



Springs and Spring Boxes



A **spring** is a place where groundwater naturally gushes or seeps from the earth. It might take the form of a stream of water that flows from a fissure in a rock, or a persistent puddle in a low spot in a field.

Water may be clean when it emerges from the earth, but it can easily be contaminated before use. Animals can walk through the persistent puddle; leaves and insects can fall into it; it may flow through a contaminated area. However, if the spring is protected, the water stays clean. A **spring box** is an economical and effective way to protect a spring.

These covered concrete boxes simply enclose the spring so that debris cannot fall into it and animals cannot walk through it. The spring fills the box from the bottom or from one side, and a pipe built into the side of the box at a convenient height allows people to fill their containers. A well-built concrete spring box can last for decades with only the simplest occasional maintenance: The concrete lid can be lifted to reach the inside of the box for cleaning.

These spring boxes are not just shipped in and installed though. Instead they are constructed by members of the community who become participants in their own development. This practice honors local leadership and involvement and acknowledges the skills within the community: essential marks of accompaniment.

Subsistence Farming

The United Nations defines **subsistence farming** as, “a form of agriculture where almost all production is consumed by the household, often characterized by low-input use, generally provided by the farm.”¹ These family farms grow most or all of the food the household needs to survive but often do not have the land or capacity to produce large yields. It is important to note that subsistence farming does not necessarily imply that the farmer is not involved in a market system. In some instances, a subsistence farmer may be able to take and sell surplus harvest at the market.



Villagers from the Mbeyeng neighborhood of Bohong, mining sand by hand from the bed of the flooded Ouham River south of Bohong, Central African Republic. The sand was used to construct a spring box to provide clean water for their neighborhood. Photo credit: Joe Troester

¹ From glossary of “Interventions for Improving Livelihoods in sub-Saharan Africa,” <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/010/i0132e/i0132e08.pdf>