

IT ALL BEGINS WITH  
*water*

**CHICKENS, BEANS AND BIG *dreams***

## IT ALL BEGINS WITH WATER

### How Sustainable Access Sparks Community Transformation in West Pokot

In the communities of West Pokot, Kenya, lasting transformation starts with one essential resource: water. Through long-term partnership and community-led development, CWS supports families as they move from water access to sanitation to thriving livelihoods.

#### From Water Access to Community Health

When we think about transformation in a community, it's easy to notice the visible things first—gardens full of greens, chickens clucking in the yard, women running savings groups and building new livelihoods. But in West Pokot, Kenya, I was reminded that none of these successes happen on their own. They all begin with one essential gift, water: reliable, accessible, sustainable water.

In the village of Kachereta, we met Susan and witnessed the very beginning of this journey—a sand dam newly built with guidance from CWS and our partner Yang'at. At first glance, it looks simple: a concrete wall across a seasonal riverbed. But in reality, a sand dam is a lifeline. When the rains come, it will capture layers of water-rich sand behind it, creating a year-round reservoir filtered naturally through the sand itself.

Today, women and girls in this community still walk three hours each way to collect water. But soon, they'll only walk 200 yards—a change that means girls can attend school, women can work in their gardens, and families can live with dignity rather than exhaustion.

This is where the CWS workflow begins, and it's not a passive process. CWS provides the technical expertise, concrete and rebar—but the community builds the dam with their own hands. They gather stones, haul sand, and organize themselves into a working group that will steward not just the dam, but every future development step. In building a dam, they also build unity, leadership and confidence. They build the capacity to take the next step.

For the village, the next step after securing a sustainable water source is sanitation. CWS works with communities to teach the importance of latrines, safe water handling and handwashing—crucial steps in reducing diarrheal disease, which remains one of the top killers of children under five globally. When clean water is paired with safe sanitation, the health of an entire village shifts.

#### Women Leading the Way in Psirwo

Once water and sanitation are secure, communities can begin the work of livelihoods—and that took us to the village of Psirwo, where we met Vivian. CWS has been working in Psirwo for over fourteen years, so their water and hygiene systems are in place. Once their days were no longer consumed by walking miles for water, the women were free to focus on building income and opportunity..

With support from CWS and Yang'at, each woman received four chickens as well as seeds and training to start vegetable gardens. This provided eggs and vegetables for their families and extra to sell. With time reclaimed and a new source of income, the women organized a village savings and loan association where every woman contributes, and every woman can borrow at a low interest rate. They call it “table banking”, and this gives every woman a stake in her community’s progress.

With their savings, these 28 women joined together and bought two acres of their own land and more chickens. Their flock of three hundred is now a business, selling eggs at local markets and chickens to the local school where their children attend.

The women of Psirwo recently planted a demonstration garden where they teach other women from surrounding villages how to grow kale, spinach and tomatoes—foods that nourish families and strengthen livelihoods. Their success is spread outward, setting off a chain reaction of empowerment—built slowly, intentionally and sustainably.

For 25 years, CWS has walked alongside communities in this region, not offering quick fixes but long-term partnership. We stay long after the sand dam is built, long after the garden grows, ensuring families have the tools and support they need to lead their own transformation. It all begins with water and leads to chicken, beans, and big dreams!

### **My Experience**

During my travels through West Pokot, Kenya, I witnessed firsthand the remarkable impact of CWS and how a community’s stage of partnership with CWS was reflected in everything from clothing and confidence to village organization and overall well-being. Moving from one village to the next was like walking through different chapters of the same story, each showing what happens when water, sanitation, and livelihoods take root over time.

In Kachereta, where a sand dam had just been completed, the atmosphere felt cautious. The people were warm but reserved, greeting us with polite interest and a noticeable sense of uncertainty. Children hid behind their mothers or older siblings; their clothing was worn and dusty. The women spoke only when prompted, the men lead the conversation and made appeals for latrines and sanitation facilities. Though their sand dam had not yet captured the rains, Susan was able to dig about three feet into the sand and collect a small amount of muddy water (Figure 6). Still requiring purification, this was the beginning of their transformation.

About an hour away, we visited a village with a fully established sand dam (Figure 2) and the difference was striking. The women greeted us with songs and were joyful, confident, and welcoming. They proudly demonstrated how they collect clean, clear water by digging just a foot into the sand (Figure 7 & 8). With reliable water in place, they had begun other projects like raising chickens and beekeeping. Their lives had changed and their hope was visible in their smiles.

The most profound experience came in Psirwo, a community that has partnered with CWS for more than fourteen years. Here, the transformation was complete enough to feel and to celebrate. We were welcomed by the entire village in song and dance, a joyful expression of how far they had come. The women were confident, vocal, and empowered, they were equal partners in community leadership. Their village was organized and thriving, with communal gardens, a large chicken coop, and a demonstration garden (Figure 9 & 10) where they now train women from surrounding villages in improved planting practices.

Vivian, the leader of their community working group, spoke with tremendous pride about their accomplishments and their growing role as teachers and mentors to neighboring communities. But the moment that stayed with me most was when she said, “Now we are healthy and clean because of how we were trained.” That simple statement captured the heart of what CWS strives for: not just providing resources, but enabling lasting change that restores dignity, health, confidence, and opportunity.

What I saw across these villages was the power of a long-term partnership and a clear progression of transformation. It begins with water, grows through sanitation, and blossoms into livelihoods and leadership. And in each community, I saw that CWS is not just supporting development, it is nurturing hope, empowerment, and a future shaped by the people themselves

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*traveled with a delegation to Africa in 2025*

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You can learn more about our work in Africa here:  
[cwsglobal.org/our-work/africa](http://cwsglobal.org/our-work/africa)

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Figure 1: Susan on new sand dam with jerrycan

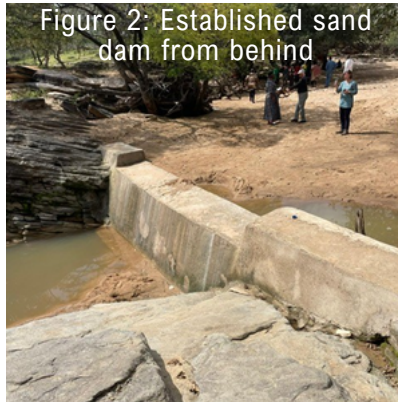


Figure 2: Established sand dam from behind

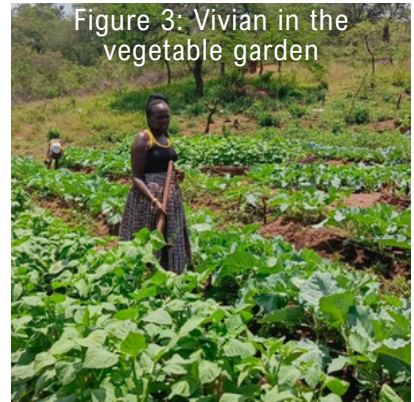


Figure 3: Vivian in the vegetable garden



Figure 4: Women of Psirwo



Figure 5: Demonstration Garden



Figure 6: Susan gathering water from sand dam



Figure 7: Woman with fresh water from sand dam



Figure 8: Clean water



Figure 9: Demonstration garden 1



Figure 10: Demonstration garden 2

## IT ALL BEGINS WITH WATER

Our annual CROP Hunger Walk is underway, and today I want to share one story that shows how transformation truly begins.

When we think about thriving communities, we often picture gardens full of vegetables, chickens clucking in the yard or women leading savings groups and businesses. But in West Pokot, Kenya, families reminded us that none of these successes happen on their own. It all begins with water. In the village of Kachereta, women and girls currently walk three hours each way to collect water. Soon, because of a newly built sand dam constructed through partnership with CWS and local leaders, they will walk just 200 yards. A sand dam may look simple—a concrete wall across a seasonal riverbed—but when the rains come, it captures water in layers of sand, creating a naturally filtered, year-round reservoir.

CWS provides technical guidance and materials, but the community gathers stones, hauls sand and builds the dam with their own hands. In doing so, they build more than a water source. They build leadership, unity and confidence.

Once reliable water is secured, the next step is sanitation—latrines, handwashing and safe water practices that dramatically reduce disease. With health restored and time reclaimed, families can then focus on livelihoods.

In the village of Psirwo, where CWS has partnered for more than fourteen years, women like Vivian began with water and sanitation. Today, they raise chickens, grow vegetables and participate in a village savings group called “table banking.” Together, 28 women purchased land and now manage a flock of 300 chickens, selling eggs to the local market and school. They even train neighboring villages in improved gardening techniques.

For 25 years, CWS has walked alongside communities in this region—not offering quick fixes, but long-term partnership. Water leads to health. Health leads to opportunity. Opportunity leads to chickens, beans and big dreams.

As we prepare for our CROP Hunger Walk on (insert date), remember: when we walk, we help communities take that very first step. It all begins with water—and it grows into lasting transformation.

## PRAYER

Loving Creator,

We thank You for the gift of water—so simple, yet so life-giving. We lift up the families of West Pokot, Kenya, and all communities longing for reliable access to clean water.

Bless the hands that build, the women who lead and the children who will grow stronger and healthier because of sustainable solutions. As we walk in the CROP Hunger Walk, help us remember that small steps can lead to lasting change.

May the seeds of hope planted through clean water grow into health, opportunity and big dreams for all.

Amen.

## HYMNS

“Great is Thy Faithfulness”

“Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing”

## SONGS

“We Abide, We Abide in You”

- Artist: The Porter's Gate
- CCLI Song Number: 7097867

“God of Justice (We Must Go)”

- Artist: Tim Hughes
  - CCLI Song Number: 5079483
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## IT ALL BEGINS WITH WATER

**Optional Prop:** A clear jar of water and a small cup of sand (or a watering can).

Hi everyone! I brought something with me today. (Hold up the jar of water.) What is this? Water! We use water every day—to drink, wash our hands and water plants. Most of us just turn on a faucet and there it is. But in a place called West Pokot, Kenya, some kids have to walk three hours to get water for their families.

That's a long walk! Imagine walking that far before school just to carry water home.

Through the CROP Hunger Walk, we help families build something called a sand dam. A sand dam collects rainwater and stores it safely in sand so families can dig down just a little bit and find clean water all year long. Instead of walking three hours, they might only walk a few minutes!

And here's the cool part: when families have clean water nearby, amazing things happen. Kids can go to school. Families can grow vegetables. Women can raise chickens and even start small businesses.

In one village, women began with clean water. Now they have a big chicken coop with 300 chickens! They sell eggs, grow vegetables and even teach other villages how to do the same thing.

It all started with water.

When we walk in the CROP Hunger Walk, we are helping families take that first step. Water leads to health. Health leads to gardens. Gardens lead to chickens, beans and big dreams!

### LET'S PRAY:

Dear God,

Thank You for water and for all the ways it helps us grow strong and healthy. We pray for children who have to walk far to get water. Help us share what we have so families everywhere can have clean water, healthy food and big dreams for their future.

Bless our steps as we walk to help others.

Amen.