

The farmer who transformed his challenges into opportunities



Ato Menibel Delagn, Melaku Tekola, COWASH, 2018

Ato Menibel Delagn (65) lives in Yinessa Sostu Kebele of Bahir Dar Zuria Woreda of West Gojjam Zone of Amhara Region. He was born and lived in this village. He claims his village is "God given" inheritance to him and his family. He asserted that his father and grandfather lived in the same neighbourhood but a kilometre away to the north from where he currently resides. Even if he doesn't know the number of his children by heart, he is a father of 9 children, the oldest being 39 and the youngest 11 years old. The land he cultivates was given to him during the time of Emperor Haileselassie. The Yinessa Sostu Kebele was formed from three "gotts" or "villages".

Ato Menibel is married to Sashe Mekonnen (45) and lives with 5 of their children out of which two of them have already been married and they live with their families in the same compound with their children (grandchildren of Ato Menibel). Menibel and Sashe are both illiterate.

The livelihood of Ato Menibel is dependent on small scale farming where they grow teff, sorghum, millet, different kind of fruits such as mangos, orange, guava and of course coffee or "bunna" as it is called in Amharic. In the past few years, the family engaged in growing cash crop known as "Khat", a local flowering plant used as a mild stimulant. "Khat" in Ethiopia is used by the youth and for some religious prayers in the Muslim community. All the family members contribute to the living. Children under 10 years of age are tasked to look after the cattle and older children are responsible to water the fruit trees and Khat. At times they are also engaged in providing food and water for the cattle. Thanks to the joint efforts of the government and stakeholders, all the children in the family goes to school, except one boy with learning difficulty. Nearest school, Meskmender, for grades 1-4 is near-by with 5 minutes' walk and the other school, Yinessa Dogma, for grades 1-8 is with 20 minutes' walk. All family members participate and contribute to the living and income of the household. It is also encouraging to note that there is a positive division of labour where every part of the family contributes to the overall wellbeing.



Ato Menibel's compound, Arto Suominen, COWASH 2018

With regards to water, sanitation and hygiene management, the whole family is now well aware of the importance of the water, sanitation and hygiene. Drinking water is collected from the nearby community hand dug well equipped with Afridev hand pump built with Finnish support in 2010. Water for plant watering, house cleaning, cattle drinking, cloth and body washing is taken from the open household well near the home. They have a traditional pit latrine with a wooden slab. This is already the second latrine constructed after the first one got full. Soap is available for hand washing before eating food and after visit of a toilet.

Health Extension workers visit the house bi-annually and provide various timely information for the wellbeing of the family.

Ato Menibel states that eight years ago they used to fetch drinking water from the river nearby and all were suffering from different kinds of water borne diseases like Amoeba and diarrhoea. He now happily

narrates that this is no more an issue, thanks to the construction of the improved water source, the diarrhoea problem has disappeared. The construction of the hand dug well also eases the burden of fetching water from distant locations by women and girls in the family. Traditionally, women are responsible for fetching drinking water to the family, and in their absence, men cover up their responsibility.



Menibel's families, Melaku Tekola, COWASH 2018

In terms of infrastructure, the house is not accessible by road and there is no electricity from grid. All families in the area use solar lanterns. Solar is also used to charge the mobile phones. Cooking is still done with "three-stone" system. All houses have mud floor and animals have their own separate places to sleep. For protection purposes and to warm the newly born calf, the Cow and the Ox stays temporarily with the family. Ato Menibel's dream is to get one day a connection to the piped water system and electricity grid. He also would like to have a standing shower pipeline. His sons would like to have a tractor and learn modern agricultural farming methods. Through hard work and the support he got from various actors including the Finnish WASH Project, Ato Menibel has now turned his challenges to opportunities and started dreaming big. Despite the overall challenges stated above, Ato Menibel is still a happy and smiley leader in his family and the community.



Menibel with his children and his grandchildren, Melaku Tekola, COWASH, 2018