

Water Action update

'To the people in the UK who support us financially, I would like to give my heartfelt thanks. Please send them my thanks. And please keep supporting us.'

Momina Ebro, local volunteer with Water Action, Ethiopia

From the onset, Christian Aid partner Water Action has required the project to have a 'community contribution', which helps to foster ownership.

Those who have given their hard work have proved their commitment and dedication to bringing safe, drinkable water to their families and neighbours. While the contribution is occasionally financial, more often it is time and labour that volunteers give, often three or four days.

The community undertakes to plant trees, dig trenches, build access roads, become members of the water committees, and manage the project after completion. Local volunteers are given training in health and sanitation and share this training with others, showing people how to build pit latrines, store food and water and make their homes more hygienic.

The value of this community contribution can't be understated. The terrain they are working in is rocky and mountainous. Deforestation and soil erosion has led to desertification and periodic droughts, and the harsh sun has baked the earth to stone. Even in the face of all this, the community is genuinely willing to contribute time and labour to build the water infrastructure for the project, despite the physical demands.



Christian Aid/Caroline Wood

Abesha Marefo is on the water committee and has contributed her time to building the trenches and access roads.

She was one of the people who really believed in the project and has been a great advocate for the need to encourage community involvement in the work.

'The project arranged a meeting for the community and they gave us a lesson on the duties and responsibilities of the committee and they elected me,' Abesha says. 'This committee is the only one like this in the area. I was so happy to be elected. The problem of water is the priority for me. It is a pleasure for me to work for this water and mobilise the community for this.'

Momina Ebro has planted 3,120 trees to protect the ground from erosion – and is still going strong! Having given three days a week to the project for the past year, she is intending to continue doing at least as much time again.



Christian Aid/Caroline Wood

'I am participating in the project fully voluntarily for three days a week as it is not just for us, it is for our children. I should work for the project freely,' says Momina.

Local volunteers give a huge amount of their time to ensure the project's success; but this can take them away from their household chores and work.

When Momina was asked how she coped with losing this time, she replied: 'At the beginning when I heard about the project I didn't believe it would be implemented. When I saw it was starting I was very eager and I wanted to help, very much. In the morning I work from 8.30-12.30 – four hours. Normally this would be a problem but my husband now shares the work. If I go to work on the project my husband will do the housework.'

Those running the project recognise that not everyone can do as Momina does. So, much like volunteering schemes in the UK where lunch and travel expenses are paid, they have agreed to give a 'calorie payment'. Money from the government will be made available to the project to give local volunteers six birr (40 pence) a day. This is not the equivalent of payment for their work but instead is seen as money given for people to buy what food they might need to ensure that the hard work doesn't leave them with a calorie deficit.

The cooperation from all involved has been staggering.

'Before upstream of the mountain was bare, now there are plants and greenness. At the spring source all donkeys and people were collecting directly. It was not protected but now it is protected and we can collect water from the pipe,' says Momina.

Thank you very much for your ongoing support.

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