

## *Safe Drinking Water for An-Oston Village, Kyrgyzstan*

### **Key message**

Women are the drivers for improving livelihood by initiating drinking water supply infrastructure and community based water management.



Gulay Seyitkazieva, initiator of the CDWUU in An-Oston village

### **Background**

The village of An-Oston is part of Ak-Dobo Village Administration in Jety-Gus Rayon, An-Oston borders with the villages of Ak-Dobo and Munduz in the west and Chyrak village in the east. The total population of the village is 1,640 made up of 1,040 people living in the village on a permanent basis, and a further 600 migrants. The village is economically dependent on agriculture and animal husbandry. Until recently An-Oston lacked safe and accessible drinking water, having many detrimental effects on the socioeconomic life of the village.

*An-Oston is a typical Kyrgyz rural village lacking adequate water and sanitation infrastructure*

During the Soviet period the twelve nearby villages were connected by a networked of water supply system. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a lack of sufficient funding for the operation and maintenance of the water supply system lead to eight villages being disconnected from the network. The villagers have had no choice but to consume water out of irrigation channels and private wells, which has caused outbreaks of infectious diseases such as hepatitis A and diarrhea, mainly among the children. The lack of a water supply has had widespread negative effects on the livelihood of the population and the quality of life in the villages. The daily responsibility to collect water falls on the shoulders of women and children

whilst the men of the village work, often in other towns and cities due to lack of economic opportunities at home.

In An-Oston the water supply system was in awful condition, out of a total 33 taps, only 6 were functional. Drinking water from these few taps was only available for 2 hours per day, one hour in the morning and one hour in the afternoon, creating long queues and tiresome unproductive waiting periods. During frequent power cuts the pump often became damaged or nonfunctional, and the villagers were left without water for months.

*Women took the initiative to drive change*

### **How change began**

Such a dire state of affairs motivated a group of rural women to seek assistance from the authorities, however many of their appeals were not heard. In December 2011 this group of women appealed to the Kyrgyz Alliance for Water and Sanitation (KAWS) with success. Upon KAWS visiting the village and learning more about the condition of the water supply system and the impact it was having on village life, action began to take place. Meetings were arranged with various bodies and the villagers became motivated and engaged in the process. The village became assimilated into the Community Drinking Water Users Union (CDWUU) and elected their own board. Out of 11 members elected, 8 were women, reflecting the commitment and dedication the original group of women had to this cause. The union has been functioning efficiently and funds have been generated through household memberships. The village population has showed great willingness to autonomously organize themselves and take the upmost responsibility in solving the issues. Through using local economic opportunities, resources and experience, public methods of collective decision-making and organizational self-help productive benefits have been reaped.

*The empowered women have an increased reputation and standing in the village and their voices are heard*



The first village consultation

Following these actions, KAWS recommended to WECF to include An-Oston village in the EWA project in order to build institutional capacity in the CDWUU and develop cooperation with all interested parties regarding improving the village water and sanitation services. Visibility of the issues surrounding water in the village began to take place. Steadily the plight of the village became

known and further action began to be mobilized. In 2013, WECF, with the support of the Global Water Solidarity UN in Geneva and together with KAWS, conducted the study 'Decentralized Water Solidarity Mechanism in Kyrgyz Republic' and the results of the study were presented to the Steering Committee of National Water Policy Dialogue of Kyrgyz Republic on 17th October 2013. In March 2014 the report was published in Russian and English to generate greater transparency and visibility on the issues.

## Results

In 2014, funding for the drinking water infrastructure was found and the construction works started in autumn 2014. Since this date and the implementation of the mechanism to provide safe and affordable water life in An-Oston has changed dramatically. Quality of life has improved, economic sustainability has been increased, the women of the village have become empowered through their actions and the children are happy to learn and play instead of having to fetch water. Despite a cold winter the villagers remain optimistic and continually driven to create progressive access to water for each household.

In collaboration with the EWA project, the women of An-Oston have been empowered through their own determination and proactivity. Throughout the preparation and implementation process the women involved in the project have proved themselves capable of initiating great change to the socioeconomic life of the village. With a safe and accessible water supply a group of women have begun a small business processing dairy products and fruits and hope to expand their business into other rural activities with the new opportunities provided by the project. Other business initiatives include opening community based guest houses to create further economic stability for the entire village. Thanks to the dedicated villagers of An-Oston, KAWS and the EWA project life in the village is now looking a whole lot more positive.

*Young people in An-Oston now have the option of staying in the village instead of migrating to cities or abroad*



Discussing the water supply infrastructure