

Press release
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Financially self-sustaining and inclusive social entrepreneurial approach provides access to safe water in Kenya

To mark World Water Day (March 22), Siemens Stiftung releases a new study: “Leveraging decentralized entrepreneurial approach to safe water supply: A comprehensive study on safe water kiosks and their impact in rural Kenya”, highlighting the role of social enterprises in providing access to safe drinking water. Access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene remains a distant reality for 40% of the world’s population (United Nations), hitting women and girls the most (UNICEF/WHO).

The study focuses on Kenya where only a third of the population has unrestricted access to drinking water. Achieving universal water supply across the entire country by 2030 requires an estimated 22 billion USD; only half of this funding is currently available to the government. Developing and sustaining rural infrastructure poses a significant financial challenge. Against this backdrop, the private sector, particularly locally anchored social enterprises, have emerged as a crucial contributor to reducing the water supply deficit.

Siemens Stiftung and SkyJuice Foundation launched a model project Safe Water Enterprise (SWE), locally known as Maji Safi in 2012 to operate a local social business model to provide access to safe drinking water at an affordable price. The study highlights that compared to traditional water supply systems, decentralized kiosk models are more cost-efficient in providing safe water to rural communities. Currently, there are eleven water kiosks in seven counties located in central, western, and coastal regions of Kenya; so far, they have supplied over 48 million liters of safe drinking water to 6,608 households serving over 33,000 people.

Community-anchored social business model

Since 2022, SWE entered into partnerships either with county governments or water service providers to supply safe water in their locality under the Water Act 2016. The study unpacks how the entrepreneurial and decentralized approach led to a stable, secure, and sustainable supply of safe drinking water. “The entire community is involved at all stages of the project; they are empowered to operate an economically self-sufficing enterprise with annual growth rates in the double-digit percentage range in some cases. The kiosks supply water at affordable prices and still manage to generate sufficient income to cover operating costs, repairs, and maintenance. They create jobs and boost supplementary economic activities like restaurants, salons, and water delivery services”, says Terry Adhiambo, community member, Sondu.

Gender inclusive model

In Kenya, women and girls bear the burden of water management for households. Lack of access to safe water and sanitation deprives girls of their potential, undermines their well-being, and perpetuates cycles of poverty. “Now women and girls don’t need to go out in the dark to fetch drinking water from far-off or crocodile-infested water sources as they have access to safe drinking water at their disposal, resulting in better health conditions and reduced cases of gender-based violence. They have more time to engage in other productive activities like

concentrating on their education and participating in the economic opportunities generated by SWE,” says Joyce Onyach, Treasurer, Lower Nyatike Water User Association.

World Water Day 2024 focuses on collaborative actions to improve water infrastructure, enhance water governance, and promote dialog and cooperation among stakeholders to balance the needs of all individuals.

“Safe water is a human right, a stabilizing force, and a catalyst for sustainable development. This was at the heart of launching the Safe Water Enterprise project. We joined forces with local authorities, community organizations, districts, NGOs, and local implementing partners to ensure that no one is left behind. The study showcases that access to clean water has led to the overall productivity and well-being of the community. It is a strong testimony to how an enabling environment and community engagement can pave the way for the Sustainable Development Goal of ensuring safe drinking water and hygiene for all”, explains Dr. Nina Smidt, Managing Director, and Spokesperson of the Board of Directors at Siemens Stiftung.

Environmental preservation

The water kiosks require low but reliable technology. SWE uses membrane fiber filter technology, which is cost-efficient, independent of electricity, and suitable for use in rural locations for water supply at the community level. A filter can purify up to 10,000 liters of water per day. Locals have also planted vegetation around the kiosks that can contribute to moderating temperatures and create microclimates, making the surrounding area more hospitable for farming activities and enhancing biodiversity. They are aware of the impact of climate change on water sources and proactively contribute to the conservation of the surrounding environment.

If you want to learn more about the study and our project in Kenya, get in touch with Christine Meinhardt, Senior Project Manager, Siemens Stiftung:
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You can download the report here:
issuu.com/siemensstiftung/docs/study-onwaterkiosks-kenya

Siemens Stiftung

As a non-profit foundation, Siemens Stiftung is committed to sustainable social development. We focus on three topic areas: Access to Essential Services, Connected Societies, and Climate & Sustainability. Adopting a proactive approach, we shape the transformations required to tackle these challenges. By working with partners from the fields of Education, Social Entrepreneurship, and Arts & Culture, we strengthen collective learning and locally based, sustainable structures. Our projects and networks focus on Africa, Europe, and Latin America.
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