



Clean Water for Quality Education

The Community-led Water, Sanitation and Hygiene project is a bilateral initiative between the Federal Governments of Ethiopia and Finland. The project started in 2011 and is now in its fourth phase (COWASH IV) which started on 01 April 2021 and is being implemented in 104 woredas of seven regional states. The project is working to achieve the ten-year development plan set by the federal government of Ethiopia in the sector by building climate resilient water supply facilities in rural communities, together with water and sanitation facilities for educational and health institutions.

The project's Federal Technical Assistance Team (FTAT) recently visited the primary school in Werarsa-keta Kebele, Sululta Woreda, in Oromia National Regional State to see the shallow well that was constructed at the school towards the end of Ethiopian Financial Year 2014 (2021/22) under COWASH IV for a cost of Birr 400,000 and to listen to the opinion of the school community on the impact of the works.



Shallow well drilled and commissioned in 2022 for Werarsa-keta Primary School, 22 July 2022, Deribew Zento



Ato. Teklie Seifu, Werarsa-keta Primary School Principal, 22 July 2022, Deribew Zento

The principal of the school, Ato. Teklie Seifu, and others in the school community gave the team a warm welcome and went on to explain in detail about the establishment of their school and the issues related to the supply of clean drinking water, sanitation and hygiene.

He advised that the school was established in the year 2012 and that it has taught many students over the years. He explained that in the last school year there were 323 male students, 267 female students (total 590) of which six had physical disabilities.

In describing the school's water supply, sanitation and hygiene history his answer was full of frustration and regret. He explained:

"When established, the school facilities, including the classrooms where the teaching and learning work was to be done, were very basic as they were built through community participation using local materials. The classrooms were not comfortable, making the task of educating the children very difficult. At that time even the most basic drinking water supply and toilet would have been considered a luxury."

Ato. Teklie informed the team: "When students were thirsty, they would have go to the river that is two kilometers away from the school to drink water. They would bring back the water they needed for cleaning the classroom at the same time, but this meant that the students were wasting their time which should have been used for learning. They were also tired after travelling and carrying water over long distances and because of this, their academic results were affected."

He went on to say "The pressure on the female students was much worse as they were vulnerable to rape. At that time there were many students who were exposed to sexual violence and harassment. While most disabled children did not attend school at all, the six who did would return home suffering from thirst. The number of students who fell ill with water-borne diseases was high and both students and teachers were exposed to many challenges."

Ato. Teklie also advised that even though the school was a beneficiary of the government's school feeding program, it was difficult to get the water needed for food preparation and hygiene. As a result the school would often fail to provide sufficient hygienic food which had a further impact on the health of the students.

COWASH IV understood the key problems of the school and in collaboration with the Woreda Water, Mineral and Energy and Education Office, worked to create the appropriate awareness among the school's stakeholders regarding the need to improve the school's clean drinking water supply. Ato Teklie Seifu explained that the community started working with a common understanding of the situation and that it could be solved by working together.

Following the completion of the necessary procurement process, a shallow well was drilled in the school compound and the associated headworks built. During the construction process, the school community provided all the necessary support and the works were completed without any problems within the scheduled time frame and to the

required quality. The “unbelievable” had come true! Children and students as well as the entire school community were now able to benefit from clean drinking water on campus.

A delighted Ato. Teklie reported: "After this, students will no longer waste time and energy searching for water and hence the problems they face will be greatly reduced. In this way, teachers' desire to teach and students' motivation to learn will increase, while tardiness, absence from school and dropping out will decrease and overall, the students' results will improve."

On the day the FTAT visited, the school was closed for vacation, but nevertheless a large number of the school's community, including the school's Parent Teacher Association, attended and welcomed the team and shared their happiness. This doubled our happiness. There is nothing more gratifying than seeing so many people happy with the little work you have done.

"The COWASH project has supported us in solving the problem of providing clean drinking water to our school. After this, it is our responsibility to properly maintain the water facility that was built for us to ensure sustainable service. Even when we face problems that are beyond our control, we will continue to talk to the Woreda Water and Education Offices and solve them" said the Principal.



Shallow well built for the school, Deribew Zento,



Werarsa-keta Primary School community discussing their school WASH facility with the FTAT, Deribew Zento

Ato. Teklie Seifu explained that the school still lacks standard toilets, a menstrual hygiene management center for female students and standard classrooms and emphasized the community's willingness to continue working with the COWASH team to solve these problems.

In Ethiopia, there are still many schools that have complex problems, just like the Werarsa-keta Primary School. As schools are the shapers of the next generation, their problems should be given as much attention as possible and all relevant parties should do their part to ensure that the responsibility of caring for our children is properly fulfilled. The COWASH IV project is doing its best in this regard.