COWASH



GREETINGS

Welcome to the latest edition of our quarterly newsletter. In this edition, we'll explore key achievements in July and August 2025, including our milestone of reaching over 1 million beneficiaries and potential new partnerships.

COWASH IV SURPASSES ONE MILLION WATER BENEFICIARIES, LAYS FOUNDATION FOR RURAL WASH

The Community-led Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Project, Phase Four (COWASH IV) has reached the major milestone of providing safe water to over one million beneficiaries in rural Ethiopia by the end of August 2025.

COWASH IV, which started in April 2021, has constructed and rehabilitated 3,904 water points in 104 districts across eight regions benefiting 1, 003, 325 people. With one year remaining in its current phase and a target of reaching 1.1 million beneficiaries, this is a monumental achievement for the project.

This achievement is a significant step toward the project's vision: "Transforming Lives, Empowering Communities." It also proves the project's commitment to improving public health, enhancing well-being, fostering social development and building climate resilience throughout rural Ethiopia.





Beyond community water points, the project has built 254 water supply facilities at health centers and 484 water points at schools.

In the area of sanitation, COWASH IV has constructed 181 health center latrines and 80 school latrines Additionally, the project has constructed 39 Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) Centers in schools, established 292 WASH Saving and Loan Associations (WASH SLAs) aimed at constructing improved household latrines and 26 Market-based Sanitation Centers (MSCs).

This work has been supported by extensive human capacity building, with training provided to 81,665people.

For women like Belay Dinku, the WASH SLA chair from Shera village in Geta Woreda, Central Ethiopia, COWASH is more than just a project that provided her community with a safe water supply.

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She said it empowered her to contribute to her society through leadership, where she managed to ensure all her members built improved household latrines. This not only helped the village achieve Open Defecation Free (ODF) status but also resulted in better health for the community. The training she received, she added, helped her a lot in leading them to success. Stay tuned to our next newsletter to learn more about her story and her all-women SLA group.

COWASH IV's success is a testament to the unwavering dedication of its communities and partners. It is also a direct result of its holistic approach guided by six key focus areas, including developing WASH infrastructure, ensuring the long-term sustainability of these services, and integrating gender and disability inclusion into all of its work.

COWASH, with its first phase launched in 2011, is a bilateral project funded by the Governments of Ethiopia and Finland. It is implemented by the Ethiopian Ministry of Water and Energy in close collaboration with the Ministries of Education, Health, and Finance, as well as a network of regional WASH partners. This collaborative effort has been the driving force behind the project's success, demonstrating that together, it is possible to build a brighter and more resilient future for rural communities.

To learn more about our work on the ground, read our next story on our community water supply work in Bale Goba.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Safe Water for All: Over 1,003,325 rural people now have access to clean water through new and rehabilitated water schemes.

Empowering Communities: 26 WASH businesses launched and 292 WASH Saving and Loan Associations established, fostering sustainable solutions.

Healthy Schools: Improved WASH facilities in 564 schools, benefiting 392,090 students and school staff.

Hygienic Healthcare: 435 health institutions equipped with water points and latrines, creating a healthier environment for patients and staff.

Menstrual Hygiene Management: 70 menstrual hygiene management facilities built, promoting women and girls' health.

ENDING A 3KM TREK: A COMMUNITY'S JOURNEY TO SAFE WATER SUPPLY IN BALE



For the community of Weltayi Kubsa Kebele in Bale Goba, daily life once included an exhausting 3-kilometer trek up a mountain to fetch water from the Hululicho Spring. Located at 10,000 feet above sea level, the journey to the spring is now a thing of the past.

In May 2017, the Ethiopian Fiscal Year, COWASH IV constructed a 3km piped line from the spring to the village, bringing safe water supply directly to the community. The new system, which includes a spring capping structure, a reservoir and two community water points, provides a reliable water supply for 475 people from 97 households. This initiative is a vital step toward a healthier and more productive future for the community.

The Hululicho spring is also one of two pilot sites for the COWASH IV's Green Legacy Initiative, which addresses climate and environmental risks. The program, which started in February 2025, complements the project's Water Safety Planning efforts.

The COWASH IV team conducted a follow-up visit on August 12 and 13 to the Bale Goba and Dinsho Woredas to monitor the Green Legacy initiative's progress. The team met with Woreda administrators, partner office heads and technical experts to discuss the initiative's implementation and sustainability.

In both Woredas, land for tree planting had already been prepared. In Goba, the COWASH team helped transport around 1,000 trees prepared by the Office of Agriculture to the piloting site. The team, along with Woreda technical experts, visited the site in Weltayi Kubsa Kebele, at the upper Hululicho Spring, where the team provided on-the-job training to community members and WASH Committee members on the importance of integrating the Green Legacy Initiative with water supply efforts. The team, along with the WASHCO members, also planted indigenous trees just upstream of the spring source to help ensure the water's sustainability for years to come.



UNDERSTANDING WASH: BEYOND THE INFRASTRUCTURE



Lasting change in WASH efforts requires more than just building infrastructure. It demands deep understanding of the communities and their daily practices. This story will explore why understanding these socio-cultural factors is essential, highlight some common challenges in WASH and discuss how to understand and address them effectively.

Why Understanding Local Perceptions Matters?

Daily WASH habits are deeply tied to a community's cultural beliefs, traditions and taboos. Solutions that fail to account for these factors are likely to be rejected or improperly used, leading to program failure. By taking a human-centered approach, projects can design interventions that resonate with a community, are more likely to be accepted, and can be maintained and sustained over time. This also fosters trust, engagement and community ownership, which is vital for long-term success.

Common Challenges from Socio-Cultural Norms

Several common socio-cultural factors present significant challenges to WASH efforts. In some rural settings, for example, open defecation is considered normal or culturally acceptable, making the adoption of latrines a low priority.

Another common misconception is that children's feces are harmless, which leads to their unsafe disposal. Pertaining to water, the responsibility for collection often falls on women and girls, creating an unequal burden. A dangerous belief that clear water is safe to drink, regardless of potential contamination, is also a widespread issue.

For hygiene, simple practices like handwashing are often overlooked if hands "look" clean, and soap is viewed as a luxury item rather than a daily necessity. Furthermore, deeply rooted taboos around menstruation can lead to a lack of proper hygiene among women and girls.



From Insight to Action: Understanding and Addressing Challenges

To move from insight to impact, it is essential to first understand these norms and then develop targeted, locally-led strategies to address them. The process begins with gathering insights through methods like focus group discussions, interviews and direct observation of daily practices.

Practitioners use participatory tools like mapping and role-playing to engage community members in a dynamic way, while also using storytelling to uncover deeper beliefs and power relations. The goal is to move beyond mere data collection and truly understand how cultural beliefs translate into real-world behavior.

Once these factors are understood, locally-led solutions can be implemented. This involves empowering women and girls and ensuring their needs and perspectives are reflected in the solutions. It also includes using local languages and stories in communication campaigns and working with key influencers and community leaders to help change social norms.





Projects also promote low-cost, culturally acceptable technologies and use behavioral nudges, such as visual cues, to encourage positive changes in a non-confrontational way.

By prioritizing a human-centered approach, WASH initiatives can build healthier, more resilient communities that are empowered to take ownership of their own well-being.

DID YOU KNOW?

Investing in WASH is one of the cost-effective development interventions. This is because improving access to WASH doesn't just prevent disease; it also saves time that people, especially women and girls, spend on collecting water. It allows them to attend school, earn income & contribute to their communities, creating a ripple effect of improved health, education and economic growth.

FROM IDEA TO REALITY: COWASH IV COMMUNITY-MANAGED WATER POINTS



COWASH IV is ensuring the sustainability of its water projects by empowering communities to lead every step of the process, from initial design to long-term management. Through its CMP approach, the project puts communities in the driver's seat, reinforcing a strong sense of ownership and commitment.

At COWASH, the journey to a new water point begins with a community's own initiative. First, they must demonstrate a clear need and a shared commitment by submitting an application for water point construction to their local Woreda Water Office.

This initial step is a critical part of the process, as it signifies the community's readiness to partner in the project.

Once applications are submitted, they are carefully appraised by Woreda-level experts, and the Woreda WASH team makes the final funding decisions.

Once a project is approved, the real empowerment begins. The community, through its WASHCO, is not just a passive beneficiary but an active participant.

Woreda experts, who have been trained through COWASH IV's Training-of-Trainers program, equip WASHCOs with the necessary skills to manage every stage of the project. This training is a crucial transfer of knowledge, covering the entire CMP approach, including active participation in the design phase.

This ensures that the water point is designed to meet the community's specific needs and preferences from the very beginning.

With the skills and knowledge in place, the WASHCOs take the lead. They sign a Fund Management Agreement, receive the necessary funding, and then directly oversee the implementation and management of the water point construction.



This direct involvement in a project's lifecycle, from procurement and construction to financial management, instills a deep sense of responsibility and pride.

The community's commitment is further reinforced by their own contributions of cash, labor and construction materials, solidifying their investment in the project.

Through tariff collection from the community, the WASHCOs also continue to administer the water point, overseeing its proper utilization and maintenance.

This holistic process is the true key to long-term sustainability. COWASH IV's support extends far beyond the construction phase, empowering Woreda-level experts and communities to manage their water points for years to come.

By fostering this genuine community ownership from the very start, the CMP approach ensures that the new water points will provide a sustainable and reliable water supply, built to last.



COWASH IV Training Programs

March 13 - June 11, 2024

1

CMP Cycle Management

- Number of Training Programs - 2
- Regions - South Ethiopia
- Participants - 21
- Focus - CMP cycle & Institutional WASH Implementation & Management

2

WASH SLAs and MBCs

- Number of Training Programs - 10
- Regions - Central Ethiopia, South Ethiopia, South-west Ethiopia
- Participants - 120
- Focus - Strengthening WASH SLAs & MSCs

3

Hygiene and Sanitation

- Number of Training Programs - 3
- Regions - Central Ethiopia, Sidama, Oromia
- Participants - 134
- Focus - Social & Behavioural Change

4

Monitoring and Evaluation

- Number of Training Programs - 2
- Regions - Central Ethiopia, South Ethiopia
- Participants - 4
- Focus - Data management & reporting

COWASH IV PARTNERS WITH RESOLUTION STUDIO TO BOOST SANITATION BUSINESSES



In a new collaboration aimed at expanding sanitation access across Ethiopia, COWASH IV has partnered with Resolution Studio to strengthen Market-based Sanitation Centers (MSCs). The collaboration aims to empower local sanitation businesses by addressing critical gaps in branding and promotion knowledge.

In a mission conducted from July 29 to 31, a joint team from COWASH IV and Resolution Studio carried out an initial assessment of two MSCs in the Central Ethiopia and Sidama Regions. The team visited two key sites: Chironi MSC in Sidama and Tesfa Zer MSC in Central Ethiopia.

The goal of this phase was to gather valuable insights into the specific challenges these businesses face, which will lay the groundwork for designing tailored support and preparing for future expansion of the initiative.

This new partnership builds on COWASH IV's ongoing commitment to fostering market-based sanitation, supporting private sector engagement and innovation to make WASH products and services accessible and affordable.

COWASH IV has established 26 MSCs across its project Woredas. This vital work demonstrates COWASH IV's commitment to ensuring sanitation access for all.



STRENGTHENING SANITATION SUPPLY CHAINS TO RURAL ETHIOPIA



Continuing its commitment to enhancing sanitation access and strengthening local business, COWASH IV is advancing its initiative to reinforce sanitation product supply chains in rural Ethiopia. The second week of July, 2025 marked a step with the ongoing transportation of 200 plastic toilet slabs from Addis Ababa to MSCs in Chirone and Selekelaka Woredas, located in Sidama and Tigray Regions, respectively. These supplies were purchased by the COWASH IV team on behalf of the MSCs on July 12, 2025.

This latest distribution builds on COWASH IV's approach to strengthening sustainable supply channels for MSCs, enabling them to thrive as viable businesses.

Beyond initial setup and supportive supervision, COWASH IV's comprehensive support empowers MSCs to provide accessible and affordably priced sanitation products to their customers, primarily COWASH IV water beneficiary households and WASH SLAs established by the project. This also helps them establish robust working relationships with suppliers for their future procurement needs, generate profits that contribute to long-term WASH business sustainability, and effectively promote sanitation products within communities, thereby expanding essential services and improving hygiene practices in rural areas.

Building on Efforts to Restore Sanitation Product Supply Chains in Tigray

The current initiative extends COWASH IV's work in restoring sanitation product supply chains in Tigray following the end of conflict in the region.

In December 2024, COWASH IV facilitated the purchase and distribution of 100 medium plastic toilet slabs to MSCs in Degua Tembien and Endamekoni Woredas.



In addition, the project team facilitated the purchase and distribution of 110 medium plastic toilet slabs to Endamekoni Woreda in February 2025.

This earlier effort was crucial for strengthening supply chains, improving access to essential sanitation products for COWASH IV community water point beneficiary households, and supporting the growth of local businesses by empowering MBSCs in a challenging environment.

COWASH IV federal and regional teams were instrumental in connecting these MSCs with suppliers for improved toilet slabs in both the current and previous initiatives. The Project advocated for these MSCs to receive priority, considering their financial capacity and specific product interests, ensuring a smooth and equitable procurement process.





These continuous actions, from targeted support for MSCs to restoring and strengthening supply chain efforts, underscore COWASH IV's commitment to ensuring sustainable and resilient sanitation access for rural Ethiopia, fostering lasting change and healthier communities.

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 safe water, sanitation and hygiene.

cowashinfo@cmpethiopia.org

www.cowash.org

Community-led Accelerated WASH IV

COWASH IV Ethiopia

@COWASHIV