



Asmamaw Mekonnen– Afar region

Adult Teacher, School Principal

Themes WASH

Summary A teacher at Guya elementary school, Asmamaw Mekonnen has also served as a principal at this school for the last two years. Water has been a scarce resource in the community of Guya Village in the Afar Region which has also impacted children's access to education. The school has been suffering due to the lack of water and many children were absent from class due to this reason. The school has not received water trucking in their baska [water harvesting structure] for a long time. Currently the local community gets water from Logia, which is 100km away from Guya. A 20-litre jerry-can costs up to 20 birr (USD \$1.16).

Currently, Save the Children is running water trucking programs in the hot-spot woredas [districts] that have been identified by the regional government. Priority is given to children in schools and so far we have provided 1,566 cubic meters of to 570 households which is estimated to be 3,420 people in Afar Region.

Asmamaw's story in his own words

My name is Asmamaw Mekonnen. I am the school principal here at Guya elementary school. During this academic year, we enrolled a total of 246 students of which 97 are female. After the first semester, a total of 61 students (31 female) have dropped out from school.

This time of the year the shortage of drinking water in the area forces many children to drop out from school. Teachers are also suffering due to lack of potable water. We buy two litres of water from people who own Baska (rain water harvest structure) with three birr (USD \$0.16) which is very expensive. This problem has continued to impact the community in general and the school in particular. Before, we used to get water from the nearby water pool that was constructed by the Chinese road construction company. Now this pool has dried and didn't replenish because there has been no rain. In fact, the water that we used to get from the pool was not safe and I wonder why people were not getting sick and this is may be because of God's will.

Currently we're getting our water from Logia, which is 100km away from Guya Village. A 20-litre jerry-can costs up to 20 birr (USD \$1.16). This is unaffordable by most families. Because of water problems many children have stopped coming school, mainly because they move together with their families to other places in search of water and pasture for their animals.

Today is the first time that we received water trucking from Save the Children. I am glad to see water coming to the school. This time of year is very critical for the school, as students are preparing for their final exams and this wouldn't be possible without water.

Normally the school hours were from 8:00 in the morning till mid day, however now we let students go home at around 11:30. Most of them get very thirsty. Water is our biggest problem here. Without food, you can stay for a week but without water you can't even last a day. Here, the problem related to water is so severe and deep. As to me this requires a long-term solution. As you can see this place is so harsh, and it is known as one of the areas with little amount of rain annually. I hope the government will look into this problem and find a long-term solution together with the local community.

Interview conducted by Seifu Assegid during the recent communication assignment to Afar region in June, 2013

Project background

The two main rainy seasons in Afar are Karma and Sugum. Early cessation of the regular Karma (long) rains in late 2012 and disruption of Sugum (short) rains in March/April 2013 resulted in critical water shortage, very poor pasture, low livestock and agricultural production and irregular migration, severely affecting the food security and livelihood status of the communities. The major affected areas are in Zones One and Two which are located in the northern and north-eastern parts of the region. Five woredas (Afdera, Erebti, Kori, Bidu and Elidaar) have been prioritised by the regional government as suffering from critical water shortage and food insecurity. Save the Children have on-going programmes in Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), livelihoods, Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), nutrition, health and education in Afar.

An emergency nutrition programme funded by HRF started in April, 2013 in six hotspot woredas. OTP is delivered in conjunction with government health workers and Supplementary Feeding Program (SFP) is delivered directly by Save the Children. So far 1,204 severely malnourished children have been admitted to OTP sites and 40 cases transferred to the stabilization centres and received treatment. A total of 4,325 moderately malnourished children and 4,428 PLWs have been admitted to the SFP.

Drought has become a frequent and persistent phenomenon in the Afar Region causing serious impairments in livestock production, the main source of livelihoods for pastoralists. In the past 10 years the region has been hit by three severe droughts — in 2002/03, in 2004/05, in 2007 and now this latest drought. Many fear that this will continue to further deteriorate the condition of the Afar people and worsen their abilities to recover from these continuous shocks. The situation requires a large-scale response within the next three months to overcome and prevent further immediate casualties in terms of both human and livestock lives. The Afar Region requires long-term investment to reduce the impact of further droughts and provide sustainable water resources to communities. Save the Children has responded to this crisis by providing water trucking to the affected regions over the last month, and aims to do so until August when it is hoped the rains will come. Save the Children is also working with partners such as UNICEF to support the sustainable development of water resources in this area, and reduce communities' dependence on trucked water.

Location Background

Afar region, situated in the North Eastern part of Ethiopia with a population of 1.4m, is a drought prone area which suffers from chronic water shortages. The majority of Afar people are pastoralists (90%) or agro-pastoralists (10%) who rely on livestock rearing and rain fed agriculture for their diet and livelihoods.

Basic service provision in the pastoral areas of Ethiopia has historically been problematic, with less than one-fifth of pastoral communities in Ethiopia having access to basic social services such as health care and education; Afar is no exception. In Afar, there are shortages of trained health staff at all levels as well as a basic lack of infrastructure — the fact that there are only 39 health centres and 4 referral hospitals in the whole region (96,707 square kilometres) means families have to cover vast distances by foot to reach lifesaving care.