Photo Essay Digging Deep: Community Driven Development and the Uganda Village Project

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Photo Essay
Digging Deep: Community Driven Development and the Uganda Village Project

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International development efforts have come under growing criticism as mounting anecdotes and evidence point to a history of inadequate modeling, unfulfilled goals, and irresponsible management. However, more participatory models of development have shown a great deal of potential in resolving many of these issues. The Uganda Village Project (UVP), a U.S. Non-governmental Organization (NGO) working exclusively in the Iganga District attempts to allow such participatory development to guide all aspects of its programming. This is why UVP works in concert with stakeholders in the region to first identify the development priorities of particular communities and then design innovative solutions that mobilize local resources in cooperation with the government, NGOs, and external donors.

This photo essay follows one such solution, UVP's Community Constructed Shallow Well program. With the successful completion of more than twenty new safe water sources in its initial phase combined with promising results from monitoring community-financed maintenance over multiple years, UVP now has plans to significantly scale-up efforts in 2009. By responding to the needs identified by the community and mobilizing the resources of all stakeholders, UVP is aiding the people of Iganga as they pursue their own visions of development.

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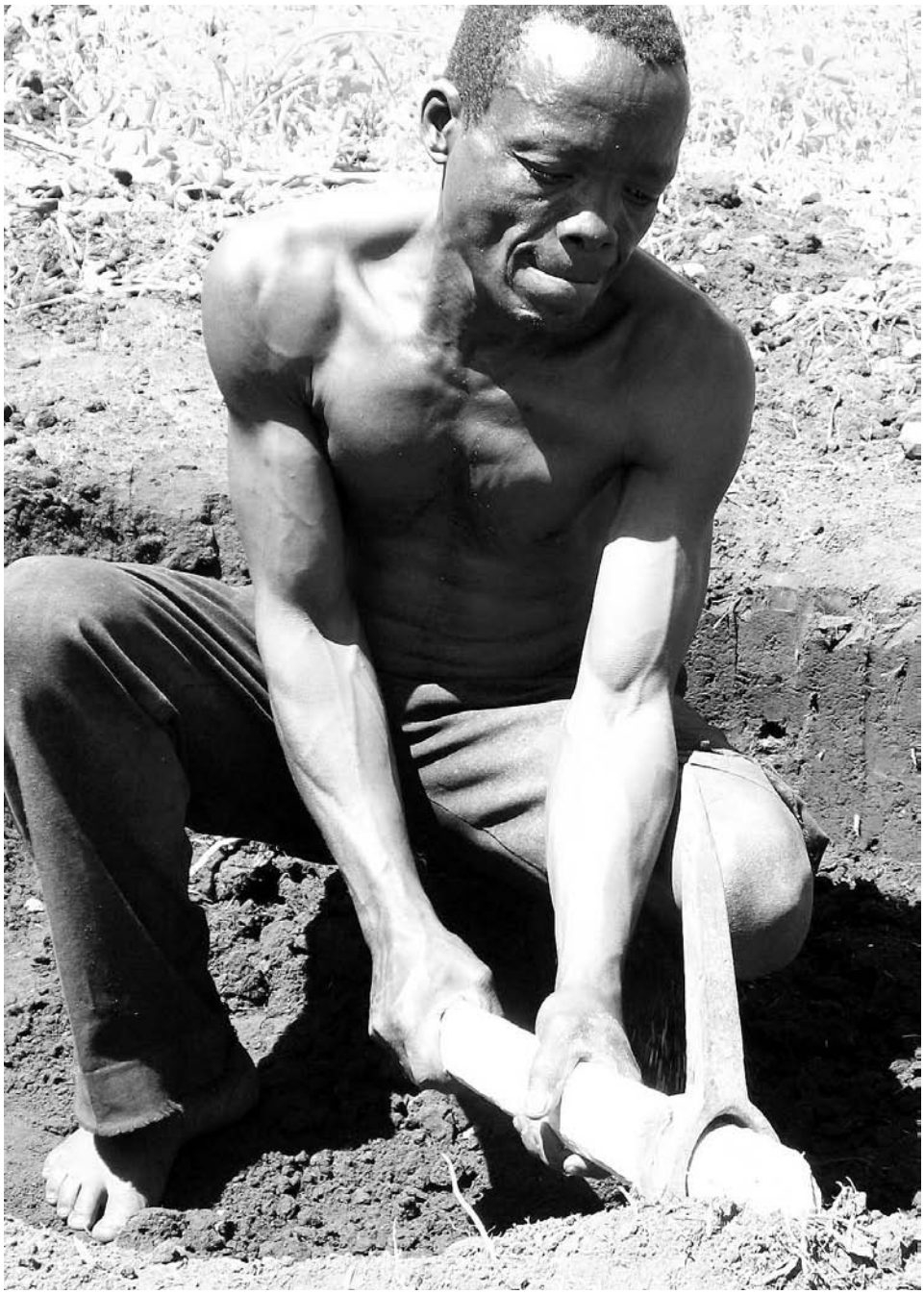
Drinking from the Swamp:
Iganga, Uganda is one of the poorest districts in the country. Water-born illnesses are among the leading causes death due to a complete lack of municipal water infrastructure, over population and less than 50% latrine coverage. In the villages, most people get their water directly from swamps and streams. Often stagnant, the people of Iganga are dependent upon these contaminated sources to survive.

Miles to Water:
Children, most often young girls, are responsible for fetching water for all household needs. Lugging bright yellow jerricans full of water two or three miles is not uncommon, and the job of simply moving back and forth can occupy the majority of each day.

Leading to Water:
Uganda Village Project (UVP), a US-based NGO, works with communities in Iganga to help them innovate grass-roots solutions for their development needs. Working in partnership with village leaders, local government, Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and international donors, UVP designed the Community Constructed Shallow Well model to address the vital need for safe water. In this photo, the community of Busiringi deliberates on how best to organize their people for the upcoming construction.

Circle Marks the Spot:
UVP teams up with CBOs that are working actively in this region to identify committed villages and help guarantee long-term sustainability. The CBOs' contribution in terms of organizing and transport cover about 5% of the costs of the project. Once communities have organized themselves, elected a Water User Committee and donated land for construction, UVP and the local government provide technicians to site the well and lead construction. Here, a water engineer assisted by the local mason in Kimanto uses sticks and a vine to measure out the appropriate dimensions for the new well.

Young Masons:
As construction ramps up, materials purchased with money from international donors arrive on site. This model harnesses the wealth of the village and the resources available from local government and CBOs so that all told, only 25% of construction costs come from outside donors. Here, a team of boys in Busiringi gather the binding wire, rebar and wire mesh needed for the concrete work that will reinforce and cap the well.



Digging In:
The villagers do all the construction themselves with a mason on-site at all times for directing the work and periodic supervision by the District's water engineer. Depending on the soil conditions, teams can excavate three meters or more in a single day.

The Weaker Sex?
As the men dig, the women not only cook the meals needed to sustain the work, they also gather all of the locally available materials (sand, gravel and bricks) that are essential for building the internal supports and concrete slab for the well. These contributions all further reduce the need for outside assistance. Here, a team of women deliver sand to a work site in Busanda.

Reinforcement:
Once they hit the water table, the villagers must build up the brick interior of the well to guard against collapse and to help filter sediment out of the water. As with every stage of the construction process, teamwork is essential.

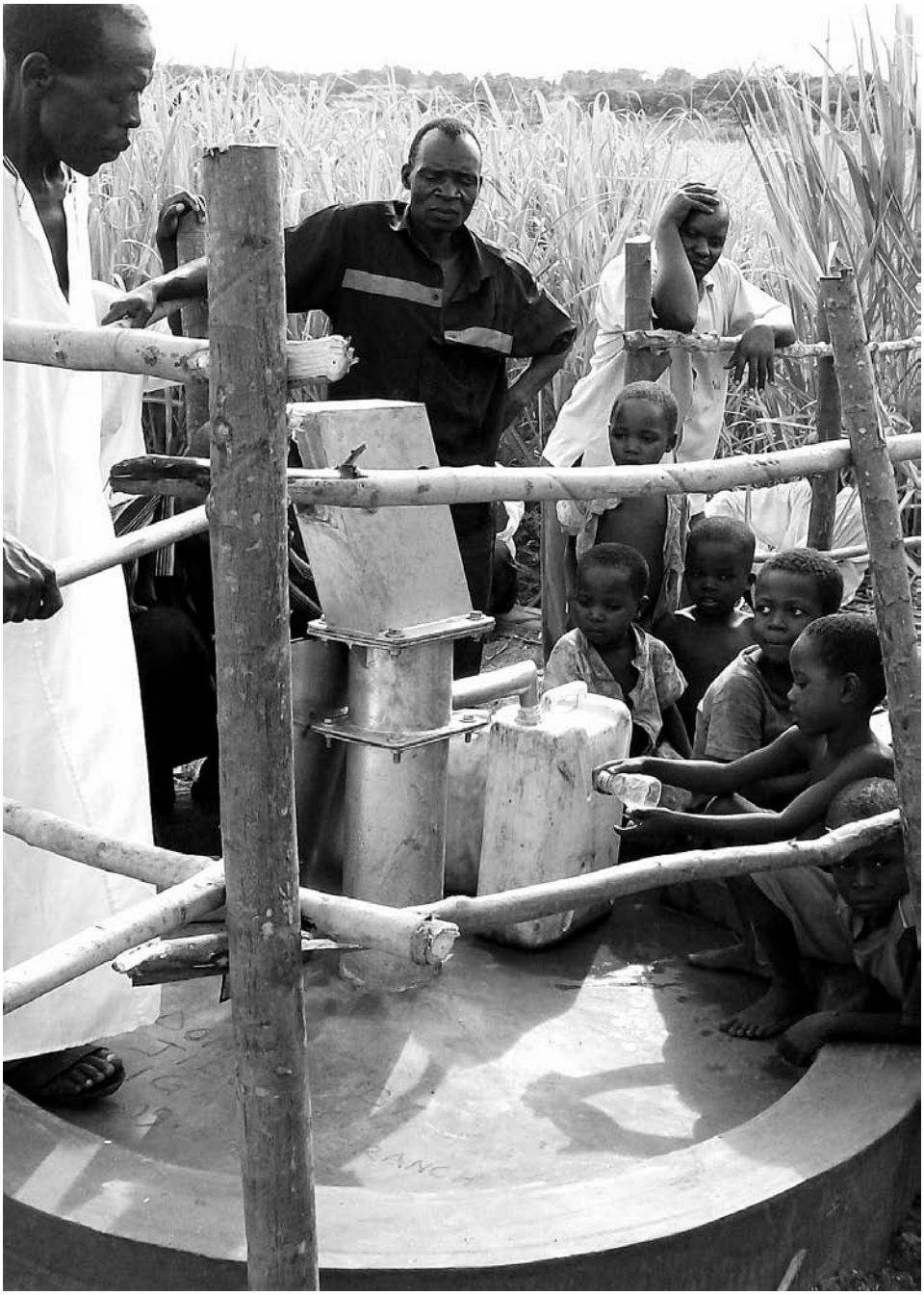
Bail out:
Though they have hit water, in order to guarantee that the well will continue providing even in the driest of dry seasons, the community still must dig 1-2 meters farther. To do this, teams must simultaneously dig deeper while bailing out the water. These last few meters can take several days to achieve.

Development from the Bottom Up:
Iganga is fortunate to have a very high water table which is what makes this construction model possible. Shallow wells are generally 8-10 meters deep, and the excavation usually lasts less then two weeks. However, this is all possible because the community members believe that safe water sources are one of their greatest needs and as such, they are willing to work together and to contribute their labor and resources to the effort.

Heave-ho!
Once excavation is complete, a concrete slab is poured on-site. Here, under the direction of the District's water engineer, community members in Nsinze are moving to cap their well.

Installation:
The District government is simply incapable of responding to all the need in Iganga, and this is one of the reasons that they have welcomed the Community Constructed Shallow Well model. As a sign of support and encouragement, they donate all of the technical parts required for each well, roughly 10% of construction costs. Here, District water personnel install the pump as leaders of the community look on quizzically.

Fencing:
To help protect the new well from livestock and roughhousing children, a fence is constructed around its perimeter. Here, the village mayor of Busiringi and his wife prepare branches to be used as part of the fence.



Instruction:
As the well pump is installed, members of the villages' Water User Committee are trained in basic upkeep and management. Additionally, they are given the responsibility to collect water user fees that will cover the costs of ongoing maintenance. Here, operation of the well is explained to several of the men of Kimanto while curious children look on.

Pride:
All told, more than 60% of the costs of these wells are covered by the contributions of the community members in terms of land, labor, locally available materials, food and shelter for the masons. The finished product belongs to and is the responsibility of the community.

Celebration:
The completion of each well closes with a village-wide celebration complete with singing, dancing, eating and—most importantly—drinking from the newly completed source. Successful development projects such as these help to bolster the cohesion of the group and make possible further efforts in the long-run.