



The opening of the Kapedo Community Water Project, which is a collaboration between Kenya RAPID and the Turkana County Government. Photo credit: Kenya RAPID

New Partnerships Find Water in a Drought

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Northern Kenya has been an arid region for thousands of years. The people who live there have adapted to the conditions, traditionally relying on migrating with their herds of cattle, camels, and goats, but the droughts are becoming more intense. For three years, the rains have been poor, leaving grazing areas parched and killing livestock — as much as 80 percent of herds in some places. Residents are desperate for water, both for their animals and for themselves.

This problem is greater than any one organization can address, so the Kenya Resilient Arid Lands Partnership for Integrated Development (Kenya RAPID) program is trying a new broad partnership approach to expand access to water and sustainable livestock and rangeland management practices in five northern counties: Garissa, Isiolo, Marsabit, Turkana, and Wajir. The five-year, \$35.5 million program, which began in September 2015, rejects the “business as usual” approach to development. All five counties and every one of the 21 partners in this public-private partnership is a

co-investor — of human capital, financial capital, software, equipment, or other organizational resources — with the goal of increasing improved water supply availability from 37 percent to more than 50 percent of residents. USAID will contribute \$12.5 million to the program.

The [Millennium Water Alliance](#) (MWA) spearheaded a collaborative process to identify and prioritize needs, define strategic objectives, and develop the program's technical approach in consultation with national and county governments, donors, NGOs, and private sector partners. Kenya RAPID partners meet multiple times a year to evaluate progress and provide strategic direction — governance that is replicated at the county level through the County Program Steering Committee.

This program also marks a significant shift away from NGOs serving as direct program implementers. In Kenya RAPID, NGOs facilitate a program that is implemented by county governments for delivery of water and sanitation services. This shift is reflected in the day-to-day operational heart of the program, which includes a County Coordination Unit (CCU) located within the counties' administrative headquarters; a program decisionmaking structure that prioritizes national and county government representation and authority; and the provision for the direct transfer of program funds to county governments to support the program's objectives. In this way, the program will build the capacity of county governments to manage this and similar projects.

Doris Kaberia, the chief of party for Kenya RAPID, describes one example of how this increased capacity will be helpful. "If you go to a county minister and you ask them 'How many water points do you have? How many are functioning? What is the operation and maintenance regime? How many beneficiaries are you serving?,' these counties cannot give an answer because they do not have a centralized database system," she explains. "So when it comes to decisionmaking for investment or budgeting, it's not really based on data."

This is where one Kenya RAPID partner is able to step in. "IBM research scientists have come in to support us in the work with these counties to develop what we are calling a water-management-as-a-service platform," she says. IBM, in turn, will be able to replicate and expand the model in other parts of the world.

Much of the data for this new platform will be generated through equipment provided by SweetSense, another Kenya RAPID private sector partner based in the United States. SweetSense manufactures solar-powered remote sensors that can be attached to water infrastructure to track use and operability. Kaberia explains that this allows water directors and county water ministers to monitor individual boreholes right from their desks, rather than having to travel hundreds of miles. "They can see which boreholes are not performing well, and which one is almost failing, instead of waiting for it to fail."

Another private sector partner, water and energy infrastructure company Davis & Shirliff, is piloting a new way to supply boreholes in communities. "Some of the partners like Davis & Shirliff are also advancing an idea called a 'leasing model,'" says Mulongo. "The county government can lease the equipment they have and pay back the cost over a certain period of time."

This will allow county governments to leave maintenance of the pumps to efficient private sector operators while retaining and improving their focus on core public sector responsibilities, such as regulation and supervision. Local governments will not need to make big upfront investments in boreholes and other infrastructure but instead will pay regular fees for service. This will also encourage companies, in this case Davis & Shirliff, to use products that last as long as possible to postpone and reduce the costs of replacement. Water supply agencies will purchase a service instead of a piece of equipment.

SweetSense, Davis & Shirliff, and other private sector partners are also providing training to county employees and community members in the maintenance of these systems. Elizabeth Jordan, a water and sanitation advisor with USAID, says that this is another way that Kenya RAPID is leveraging the expertise of the private sector. “This private sector engagement is really interesting,” she says. “This is actually a skills transfer.”

In its remaining three years, the program will continue to work with county governments to increase access to safe water sources in a sustainable way, helping to build the regulatory systems to keep the infrastructure running. Many of its innovative models are being piloted under Kenya RAPID and have potential for broad scale-up in the future, creating opportunities for more and larger partnerships with private sector companies, and ensuring as many people as possible can experience the economic and health benefits of clean water.

By Christine Chumbler



Additional Resources:

- [USAID/Kenya](#)
- [Kenya Resilient Arid Lands Partnership for Integrated Development](#)

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