

**Testimony of a first-hand experience, a well accomplished, a young leader, an ardent advocate of COWASH Ethiopia**



Mohammed Babeker, nick named Nurie , 29, was born in Assosa, Kebele 02 from his father Ato Babeker, Berta family and his mother, W/o Zahara Mohamed from Wollo, Amhara region. Mohammed is born into a family of 3 boys and 3 girls and he is the youngest. He started his primary school education in Arabic as his father is of an Ethio-Sudanese decent.

When the school he was going to closed, Mohammed moved on to studying in MOE curriculum and went to Assosa primary school from grade 1-8. He attended his secondary school education in Assosa Secondary and Preparatory school. **Later**, he joined Jimma University in 2011 and graduated in Sociology and Social Work. Currently he is in his second year pursuing his Master's degree education in Project Planning and Management.

Mohammed married W/rt Fetle Wolde in 2016 and is expecting his first baby boy very soon. He speaks five languages; Arabic and Al- rutuna as his mother tongue, Afaan Oromo, Amharic and English proficiently.

Mohammed is very proud of his current achievements and sets bigger goals to achieve in the future. He currently holds high level political leadership positions, member of the central committee for the Benishangul Gumuz People and Democratic Party. He is President of Assosa town Youth Association and is serving as Secretary of the Youth Federation of the region. He is also Chairman of bid endorsing committee in Bureau of Water, Irrigation and Energy .He truly is an example of well accomplished young leader at his age

He is very passionate about COWASH, an ardent advocate in all his conversations. Mohammed narrates “I started working at the Water Bureau as Community Participation Expert under water resource management and worked for one year. Later became Water Resource Core Process Owner and Director of water resource and scheme management in 2012.”

Seeing his progress and successful track record, he was assigned to a different sector as Ethics and Anti-corruption Director in 2013 and 2014. In 2015, when the need arose for his competency, he was re-assigned to Water Bureau as Water Resource and Scheme Management Director. In September 2017, he became COWASH Coordinator. Currently, he holds the positions of Water Resource and Scheme Management Director and Regional COWASH Coordinator.

Asked how he joined COWASH, Mohammed replies “I came as a replacement of the previous coordinator; I was brought on board on a direct request by the Bureau Head. Working with the government of Finland is not new for me or for Assosa. I knew it during FinnWASH. I feel honoured and humbled to get the opportunity to work with COWASH”.

Mohammed dichotomizes his likes for COWASH in two as personal and community. “Personally I have got a lot of things especially in areas of capacity building...I attended various trainings that enhanced my knowledge on WASH in general and community led accelerated WASH in particular....I like COWASH more because it is community centred and its programmes have a full buy-in from the community.” He added “COWASH increases ownership and hence the schemes are properly utilised and maintained; but what I feel to be the most important is creating community satisfaction is a bigger deal in COWASH.” To Mohammed, to see one kebele having clean water is very rewarding. It is his inspiration that kept him in COWASH. Mohammed narrates “the domino effect of COWASH is that most of the time in our community, women are responsible for WASH needs of the family. When a woman goes a long way to fetch water, she is prone to rape, abduction and or any other physical threats. This is one commendable effort COWASH Ethiopia invested to reduce the challenges at all levels.”

For this to happen Mohammed contemplates, the Federal team takes great credit. He said he appreciates the Federal team in general and the Chief Technical advisor, Mr. Arto and Mussie in particular for supporting the region with all they have. He added “The support was not given only when we were doing well but even at challenging times....If we were not supported during those difficult times, we would not have scored such a great result now” reminisces Mohammed. Talking about the result he said, the attitude of the regional government is now encouraging towards COWASH to an extent of allocating matching fund.”

Asked why the regional government has given a special attention to COWASH projects, he responded “COWASH reaches places where government doesn’t reach, and due to unique approach of the programme delivery, i.e community managed project approach. He assures the readiness of the regional government to allocate matching fund should COWASH intends to implement Phase IV. He appreciated the commitment of the regional government and acknowledged the regional administration, members of COWASH regional steering committee, the office of the President, COWASH regional support units, CMP

Supervisors, Woreda and Zonal focal persons and steering committees for the success of COWASH in Benishangul Gumuz region.



In his conclusion remarks he stated “COWASH has become the voice for the voiceless like people with disabilities.” This is unique and encourages government to take similar initiatives. He also added COWASH is to be appreciated for promoting Sanitation marketing, supply chain and MSE. “Unlike many projects, COWASH’s deliverables are noticeably seen on the ground and the reports and photos are real”. As points of improvement in COWASH, Mohammed notes there is an improvement in areas of strengthening the regional communications network, Organizational visibility and utilization of local and federal media to show success stories and improvement of quality information.

At the end, he congratulates the exponential growth of the Facebook reach and expressed his delight in the new communications initiative COWASH put in place.

#### **Disclaimer**

Mohammed was promoted to be Team Leader of COWASH team in Benishangul Gumuz after compilation of this story.