

WORKING 'MIRACLES' WITH WATER PUMPS



Eleven-year-old Salemu Mantusa's wants to be a doctor when he grows up. However, he often had to miss school to trek two hours back and forth to collect water for himself and his family.

But life for Salemu and the people in his village of Angatcha is about to change. A new shallow well water pump has been installed in the village with the assistance of UNICEF and the Regional Water Bureau in Southern Nations Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR).

"I had to walk very far to get water, and I was afraid after one of the women was attacked and killed by a hyena," recalls Salemu. "But now, from nearby, I will get water so I will have the time for school, especially science, my favorite subject."

Water and sanitation coverage in Ethiopia is among the lowest in the world. According to government figures, only 31 percent of households have access to safe water, and 17 percent of households have access to sanitation facilities. Access to safe water is defined as 20 liters per person per day within a distance of 1-2 kilometers.

Getachew Geletu, the Coordinator for UNICEF-assisted projects in SNNPR, said government and UNICEF officials worked closely together to come up with a better solution for improving water coverage in the region. Shallow wells, drilled with a new rig provided by UNICEF, could be installed for 22,000 birr (approximately \$2635), compared to 53,000 birr (approximately \$6347) for a well drilled by a private contractor. More importantly, within two months, 24 shallow wells could be drilled with the new rig, compared to 20-25 wells drilled annually.

"Multiple shallow wells can be installed for a minimum cost, fast and efficiently, and are more easily maintained by the community," Getachew said.

Low levels of water and sanitation coverage have important social implications since women and children spend so many hours each day collecting water.

"In our community, water supply has been a constant problem," said Assefaw Idamo, chairman of the local *kebele* or district. "Along the river bank, there are low yielding springs where person by person they waited their turn to fetch the water. The women sometimes went at 6 a.m. and waited until 6 p.m. Sometimes they begin their walk at 3 a.m. Hyenas and wildlife were attacking them. They quarrel over their turns. Children drop out of school,

because they have to fetch water. They have to wait for their turn in line, so they miss their classes and drop out. Even then, the water they were collecting causes them to suffer a lot of illnesses, because the water is not clean.”

Before the installation of the new pump, water quality was indeed a major problem for the village. Frequent outbreaks of water-related epidemics were common. Contamination of water supplies by cattle dung and human excreta was frequent.

Salemu, himself, was often sick from unclean river water and has suffered stomach cramps and diarrhea. “Everyone I know gets stomach sickness at sometime after drinking it,” he said.

Those who get very sick had to be carried to the nearest clinic 16 kilometers away in the town of Damboya. Fifteen to 20 men were needed to take turns carrying patients on litters on the long journey to the clinic, taking them away from their farms, Assefaw said.

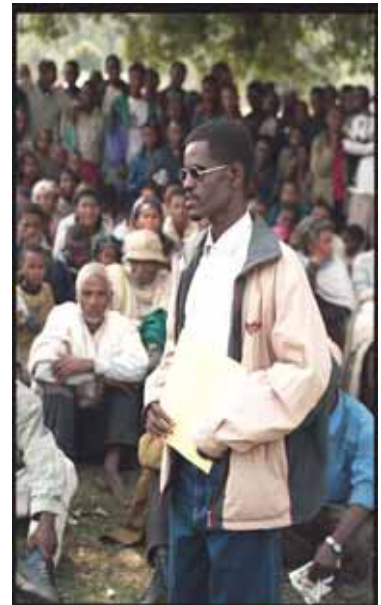
Tagesse Hailibu is a 29-year-old water conservationist from the water department in Durame. Despite the challenge of being blind, he has managed to teach basic sanitation and water conservation to the local Kumbata people in their own language.

“The main source of water for these people was from seasonal rivers,” said Tagesse, after conducting an open-air lecture on water for hundreds of villagers just outside of Angatcha. “These pumps for them are a miracle. They tell me they have a shortage of words to express how happy they are.”

“During the dry season, women and children would go many kilometers a day for their daily water consumption,” Tagesse said. “But even then it is not good water. Many are affected by water-borne diseases. One woman lost her life after being attacked by a wild animal. Children, especially girls, do not fully participate in school, because they have to fetch water. With the help of UNICEF, children will be able learn properly.”

UNICEF aims at assisting the Government of Ethiopia to increase the water coverage from 31 to 40 per cent by 2006. “UNICEF’s contribution will be the construction of 1550 new water supply schemes and rehabilitation of 850 old water supply schemes,” said Sampath Kumar, OIC of the Water and Sanitation Section. UNICEF also will contribute to increasing the sanitation coverage from 17 per cent to 30 per cent, by supporting the construction of 275,000 household latrines, 650 community latrines and 550 school latrines.

“God gave us UNICEF to help solve our problem, and we’re all grateful,” Assefaw said. “We all will do our part in what has to be done. Our community is very poor, but we are taking turn by turn to guard the pump, and we will be responsible for it.”



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