

PRESS RELEASE

19 October 2004

AFAR AND SNNPR TO RECEIVE UNICEF DONATED DRILLING RIGS

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia – UNICEF handed over two shallow well drilling rigs to the Government today to be used in the drought-prone regions of Afar and Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR).

The drilling rigs, which cost an estimated 8 million birr each, were purchased through generous donations by the Irish Government, CIDA and DFID. Each rig is expected to last for ten years and will provide drinking water to a minimum of 500,000 people in each region.

“The wells these rigs drill will provide sustainable solutions to the water shortages these drought-affected populations have faced in the past,” said Representative Bjorn Ljunqvist, who presided over the hand-over ceremony Tuesday at the UNICEF warehouse. “The rigs allow accelerated, efficient coverage and enable the regional water authorities to increase their capacity to the people who need it most, particularly vulnerable women and children.”

Annually, each rig is expected to drill 100 shallow wells to a depth of between 50-70 meters. Each well will be fitted with a hand pump to service 500 people in surrounding villages.

SNNPR already has one shallow well drilling rig in operation, which UNICEF donated during the 2001 drought. Hans Spruijt, head of UNICEF’s Water and Environmental Sanitation section, said that using these types of rigs will serve as a model project to improve drilling performance throughout the country. To date, UNICEF has donated a total of 17 shallow well drilling rigs to the Ethiopian Government. The Water Bureaus, with UNICEF support, will train crews, support preventive maintenance and provide timely repairs with spare parts already in stock.

Most importantly, the drilling takes place in clusters where 10 wells are drilled in one area instead of one per *woreda* (district) as has been done in the past. This reduces the cost of drilling per meter and per well as well as improving overall water coverage in the region.

“We have reports that up to 25 wells are being drilled in a 45-day period,” Spruijt said. “This stellar performance has been achieved because of the Water Bureau’s immediate response to emergency operations. Keeping the rig directly with the bureau has enabled them to respond where there is the most urgent need.”

Coverage levels for water and sanitation in Ethiopia are among the lowest in the world. According to official figures, 31 per cent of households have access to safe water, and 18 per cent of households have access to sanitation facilities. Access to safe water is defined

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as 20 litres per person per day within a distance of 1-2 kilometres. UNICEF aims at assisting the Government to increase water coverage from 31 to 40 per cent by 2006.