

Give water for life!

Bishop of St Albans' Harvest Appeal 2009



The new water supply in Ibrahim Hussein's village

Story sheet

The water supply for Ibrahim Hussein's village in Ethiopia was provided by Water Action, which we are supporting this year through Christian Aid.

Caroline Wood, who visited Water Action in Ethiopia for Christian Aid, writes: 'One thing that has stuck in my head since I returned is that everyone told me that during the 1984-5 famine 'the riverbeds never ran dry'. I found this really surprising. Even now, from a distance, most of the riverbeds appear dry – but we found to our surprise that beneath the surface there is still a small amount of water running through them. Christian Aid partners such as Water Action are proving that this small amount of water is enough. The irrigation techniques, pumps, wells and rain water harvesting schemes that they have developed in these regions mean that farmers can, even with very little rainfall, have access to enough water to produce enough food for the year. Listening to people tell me about their experiences during the famine, I found it very upsetting to think that the problems they faced could have been so easily solved and that there are so many people in Ethiopia still facing these problems.'

'There was no water supply here,' says Ibrahim. 'The water flowed through the grass, it was muddy. We couldn't drink it. It was too dirty.'

Ibrahim's village is one of the fortunate ones that has a new water supply provided by Water Action. Water Action supplied the building materials and specialist skills and the village provided the labour for building the water supply. Water Action has also given training in health and sanitation to Village Health Communicators, who spread their knowledge from family to family.

Water Action is also helping the village to use their new water supply to irrigate their fields. One of Ibrahim's neighbours explains: 'The irrigation is becoming very useful for us. We are now channelling water to the sites. Now we can grow bananas, avocados and coffee. In the past we didn't think about irrigation. Now we have started to think about it.' Another adds: 'All the training, the water management techniques, everything, the farmers go around and show other farmers how to do everything they have learned.'

The region where Water Action works is often very seriously affected by drought and food shortages. Near to the rivers the land is very green and the area appears fertile, but as soon as you move away from the rivers it is easy to see why the area has been so prone to food shortages in the past.

'It is because of this project that we have started to drink clean water.'

Water Action's projects start by focusing on providing water, but all seem to move beyond this as the community takes ownership of the project through local water committees that they help to set up. The projects also then include things such as income generation and rural development schemes. Water Action encourages the water committees to seek formal recognition from the government. This helps to make these projects more secure and fosters the belief amongst farmers that their situation is more permanent and that their land is therefore worth investment. Water Action also helps farmers to try things such as short-maturing crops, which mean that they can invest in environmental regeneration projects without losing out on producing crops to eat.

Ibrahim has seen a big difference in his area: 'There are terraces now, there are trees. It's good. It is because of this project that we have started to drink clean water.'

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Christian Aid/Caroline Wood

Sofia Shukure's life will be transformed by the new water supply

Story sheet

Sofia Shukure has to travel six hours every day to collect water. And, despite the hard work involved in collecting it, it is unsafe and regularly makes her family sick.

Every day Sofia walks for six hours to collect water for her family, taking a donkey to carry the water and another girl from the wider family to help her. Sofia is 30 years old and married with three children under four – Ahmed, Ishmael and Mien Moona.

'When it rains,' says Sofia, 'we collect it from a pond [which is nearby] and it will then take three hours. We fetch for seven months from the pond six hours away and for the rest of the year from the nearby pond. It is very dirty water. The water tastes awful, so terrible, very bad – it tastes like cow dung. Everybody is ill, it is very common. This is our problem, even though it is dirty we use the water for drinking and washing.'

The Water Action project we are supporting will provide clean water to 20 sub-districts in the Silitie Zone of Ethiopia, reaching almost 55,000 people, by capping a large spring (Chanchos spring) and pumping the water up a mountain to a reservoir. From the reservoir the water will flow by gravity through 46km of pipes, with 45 distribution points along the way. Sofia is one of the people who will benefit from this new water supply.

All the projects require a community contribution to the project, which helps them to feel the water supply is their own and theirs to look after in the future. While the contribution is occasionally financial, more often it is in time and labour. The community undertakes to plant trees, dig trenches, build access roads and, through membership on the committees, manage the project after completion.

The contribution made by the community must not be underestimated. The work is physically hard and most members of the community give three days a week to the project, working for more than a year. The terrain they are working in is rocky and mountainous – deforestation and soil erosion have led to desertification and periodic droughts and the harsh sun have baked the earth to stone.

As Sofia says, 'I am ready to work, to contribute, because we have a big problem with water. Even my husband would participate!'

'Everybody is ill, it is very common. This is our problem, even though it is dirty we use the water for drinking.'

The project will make a huge difference to Sofia's life. Having a nearby water supply will save her vast amounts of time every day that she can then use for other activities. While the women and girls are collecting water, they are vulnerable to attack and even rape, and this danger will also be removed. Sofia says, 'If it happens it will be good for us – our time will be saved and we will be well,' she says. 'I will be able to wash my clothes and my children's clothes and I will grow vegetables. If the water is closer I will grow papaya, mango and cabbage. I try to grow these things now but they dry out and die. If water comes I can grow these things. My family would eat this food. At the moment there is not enough food. Our farm depends on the rainwater and the land is not good for our crops. During the rainy season we can grow vegetables but during the dry season we cannot.'

Sofia has seen her local climate change. 'If there is rain everything is good but if there is no rain then it is not; if it rains heavily our crops are damaged. Sometimes the dry season is longer and the rain is heavier. Sometimes the droughts come every two years, sometimes every three years. Everything is changing. It's like a desert.'

For more information, resources and where to send your donations, contact: Valerie Geldard, tel: 01727 851748, email: vgeldard@stalbens.anglican.org or see the Diocesan website: www.stalbens.anglican.org/mission

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