

Rural Kenya Aims for Sustainable Water Utilities: Something Missing for Financial Sustainability and it's not Infrastructure

In rural water supply management, there is potential for knowledge sharing, capacity building and collaboration between the water utilities, the partner organizations, and the communities they are a part of. This can be beneficial in the long run for sustaining themselves and not just financially.

The **SuWaMa 2020** – Sustainable Water Management is a student project aiming to **support the financial sustainability and self-sustenance of six water utilities in rural Kenya**. A team of two Water and Environmental engineering students and two Creative Sustainability students from **Aalto University** have been working on the project since January 2020. The student project is a part of the **Sustainable Global Technologies (SGT) Studio course** by the Aalto School of Engineering. This is the third team from Aalto University to be assigned a project by the **Water Sector Trust Fund (WSTF) in Kenya**. The WSTF project falls under the **Joint 6 Programme**, that aims to support equitable access to water, sanitation and enhanced water resources management in rural Kenya.

Communities in the rural areas have founded their own **community-based water utilities called Water User Associations** to provide water services in underserved areas. The funding from the Joint 6 Programme has supported the infrastructure implementations more than the capacity building of these associations. Thus, some of the rural Water User Associations have become dependent on funding and are struggling to maintain their operations once funding ceases. In such a system, the benefits from infrastructure investments are under risk due to the lack of capacity to maintain the operations. As the Joint 6 Programme is coming to an end this year, it is important to **support the utilities with capacity building information and training**. This will help ensure the water utilities' future sustainability and improve their quality of service.

The project included a **field trip to six rural Water Utilities** in the Nandi, Laikipia and Tharaka Nithi counties in central Kenya in February. The team conducted



Above: SWOT analysis in progress at Muthambi 4K Water User Association. Image: Oona Oikarinen, 2020.

workshops with the boards of the Water Utilities to understand the operations and maintenance, which included **facilitating ideation sessions for solutions that could be implemented**. Experts from Water Sector Trust Fund, Water Services Regulatory Board and the Embassy of Finland were interviewed in Nairobi to better understand the broader context.

The main outcomes of the project are **five-year financial sustainability action plans for each of the visited Water Utilities** and a **general recommendation booklet for the Water Sector Trust Fund**. The plans include concrete steps and recommendations

on key activities to strengthen the financial sustainability of each utility. Based on the workshops conducted with the utilities, these action plans will be presented in a poster format. The general recommendations booklet is compiled of the observations in the field, and it has the potential to support all water utilities to reach self-sustenance through the Water Sector Trust Fund.

More about the project:

www.suwamakenya.com

Instagram: [@suwama_project](https://www.instagram.com/suwama_project)

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“ During our field trip, we realized that the interpersonal skills are just as important as the technical skills.

*- Maria Kosonen,
Team SuWaMa 2020* ”