Many areas cannot scale up production because they have no access to water. For people to achieve a higher standard of living there is a need for water in farming and rural areas. If WfL can provide facilities, people will migrate to this productive land because people follow water. If we can achieve full access to water it will be very easy for the community of Lakes state to wage war on hunger.

Peter Monyde Mourater
Chair, water user committee

Empowering women in South Sudan

“When I gain financial stability I will complete my studies, get a job and a better life. I hope for a bright future for my children.”

I was brought up in the cattle camps in Tonj, 150km from Rumbek where I have lived with my husband since 2000. We experienced a terrible life in Tonj, sleeping on the ground and drinking milk to survive.

I begged my parents to send me to school and they agreed. My mother ran a small business distilling alcohol and that is how she paid the fees.

When I was 16, my father forced me to marry a man of 35. This is the South Sudanese culture: a girl can be married by any man, anywhere. When forced to marry early, one cannot manage a successful life. It is still difficult for me now, at 35, bringing up my five children aged between two and 15. The eldest is a girl. I hope she will go to university. She will never be forced to marry because my husband and I understand the value of education.

My husband has a university degree but is unemployed because there are no job opportunities here. I have managed to find a job helping part-time in a school.

The area used to rely on agriculture: people would farm and feed themselves from what they produced. But the inter-clan conflict has made farming difficult. Now women are the ones who have to farm out in the villages because men are scared of being killed.

Few women in South Sudan have professional or skilled jobs; they tend to be casual workers. Yet women have many more responsibilities than men. That is why it is important to educate them; when you educate a woman, you educate the whole nation. It is good for women to be empowered and given equal opportunities with men. Educated women can change the community in a broader perspective than uneducated women. We must be educated in order to promote national development and unity.

WfL is helping women not to be left behind. The organisation has improved the capacity of women through training, preparing them for future roles and responsibilities. We now have access to clean water and can sustain and manage our water facilities at community level. WfL has trained everyone, from children to elders, in how to practise good hygiene.

My role is to create good hygiene practices and awareness from household to household in our area. The challenge that I face is a lack of knowledge and understanding from those I try to teach. However, when I persevere it does make a difference. Transmissions of disease as a result of poor hygiene and water handling have reduced.

I hope that WfL will continue to work with women, and extend its programmes to empower us more. When I gain financial stability I will complete my studies, get a job and a better life. I hope for a bright future for my children.

Susana Abual Bol
Community hygiene trainer





“When WfL ends the community will be able to operate themselves. This is the future I’m seeing.”

Access to clean water becomes a sustainable reality

AYU is one of 11 community support organisations working on WfL. We cover two counties: Rumbek East, which has 80 boreholes, and Rumbek Centre, which has 52. By the end of programme, almost 750 boreholes will have been created or rehabilitated in the Greater Lakes region.

Every month we go out for different activities. Those might be water user committee meetings, training or hygiene promotion. WfL has a different style of project management, working locally so the community can take charge. Before there was no one to carry out repairs when the facilities broke down, so people were forced to return to using unclean surface water. WfL has drilled and rehabilitated facilities and provided training to repair them. Everyone has access to clean water now.

One of my roles is to form water user committees. These are made up of five people and take charge of the facilities. They collect money for repairs and maintenance from users, invest in local businesses and establish by-laws with their communities that will govern the boreholes. We routinely monitor the committees and continue to work with them for a year before they ‘graduate’ and become independent. Not all of them do well to begin with. But we found that an effective way to help them to improve is to pair weaker committees with stronger ones.

Hygiene training with women has had a big impact locally. We teach things like the importance of using clean water containers, hand washing, safe disposal of waste, and the causes of diarrhoea. We also encourage the use of latrines.

People are starting to adapt. Before, most didn’t use soap to wash their hands and people would go to the toilet in the open, near water sources. They are now starting to build latrines and implement some of these hygiene changes.

Now that people have access to clean drinking water it leaves them time to do other things. People have started small businesses such as vegetable farms, often around the boreholes.

Most of the people running these businesses are women, and women are seeing a big impact, both economically and socially. Generally in South Sudan women are kept at a lower position but, when you look at the WfL management, especially the committees, most of them are run by women. This gives them a sense of leadership. Some of these women used to be shy but now, through WfL, they are trained, they take charge of the facilities and become stronger people. You even see that they are able to challenge men.

The WfL programme has given people a sense of ownership of their water. They can take charge of their own facilities and can stand on their own. When the programme ends the community will be able to operate themselves. This is the future I’m seeing.

Mayan Chol
Lead trainer, community support organisation

Access to water affects children's access to education

So far WfL has drilled more than 250 boreholes in the region and rehabilitated 393. The programme has also created 19 water yards.

I have received training from WfL in managing and supervising, in database and data collection and also in training water pump mechanics. The capacity I gain from them, I implement to the community. I supervise ongoing work and make sure that it is completed to our standards.

WfL is different from other programmes I have come across. First, it involves government officials, and this adds a layer of sustainability. We will be able to continue once the project is finished. Second, previous NGOs just dug a borehole and then left without training anyone to use it. WfL works with the community so that they can run their own facilities. People also receive training to understand the ownership of the water and the facility. The facility is not for WfL, not for the government of South Sudan, it is for them as a community.

Many things have improved since WfL started working here. Disease levels are reducing and fewer people suffer from diarrhoea and guinea worm. WfL has improved the health of our community.

Economically as well, we are able to see changes. When agricultural areas are able to irrigate, communities can grow more food, sell more food, improve their soil and parents can afford school fees for their children. These things did not happen before.

Joseph Amal
Deputy water commissioner, Greater Lakes

“The facility is not for WfL, not for the government of South Sudan, it is for the community.”



Community savings and loan scheme brings prosperity, unity and co-operation

“For myself, I feel empowered, strong and responsible enough to cater for my children. The VSLA has improved my life because now I have a hope for something.”

My daily life in Akuach village, near Rumbek, relies on farming, but I am also a priest and have a small business baking cakes. I have six boys and a girl, some of whom live here with me, but some live with my husband in Uganda. His sister is caring for him there as he recovers from an attack carried out while he was looking for food. So it is up to me now to provide for our family.

Life was so difficult when we started our household. You can see the scars on the palms of my hands from where I used to pound grain, dig and fetch water from far away. But now there are boreholes available thanks to WfL; I even have a water hand pump near my compound and I’ve planted fruits and vegetables. Diseases have reduced as a result of access to clean water because people can wash their hands and utensils, and there are latrines with soap.

The idea behind the Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) is that, by saving money as a group, you will be able to do something better financially. We were trained on how to set up the group, how to operate it and how to work together. We have a welfare fund, to which we all contribute so we can support each other in times of trouble. We also have a fund for loaning with interest, which is how I started my business.

The VSLA set-up is very good for women. Most women here have suffered trauma; they might be widows or married but financially vulnerable because their husbands are not earning.

Before the VSLA was formed they used to borrow from traders, but if they couldn’t pay back the money – with interest – they would end up in prison. Now women can borrow as much as they need without fear. No one among us is left to suffer financially. The VSLA has brought unity and co-operation among women, which is why we see that they are happy and dancing.

For myself, I feel empowered, strong and responsible enough to cater for my children. The VSLA has improved my life because now I have a hope for something. I can pay school fees and feed my children, and took a loan to get medical treatment for my youngest child who had malaria.

Many people, but especially the men, did not support this programme when it started. They said it was a waste of time and all we did was meet and drink tea together. But they have seen what we have achieved. Now I can tell these men that by joining the VSLA group they can improve their lives and provide for their children.

In the future I hope my business will have grown enough to move to town from the outskirts. I hope to build a kiosk to sell basic groceries and, of course, I will keep baking cakes.

Martha Anger Abendego Thuc
Group member, Village Savings and Loans Association



“Water is basically life. You have to drink it, cook with it, wash with it; I can’t imagine life without water.”

When water is provided, you start to see development

As a South Sudanese government water engineer on secondment, my role is usually concerned with determining the need for water, arranging contractors to drill the boreholes, and supervising and paying them.

Sustainability is very important because you cannot supply water once and expect to be done. Boreholes break down; they need to be repaired. The numbers need to keep growing to support the population.

We focus on selecting technologies that are sustainable for supplying water to the communities. I also work in community-led sanitation improvement. We train people to sustainably lead the process of improving their own sanitation.

Our main technologies are boreholes with hand pumps and water yards. We decide what to create based on the need and the situation of the water. There is a lot more potential in a water yard – it can supply up to 40,000l/d of water, 10 times more than a borehole, and can support cultural activities as well as livestock. In more densely populated areas they can serve more people than a borehole could. One water yard can serve 1000 households – and we have on average seven people per household here. At about 20 years, the life span of a water yard is longer than a borehole too.

The WfL focus on monitoring is very important. Since the project started we’ve been training water user committees and preparing them to own the facilities. There is monitoring of the committees every month. I don’t think any other project is doing it quite like this. Of 2000 boreholes in Greater Lakes region, WfL has so far directly handled more than 640 of them; the numbers really are quite huge.

It is so important to give communities access to water. Water is basically life. You have to drink it, cook with it, wash with it; I can’t imagine life without water. On another level, it is a tool for economic development, livestock, farming and businesses. When water is provided you start to see development in the country.

I hope WfL will keep on expanding. I think we need to increase the number of boreholes by about 30%. To put it into perspective, the need can never be satisfied because water is so important. As you get to know how important it is, the different ways it can be used become available. The need for water always expands. It is exponential.

Sunday Benjamin
Water engineer





“We used to spend recklessly and just push on with life without planning. We are much more careful now. We have hope.”

Savings and loans groups bring hope to struggling communities

I grew up in Rumbek East and moved to Wau with my husband in the 1980s just as the civil war was intensifying. People were being pulled out of their houses and killed, so we left for Khartoum with the one child I had then, my sisters, brothers and cousins, all 18 of us. I had five more children in Khartoum.

We had a great life. My husband was a lecturer and then vice-chancellor at the university. I had a small business running a private restaurant at a school but mostly I took care of the children and the household.

Everything changed when my husband had a stroke. He could no longer work, he didn't recognise anyone or talk and was paralysed. He was sick for 16 years before he died. I decided in 2005 to move back to Rumbek to be closer to my relatives.

Catering for six children isn't easy. When we got back here I sold our belongings and bought goats and cows so that I could sell the young ones when we needed money. We share our shelter with cows, and plant pumpkins, okra and groundnuts for our survival. But our habit as the Dinka people is to say “if I have something little like that pumpkin I am surviving well”.

My two older daughters are studying at the University of Juba and I'm sponsoring them. I sent my two younger girls to Juba as well when security got very bad here. I send money whenever I can.

It was good news when the VSLA started. A group of 25 members was formed and chose me as leader. I felt valued and I started to value myself more.

My role is to take care of the money after saving, approve loans, keep an eye on when loans need to be paid back and maintain proper records of money going in and out. I can work for the people: if there is something missing in the community I can contribute to make it better. I can help other people to realise their own value. There are noticeable improvements for women in the area. If a child needs a doctor, the parents don't have to find something to sell; we can lend them money from the group savings.

Thanks to WfL, women don't have to travel far to fetch water. There is less diarrhoea, less vomiting. We wash our hands with soap and have dug latrines so waterborne diseases have reduced.

This support from the VSLA programme has improved the way of living because we can plan and know there is capital available. The VSLA training has stimulated us to be creative in terms of business. We used to spend recklessly and just push on with life without planning. We are much more careful now. We have hope.

Susan Akuach Majok
Chairperson, Village Savings and Loans Association

Building skills and communities in Rumbek

I've been working in and around the water facilities in Rumbek since 2007, first for the government, then with Oxfam and now with WfL. Working with WfL has really improved my life; I have more money, better tools and I work better with the community.

“Now my family don't have to go to sleep without food like they did before. I can supply all that they need.”

I moved here from a cattle camp. Life there was hard because there was not enough grass for the cows in the dry season, so they did not produce milk and we made no money. My friend told me to come to Rumbek because cattle farming was not a good life. Cattle would be raided, others would die of hunger. He told me Rumbek would save my life.

I worked for the government for a few years collecting user fees for hand pumps and boreholes. Then I was trained as a pump mechanic and started repairing boreholes. I joined WfL and learned even more about the mechanics of pumps as well as how to repair platforms. Alongside members of our local community support organisation (CSO) I also received training in how to mobilise the whole community. WfL has really improved my life and built up my skills.

I work with a team of three responsible for 150 boreholes in Rumbek East. Each day we visit boreholes checking for problems, doing routine maintenance to prevent breakages and carrying out repairs.

During the rainy season we don't need to repair so many boreholes – on average 20 a month. But in the dry season it is between 40-50 as people migrate into town, which puts pressure on the water facilities.

The community is responsible for paying us. They pay me 10 times more than the government did. They are also much more prompt at payment. Sometimes I would have to wait up to four months for the government to settle.

I'm very involved with the community, who give me a lot of support. The local CSO that is involved in the WfL project introduces me to all the groups and people who manage the facilities. They know to call on me when there is a problem. They respect me, and I trust them. Sometimes they don't have enough to pay me there and then so they need to do so in instalments. I'm happy to do this because I know they will settle and it means local people can keep taking water.

I love WfL because the project has improved my life a lot. The organisation gave me a bicycle and tools to make it much easier to do my job. Now my family don't have to go to sleep without food like they did before. I can supply all that they need.

Isaac Manyac
Water pump mechanic





Provision of water yard means no one needs to fight over water

“I like this job because I am helping to save my community.”

I’ve lived in Rumbek most of my life. When I was very small I was in a cattle camp but then my family moved to town. I have worked at the water yard since it opened in 2016 and my community chose me to run it.

Before the water yard came into being life was hard; people were thirsty. There were a few boreholes but there was a lot of conflict surrounding them. It was mostly children who were sent to collect the water. But the older ones would beat off the younger ones, and then the mothers would get involved. They would fight over the water because it was limited. Now there is no conflict and there is plenty of water. There were a lot of diseases then because people were using dirty surface water. Vomiting, diarrhoea, itching. Since this facility was installed those sicknesses and conditions have disappeared.

The community here chose me to be trained by WfL to run the yard. They chose me because I am trustworthy and I have good relationships with people. I was trained how to open, take care of and run the facility, how to troubleshoot and detect problems, and when to call someone for help.

I open each day from 7am to 7pm. It is mainly women and young girls who collect water from here. I sell between 50 and 60 jerry cans of water a day for five South Sudanese pounds each – about US\$0.04. I take the money to the treasurer of the water user committee and the committee pays my salary out of that. I hope we can use some of the money to set up a small shop at the water yard, selling essentials so that people don’t always need to travel to the market. I have planted a small vegetable garden here. I sell some of the produce to make money and the rest helps to feed my family at home.

I like this job because I am helping to save my community. I think life around here will continue to change and improve because of clean water.

Joseph Lieny Dok
Water yard operator



