

**INTERVIEW WITH TIREZA SATHEESH AND ZERIHUN MAMMO,
ETHIOPIAN YOUTH REPRESENTATIVES, SPONSORED BY UNICEF,
TO THE THIRD WORLD WATER FORUM IN KYOTO, JAPAN 18-22 MARCH**



You recently returned from a field trip to drought-affected areas of Ethiopia as part of your preparation for the Kyoto Third World Water Forum. What were your impressions and what message will you be taking to Kyoto with you?

Tireza: I was able to see with my own eyes things that I had only heard or read about through the media. Seeing the real thing gives you a different perspective. I didn't know that children were not going to school because of water. They have to go a long distance, walking three to four hours to collect water, and by the time they take the water home they are late for class or have to miss school all together. And for those of us here in Addis Ababa, we do not see the harm of not having water that much. If we do not have water for one day then we all join in a chorus to complain, 'There is no water today,' then it comes back. But in the drought-affected areas they don't have water for two or three days, and they have to wait for a truck to bring them water. And even if they do get water, they do not have anything to cook. When they do get some water, often it is unsanitary so they are not able to use that little water. The children are exposed to diseases such as diarrhea. When I go to Kyoto, I plan to tell the world that these are the problems facing children and youth in Ethiopia. At this time we are in need of a lot of assistance. We expect a lot from the leaders of the world as well as from the various organizations who will be represented there. We have met with children and youth facing the worst water-related problems in our country. They have told us about their problems in their own words, from the heart, and they have asked us to pass on messages when we are in Kyoto on their behalf. We will be in a position to share these with the outside world, and this is what we are planning to do.

Zerihun: During our stay in Dire Dawa and the surrounding areas, I was able to see a lot of new things. Previously in Addis Ababa when we were told how many people were being affected by the drought, my understanding was that the affected people were unable to grow food because of a lack of water and therefore they experienced food shortages. However, when I went to Shinile I was really amazed. They have absolutely no water. They have no food and on top of that they have no water to drink. I saw how careful they were when drinking the water that came from the tanker, how careful they were when storing it so as not to lose a drop. It was the first time that I had seen something like that. If there is going to be a water outage in Addis Ababa we just fill up our barrels, and we don't think much about it, and the water comes back on quickly. That is what I want to talk about at the Kyoto Forum. Although we have all these water resources in Ethiopia, we are not able to use them. We need to learn how we should utilize these resources because we do not have the finances to do it – this is what I want to say in Kyoto.

How can youth become part of the solution for water-related problems?

Tireza: In Dire Dawa, we visited hand-pump fitted wells that were constructed with the assistance of UNICEF and some of the sanitation programmes. Now the people who are doing this are either large organizations or the Government. But it is young people who will be able to take these over and ensure that they are sustainable. The community has to protect those hand-pumps to make sure that they do not get broken or damaged. If young people are engaged in protecting these hand-pumps then they will last for a long time. And when something does go wrong and repairs are needed, young people can rally the community together to donate money and young people can collect this money and put it to use to change things for the better. Otherwise an NGO or Government can construct a well and leave a place with no follow-up. If young people from the area can be made to assume responsibility for it they can make sure that it remains operational for the long term. Another thing is young people can express the problems that the community is facing and by so doing help find solutions.

Zerihun: Young people have a large role to play. Perhaps those people who are above the age of forty may not be in the work force for too much longer. Young people need to be organized in order to take over. For example, around Dire Dawa in the place called Kersah, we saw how the drought is affecting them. There was a lake there that has now dried out. It is the young people who are digging up to four meters below the surface to reach the underground water, which the community is using for irrigation. So more of this type of activity can take place in drought-affected areas. Young people can come together and dig the ground to access underground water where it is available – this is one possibility.

Another possibility is in the area of sanitation. Even in our capital city Addis Ababa you see the rivers are polluted with lots of garbage. Young people can contribute to efforts to ensure that garbage is not thrown there. For example, they can penalize offenders. The other thing that young people can do is to gain awareness themselves, organize among themselves and pass on their knowledge to other youth who may not be as well informed about sanitation issues, and by doing these things we can protect our sources of water from being polluted.

In drought-affected communities, young people should come together and teach the community how they stop depending on rainwater alone, and find ways to tap the rivers, lakes or whatever natural water source is available in their community. If we do this, because the water resources are there, I am sure that there will come a time when we will not be so vulnerable to drought.

Tireza: When we were in Dire Dawa, we saw places where UNICEF had drilled hand-pump fitted wells to assist drought-affected people. Young people are the ones who have taken responsibility to collect monthly contributions from the community, and if the pump is broken or damaged, then they will be able to pay for repairs. They are self-sufficient – and this is one example of how young people are participating in water development activities.

Now in the past drought would affect Ethiopia every seven years. The gap has been shrinking and today it is recurring every two and three years. In order to reverse this situation and to get rid of the emergency situation, we have to work together. We have to educate young people in various sectors -- in health, in clinics – if they find work – they can encourage other youth to keep their environment clean – and in drought-affected areas efforts can be made to make sure that youth are not forced to leave their schools.

Especially by giving attention to girls to make sure they don't drop out. Sources of water, like hand-pump fitted wells should be dug around where they live. I believe this will make a big difference.

What do you think is the biggest problem when it comes to water?

Tireza: Ethiopia has a lot of water resources -- second in Africa in terms of water resources. The main issue is that we have not been able to use them appropriately. Ethiopia has numerous lakes and rivers, but the population is always depending on rain. Farmers wait for those particular months to farm. We should not be only dependent on rainwater, but should be able to use the water resources that we have effectively.

What type of water problems do you experience in your personal lives?

Zerihun: Water is very important to me. I fully support the saying *Wuha Hiwot New* (water is life). Water is absolutely necessary for our daily existence, to wash our bodies, to cook, for everything. If there is no water, then it becomes difficult to maintain sanitary conditions.

I went once to the Kolfe area in Addis Ababa to spend the rainy season. By the time I returned home, I hated living there. The reason is they don't have water during the day. The water comes in the middle of the night, around midnight, and then the tap dries up around six a.m. During the day there is no water.

Tireza: Water is life, I agree. This is an appropriate motto for all Ethiopian children and youth. When I look at my own life, water disappears in our neighborhood for at least one day every month, so you accept that you will go thirsty – except you can buy bottled water as an alternative. But this is in town – out in the countryside you may not have this option. The present water shortage situation is also affecting the power supply. One day out of every week we do not have power. And this causes problems, for example at night when we need to study.

How does the availability of water affect girls and their ability to go to school?

Tireza: Near Dire Dawa, we met a ten-year-old girl named Kemiya. We can see the lives of girls reflected clearly in Kemiya's experience. She has to travel three to four hours to collect water and as a result she is often late for school. Her family depends on farming for a living. Because of the drought, her father and brothers have been forced to leave the family for town where they are trying to find ways to make a living to support their family. She gets into fights with them over money to buy exercise books. Her life shows how much suffering she has endured and being deprived of water is part of that. She also has a great desire to go to school with the hope that she can change her life for the better. In order to do this she has to go out and beg so that she can have enough money to buy exercise books. She has seen all of these problems at such a young age. Kemiya is a living example of the problems that girls face in life and through her we can see how much girls are suffering. She is an example repeated again and again. Kemiya is forced to resort to begging in order to survive. She is forced to forego her education. But because she is strong she is surviving, so through her struggle we can also see that there is hope.