



CASE STUDY

Water Springs from Women's Initiative

Tibetan women work together to bring clean water to their villages



Photo: The Bridge Fund

Women from Tongda and Drongda discuss possible locations of new water taps in their villages.

CHALLENGE The women of Tongda and Drongda villages, in China's rural Qinghai Province, were spending an hour each day lugging buckets of water to their homes and fields from the closest source, a river one kilometer away. Many of them suffered from crippling arthritis which they attributed to the water itself or to the punishing act of carrying the heavy buckets to their villages, which are home to 354 Tibetans. The trek was so arduous that some women relied on stagnant pools of water near their villages rather than walk to the river.

INITIATIVE Understanding the need for clean, accessible water, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), through the Bridge Fund, supported a project to pipe water from the surrounding mountains to the two villages. In a region where decisions are often made by official committees or exclusively by men, the project brought the communities' women together to determine the best locations for the new water taps.

The women first mapped their area, an activity that challenged them to work as a team and to put abstract ideas onto paper. Then they identified several locations for spigots based on their mapping of the area. Final selections for each village were made through a voting process.

The women then took the initiative further and, in consultation with other village members, proposed increasing the number of taps to provide fair access for all.

RESULTS The installation of these taps brought clean water to Tongda and Drongda for the first time, and the villagers are pleased with the results.

The women are particularly happy. Not only do the taps save them time and effort, but the process has empowered them to take part in community decisions that affect their lives.

