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COWASH



GREETINGS

We are thrilled to launch the first edition of the COWASH IV quarterly newsletter, bringing you exciting updates on our ongoing journey to ensure equitable access to water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) for all. As we navigate the dynamic landscape of WASH development, your continuous support remains our driving force.

EMPOWERING CHANGE: ASHILE'S STORY

Ashile Seqaqo, a mother from Wondo-Genet Woreda in Ethiopia, knew the ache of water scarcity all too well. Each day, she faced a grueling journey, miles long with a heavy container on her back, just to secure the most basic necessity– clean water. This daily struggle limited her time, her energy and her dreams.



But then, COWASH IV arrived. With the construction of a new water point near her village, Ashile's life began to transform. The heavy burden lifted, replaced by the ease of accessing clean water within reach. The hours saved weren't just minutes, they were precious moments to nurture her children, cultivate her small farm and pursue possibilities she never dared imagine.

Ashile's story isn't unique. It echoes across Edo Kebele, where many women once faced similar hardships. The Edo Segele spring, their sole source, demanded an hour-long trek through challenging terrain. Exhausted from carrying meager amounts of water, girls missed school or struggled to focus in class. Their families, constantly facing scarcity, were held back from reaching their full potential.

But eight months ago, six new water points, constructed through rural pipe schemes from the spring by COWASH IV, brought a significant change. The arduous journey became a short stroll, replaced by the ease of accessing clean water closer to home. The burden lifted, not just from their backs but from their dreams. Girls now attend school with renewed energy, families have access to more water, and communities are brimming with the potential to thrive.

Ashile, once burdened by water scarcity, now exemplifies the transformative power of COWASH IV. Her story, and many others like it, are testaments to a future where clean water is not a privilege, but a right, empowering individuals, families, and communities to reach for a brighter tomorrow.



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MARKET-BASED SANITATION CENTERS: A STEP TO ENSURING INTEGRATED WASH

The COWASH IV project is making significant progress in providing integrated WASH services in rural Ethiopia. One of the project's key initiatives is to establish market-based sanitation centers, private sector entities that supply sanitation and hygiene products to the community.



Market-based sanitation centers are an innovative and effective way to address the challenge of making sanitation products more accessible and affordable for rural communities. These centers are run by local people and provide products and services that are tailored to the needs of the community.

In addition to providing a stable income for themselves and their families, the centers give local people the opportunity to serve their community. Teku Abraham, representative of Rori small and medium enterprise, says that the market-based sanitation center initiative empowers communities by giving them ownership of their own sanitation and hygiene.

The market-based sanitation centers also make sanitation products more accessible and affordable for community members. In the past, people had to travel long distances to purchase sanitation products, which was both time-consuming and expensive.

Matiwos Kismo, COWASH IV Sidama RSU sanitation and behavioral change specialist, says that the market-based sanitation centers are helping to improve sanitation in rural Ethiopia by increasing access to affordable sanitation products and by promoting sanitation and hygiene practices.

The COWASH IV market-based sanitation center initiative is a successful example of how to empower communities and improve sanitation in rural Ethiopia. The initiative is providing jobs for the youth, making sanitation products more accessible and affordable, and improving overall health and well-being.



DID YOU KNOW?

September 2025 marks a significant milestone as Ethiopia and Finland celebrate 30 years of collaboration in the WASH sector.

Their partnership in the Ethiopian WASH sector commenced in 1994 with the Rural Water Supply and Environmental Program in the Amhara Region.

REBUILDING WASH ACCESS AND SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESSES IN TIGRAY



As Tigray rebuilds after the conflict, COWASH IV is committed to playing a vital role in restoring access to WASH for its communities. Following the first Regional Steering Committee meeting on September 21, 2023, the project has hit the ground running with a focus on water scheme rehabilitation and supporting local businesses and infrastructure rehabilitation.

Many WASH Medium and Small-scale Enterprises (MSEs) established by COWASH in Tigray face immense challenges due to damaged infrastructure and disrupted markets. Recognizing their crucial role in providing WASH services, COWASH IV is actively supporting their recovery.

COWASH IV's Federal and Regional teams conducted a field visit from January 29 to February 2, 2024 engaging with five MSEs across four project Woredas. Through discussions with entrepreneurs and local officials, COWASH IV is gaining valuable insights into their specific needs. This personalized approach allows tailoring support effectively, encompassing financial assistance, technical training, and connections to suppliers and service providers.

COWASH IV has also conducted a project work progress assessment on February 19-23 in Degua Temben, Laelay Kiraro, and Zana.

In the coming months, COWASH IV will collaborate with partners to empower these vital MSEs to resume and expand their operations, ensuring sustainable WASH access for all. This commitment aligns with the project's broader goals:

- Reaching 69,150 people with improved water supply through new and rehabilitated infrastructure.
- Investing 154.7 million Ethiopian Birr in Tigray's WASH sector.

COWASH IV's work in Tigray transcends providing water. It's a story of empowering communities to rebuild their lives. By supporting local businesses and infrastructure, COWASH is paving the way for a healthier, more prosperous future for Tigray.



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FINNISH DELEGATION VISITS COWASH IV PROJECT SITES IN SIDAMA REGION

A high-level delegation from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and the Embassy of Finland in Ethiopia visited COWASH IV project sites in Sidama on February 9-10, 2024. The delegation included the Ambassador of Finland to Ethiopia, Mrs. Sinikka Antila, Deputy Director General for the Department for Africa and the Middle East, Mrs. Helena Airaksinen, Director for the Unit of the Horn of Africa and Eastern Africa, Mr. Jukka Pajarinen and Senior Adviser, Development Policy, Mr. Tomi Särkioia.



The delegation embarked on a journey through Wondo-Genet and Gorche Woredas. They visited community water points and institutional WASH facilities, directly engaging with the people whose lives have been transformed by COWASH IV's interventions. Community members expressed their heartfelt appreciation for the project's positive impact. Mr. Tomi Särkioja shared his joy in meeting the communities impacted by COWASH IV and hearing how they feel about the contribution of the project to their lives.

The delegation commended the strong sense of community ownership and collaboration driving the project's success. Mrs. Helena Airaksinen observed that communities possessed abundant resources, yet lacked access to safe water. "COWASH IV, through its collaborative approach, bridged this crucial gap," she remarked.

Ambassador Antila applauded the community's active participation, highlighting the effectiveness of community-based management for such initiatives. "This model fosters ownership and ensures long-term sustainability," she emphasized.

Mr. Jukka Pajarinen emphasized the project's broader impact. "COWASH IV goes beyond providing clean water," he stated. "It empowers girls, improves overall health, and unlocks opportunities for communities."

This high-level visit serves as a powerful symbol of Finland's unwavering commitment to supporting positive change in Ethiopia. By witnessing the tangible impact of COWASH IV, the delegation reaffirmed Finland's dedication to empowering communities and building a brighter future for all Ethiopians.



BUILDING A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT: EDUCATOR TRAINING

COWASH IV partnered with regional education bureaus to train over 50 educators in Sidama and Tigray, addressing menstrual hygiene management (MHM) challenges. Held between December 12-15, 2023, in Yirgalem City and November 21-25, 2023, in Adigrat, these programs equipped participants with crucial skills to support girls and women managing their periods.

Participants, including school directors, teachers, and health workers, covered topics such as life skills development, dispelling menstrual myths, and practical sessions on reusable sanitary pad production. This knowledge empowers educators to address social and practical challenges, fostering openness within communities. Health extension workers can extend their learnings, contributing to sustained improvements in menstrual hygiene practices.

By empowering educators and advancing MHM education, COWASH IV invests in the future of girls and communities, enabling them to stay in school and realize their full potential.





KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Safe Water for All: Over 381,147 rural people now have access to clean water through new and rehabilitated water schemes.

Empowering Communities: 20 WASH businesses launched and 63 WASH Saving and Loan Associations established, fostering sustainable solutions.

Healthy Schools: Improved WASH facilities in 190 schools, benefiting over 150,000 students.

Hygienic Healthcare: 79 health institutions equipped with water points and latrines, creating a healthier environment for patients and staff.

Menstrual Hygiene Management: 19 menstrual hygiene management facilities built, promoting women and girls' health.

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COWASH IV IN CENTRAL AND SOUTHERN ETHIOPIA

After recent regional restructuring in Ethiopia, COWASH IV swiftly acted to maintain vital WASH services in the newly established Central and Southern Ethiopia regions. Leveraging existing presence in these areas, COWASH IV seamlessly adapted to the changes, supported by MOUs with the Regional Finance Bureaus. The COWASH IV Federal Technical Assistance Team (FTAT) played a key role, initiating collaboration with the Water Bureau of Central Ethiopia Region on February 7th to ensure uninterrupted services. This strategic approach positions COWASH IV to address WASH needs effectively, partnering with local stakeholders to advance sustainable access for all..







SHARING BEST PRACTISES

COWASH IV held its first Regional Support Unit (RSU) Knowledge Sharing Workshop in Hawassa, Ethiopia, from November 6th to 9th, 2023. Around 50 participants, including FTAT and RSUs, along with stakeholders from the Ethiopian Ministry of Finance, the Embassy of Finland in Ethiopia, VisionFund Microfinance Institution, and others, attended.

The workshop facilitated discussions on best practices and current trends in the WASH sector. RSUs presented case studies on innovative approaches, such as community-led management and collaboration with local businesses for affordable WASH technologies. Topics also included WASH financing, climate change and communication strategies. The workshop fostered collaboration among RSUs and partners, providing a platform for networking and sharing experiences.

Participants exchanged insights on overcoming challenges, such as financing WASH projects in remote areas and promoting menstrual hygiene management.

THANK YOU FOR READING!

We hope this newsletter has inspired you to learn more about COWASH IV and the communities we serve. Together, we can make a difference in the lives of rural communities in Ethiopia by ensuring access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene.

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Community-led Accelerated WASH IV

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