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GREETINGS

Welcome to the latest edition of our quarterly newsletter! In this issue, we will explore key achievements, new initiatives, partnerships and progress from October to December 2025.

BELAY DINKU'S ALL-WOMEN SLA GROUP LEADS SHERA VILLAGE TO OPEN DEFECATION FREE STATUS



The Shera village in Agata Kebele, Geta Woreda, Central Ethiopia, has achieved Open Defecation Free (ODF) status, a significant health achievement led by an exemplary and highly motivated Shera Saving and Loan Association (SLA). This group, which was established in 2022, is unique among those formed by COWASH IV as all 30 member households are represented by women.

The SLA is chaired by Belay Dinku, who credits the crucial training provided by COWASH IV on leadership, management and financial governance for her success. Belay's effective leadership ensured all her members built improved household latrines, laying the ground for the entire village to achieve ODF status.

COWASH IV facilitates the establishment of these SLA groups to financially empower communities to construct their own improved household latrines, while also providing crucial training programmes.

In the wider Agata Kebele, COWASH IV has facilitated the establishment of five SLAs, all of whose members successfully built improved household latrines, leading to the *Kebele* being officially declared ODF.

The shift in the Shera village's sanitation practice is profound. Belay recalls the past when people relied on natural spaces, such as the Enset (false banana) fields in their backyards, for defecation. Now, with the construction of improved household latrines, environmental hygiene has become the norm. Belay also highlights the significant change in behaviour and health outcomes adding that when she was a child, her hands often itched due to poor hygiene caused by the lack of proper latrines. She says, there is a lot of change now where they actively maintain environmental and personal hygiene.

This commitment to hygiene and the quality of leadership is evident to anyone who visits their village.





Abebech Gebreyohannes, the *Kebele's* Health Extension Worker, specifically commended Belay for her leadership skills in effectively mobilizing her SLA members to save. Derbe Melese, the SLA's Treasurer, agrees, noting that Belay effectively manages the group despite having many responsibilities at home. Beyond her village, Mifta Sherif, the COWASH IV Community Managed Project (CMP) Advisor at the *Woreda*, says Belay and her group have become a model for other SLAs due to her strong leadership.

Financial Independence and Future Goals

The Shera SLA group's disciplined approach included saving 10 Birr per week. Belay remembers their collective determination: during construction, when members were short of money, they each sold a chicken to make up the difference and add to their savings.

Now that all members have achieved their goal of constructing an improved latrine, the group has chosen to keep meeting regularly to discuss sanitation and hygiene issues, with the kebele's health extension worker attending to provide ongoing advice and training. Their next goal is to bring water directly to their houses using their pooled SLA savings.

Their long-term vision also includes starting a local small business to produce and sell liquid soap for themselves and the community and installing solar systems in their households.

This financial independence is supported by COWASH IV's infrastructure efforts, which included the construction of a community water point, ensuring Belay and her community have a nearby safe water supply.

Learn more about Belay's inspiring journey and our work in SLA by checking out our documentary titled: "Building with Savings: Community Ownership" – https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nA4ljAarcCs&t=3s



REVIVING SANITATION WORK IN TIGRAY



The COWASH IV team is scaling up its post-conflict sanitation efforts in Tigray, coupling critical on-the-ground fieldwork with a major new financial initiative designed to ensure long-term sustainability.

Following the conflict, COWASH was one of the first projects to restart operations in Tigray. While the immediate focus was on the rehabilitation of safe water points, the project is now steadily expanding its sanitation work.

From October 14–31, 2025, the COWASH IV team successfully concluded a critical three-week mission across all 12 project Woredas in Tigray. The primary focus of the mission was on reviving and enhancing household sanitation, centered on sustainability and community empowerment through finance: establishing and strengthening SLAs. The team traveled across all project *Woredas*, meeting with beneficiary communities, existing SLA members, and key *Woreda* and *Kebele*-level stakeholders.

They assessed the status of existing SLAs and successfully initiated the formation process in Woredas that had none, starting with at least two new associations in each, working closely with partner bureaus and COWASH focal persons.

Following deep discussions with Woreda partners and health extension workers, the team prepared concrete action plans to improve sanitation implementation practices in the region for the coming months, including the goal of ensuring selected pilot *Kebeles* in each *Woreda* are declared ODF.

Building on these efforts and to address the immediate supply gap, the COWASH team successfully facilitated the purchase and distribution of 310 plastic latrine slabs to the SLAs in three separate rounds, utilizing project vehicles to ensure timely delivery. Visible improvements in sanitation practices were already noted during the October visit, particularly in Degua Tembien and Ende Mehoni *Woredas*, where training and slab distribution efforts have been most intensive.





However, a major challenge for many communities in constructing improved household latrines is the financial barrier, often due to the lack of affordable and accessible materials and a broken supply chain. To address this financing and supply gap, COWASH IV is pioneering a solution in Tigray: the establishment of a Birr 2.25 million Revolving Fund dedicated to the supply of toilet slabs.

This consensus initiative, developed with regional stakeholders, directly tackles several challenges, including shortages of sanitation supplies, a lack of local transport and material availability, and limited local access as centralized suppliers require large minimum orders. The revolving fund initiative builds upon the Tigray Water Bureau's prior experience with revolving funds for Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) spare parts, leveraging a proven financial mechanism to significantly improve household sanitation.

Following fruitful discussions with the Bureau of Water, Health, and Finance, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been drafted and is expected to be signed soon.

Once signed, COWASH will provide the initial fund for procurement, to be administered by the Bureau of Water.

This initiative is critical because the revolving fund is a continuous financial source, ensuring sustainability and providing affordable, accessible toilet slabs for Woreda stakeholders, sanitation supply centers, and communities across the region. While COWASH takes a pioneering role in establishing the system, it is designed to be open to any entity working in sanitation to contribute additional finance, promoting a systematized, collaborative approach to procurement and supply chain management.

This new fund is one more way COWASH IV is empowering communities to take ownership of their sanitation service needs across the 104 rural woredas where it works, strengthening local supply chains and financially empowering households to construct safe, inclusive, and standardized latrines for all.



COWASH IV CONDUCTED KEY FIELD ASSESSMENT ON SUSTAINABLE SOLAR WATER SOLUTIONS



The reliance on diesel generators and electric grids for rural Ethiopian water systems is often affected by critical challenges, including high operational costs and complex maintenance. This reality is fueling a necessary shift toward sustainable solar-powered solutions, prompting COWASH IV to lead a vital assessment into the feasibility of this technology within the CMP approach.

The COWASH IV team concluded a major field assessment in Central Ethiopia, focusing on Abeshege and Lemo *Woredas* from November 24 to 28, 2025.

This mission is part of a broader study comparing the long-term technical, financial and operational sustainability of solar-powered water supply systems against traditional diesel generator and electric options.

The work builds upon similar assessments previously conducted in the Oromia Region's Kersa and Goma *Woredas*.

During the assessment, the team engaged directly with communities, examining functional solar-powered rural water supply systems and reservoirs. Crucially, they held extensive meetings with WASH committee leaders, non-government organizations and experts from design, alternative energy and scheme management teams across *Woreda*, *Zone* and Regional Water offices.

The assessment's central purpose is to determine if solar power is truly achievable and sustainable when systems are primarily implemented and managed by the community with Woreda expert support.

Key objectives include identifying the benefits of solar systems over diesel and electric grids, highlighting specific hurdles for utilizing solar systems within CMP approach and gathering lessons learned to optimize solar implementation for the remainder of COWASH IV.



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Based on the findings, the project aims to expand the use of solar systems and provide data-driven advice for integrating solar power as a core option in the project's next phase.

With the fieldwork in Central Ethiopia complete, the team is now preparing for its final assessment mission in a selected third region. Following the completion of the entire field assessment, the COWASH IV team will move to drafting a comprehensive report.

This report will feature detailed recommendations on the technical, financial and operational requirements needed to successfully integrate solar technology into future community-led projects.

Furthermore, if found necessary, the team will develop a detailed guideline on how communities can practically implement and manage solar-powered water systems.

COWASH IV, having already successfully piloted solar-powered water supply systems in some community water points, is committed to driving this sustainable change. Stay tune as we will bring you more updates on these crucial findings and recommendations in our upcoming newsletters.

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.

COWASH IV AND MAX FOUNDATION PARTNER TO INTEGRATE WASH AND NUTRITION



COWASH IV and the Max Foundation, an international non-governmental organization dedicated to improving the health and well-being of children and mothers, have established a partnership to integrate their works in WASH, Nutrition and Nutrition-Sensitive Agriculture (NSA).

A joint team from the two organizations is developing a pilot that explores how Max Foundation's Healthy Village (HV) approach can be effectively integrated within COWASH's successful WASH systems.

This partnership's first phase focus will be on capacity building and joint learning to prepare for a strong, complementary collaboration in the future.

The partnership seeks to leverage COWASH's existing community footprint to accelerate progress on child health and nutrition outcomes across Ethiopia.

The HV program will add crucial components of nutrition and NSA, with a focus on the first 1,000 days of life, which includes children under two and pregnant and lactating women.

The partnership follows earlier discussions between COWASH IV and the Max Foundation team about the possibility of adding nutrition-focused work to COWASH's existing efforts.

These initial talks were followed by an assessment visit to COWASH IV project *Woredas*, which took place in Central Ethiopia from August 25 to 28, 2025. The visit provided valuable insights, enabling the team to decide on integration points and select pilot *Woredas* to strengthen both sectors and benefit communities.

During its visit, the joint team met with local leaders and representatives from various government offices, including the offices of Agriculture, Education, Finance, Health and Water.





The team also had a discussion with community members, WASH committee leaders and members of SLAs established for constructing improved household latrines. These meetings focused on the current groundwork, the available opportunities for implementing the potential partnership and the needs for integrating nutrition programs. Both community members and local officials expressed strong enthusiasm for the idea, noting that nutrition work has been a critical challenge in their area.

This integrated approach aims to go beyond the established COWASH IV system by leveraging existing government structures, such as Health Extension Workers and Agricultural Development Agents. The goal is to strengthen frontline capacity and embed nutrition into routine services.

The collaboration also seeks to develop a market-based ecosystem that ensures families can reliably access the products and services they need to stay healthy.

To achieve this, the partnership will integrate COWASH IV's work in SLAs and Market-based Sanitation Centers (MSCs) to create a demand and supply chain for improved seeds and fortified flours, extending beyond sanitation supplies.

The partnership leverages COWASH's strong community presence to cost-effectively add the HV program's nutrition and NSA components. By creating a holistic, scalable model, this collaboration aims to accelerate progress on diet quality, child growth and learning outcomes, while protecting the gains made in WASH. This direct alignment with government priorities, such as the One WASH National Programme and the National Food and Nutrition Strategy, will allow for rapid expansion at a marginal cost.

DID YOU KNOW?

Improved WASH services in schools can have a direct positive health impact on students. Studies and reviews suggest that improved school WASH interventions can significantly reduce the incidence of diarrheal disease by 25% up to 50% among students.

COWASH VOLUNTEERS LAUNCHED COMMUNITY CONVERSATION ON SANITATION AND HYGIENE ACROSS THREE REGIONS



Volunteers who graduated from the COWASH IV's recent training programme for volunteer Community Conversation Facilitators have launched regular community conversations on sanitation and hygiene in their villages.

This initiative marks a major step forward in the project's efforts to bring about positive, sustained behavioral change in sanitation and hygiene across its project regions.

The comprehensive training program, which launched on September 16, 2025, in Gumaye, Jimma Zone, was designed to build the capacity of local volunteers and *Woreda* experts, including WASH SLA members and health extension workers across seven regions. It equipped them with the skills to lead and facilitate effective, weekly or bi-weekly community conversations.

To guide these interactive sessions, the COWASH IV team developed a specially designed flip chart, now available in four local languages.

Since the training's launch, the COWASH IV team has successfully completed sessions in 15 *Woredas* across the Central Ethiopia, Oromia and Sidama Regions.

Crucially, 14 of these *Woredas* have already initiated their bi-weekly community conversations. This rapid uptake demonstrates the commitment of the volunteers and the effectiveness of the capacity-building approach.

The team will continue this training programme in eight additional *Woredas* in the coming weeks, aiming for a total of 230 participating volunteers who will go on to form 92 community conversation groups.

These conversations will be guided by the flip charts and will focus on essential public health topics, including building and using improved latrines, alternative latrine products, hand washing, safe water handling and storage, menstrual health and hygiene, and gender and disability inclusion in WASH.





The training program is designed to foster in-depth, locally-led discussions that lead to lasting behavior change. Halima Nasser, a WASH SLA member from Kersa *Woreda* in the Oromia region, shared her enthusiasm, noting that the training built her confidence and provided her with critical knowledge she is now eager to share.

Similarly, Abdulbasit Jemal, another trainee from Kersa Woreda, confirmed that with their gained skills, their SLA group will actively work to bring about change in their community.

Ebsa Feyisa, Social and Behavioural Change specialist at COWASH IV, applauded the volunteers, who were elected by their communities based on set criteria, for their active involvement and dedication. He noted that the immediate commencement of community conversations in nearly all trained *Woredas* is a testament to the success of the initial capacity-building effort and a strong indicator of future progress.

COWASH IV Training Programmes

September 13 - December 13, 2025

CMP & Water Safety Planning — 1

- Number of Training Programs - 34
- Regions - Oromia, South Ethiopia
- Participants - 113
- Focus - CMP appraisal, CMP cycle & Institutional WASH Implementation & Management

WASH SLAs and MBCs — 2

- Number of Training Programs - 16
- Regions - Oromia, Sidama, South Ethiopia, Tigray
- Participants - 283
- Focus - Strengthening WASH SLAs & MSCs

Gender & Disability Inclusion — 5

- Number of Training Programs - 1
- Regions - South-West Ethiopia People's Region
- Participants - 16
- Focus - Women's leadership, gender-based violence & Menstrual Hygiene Management

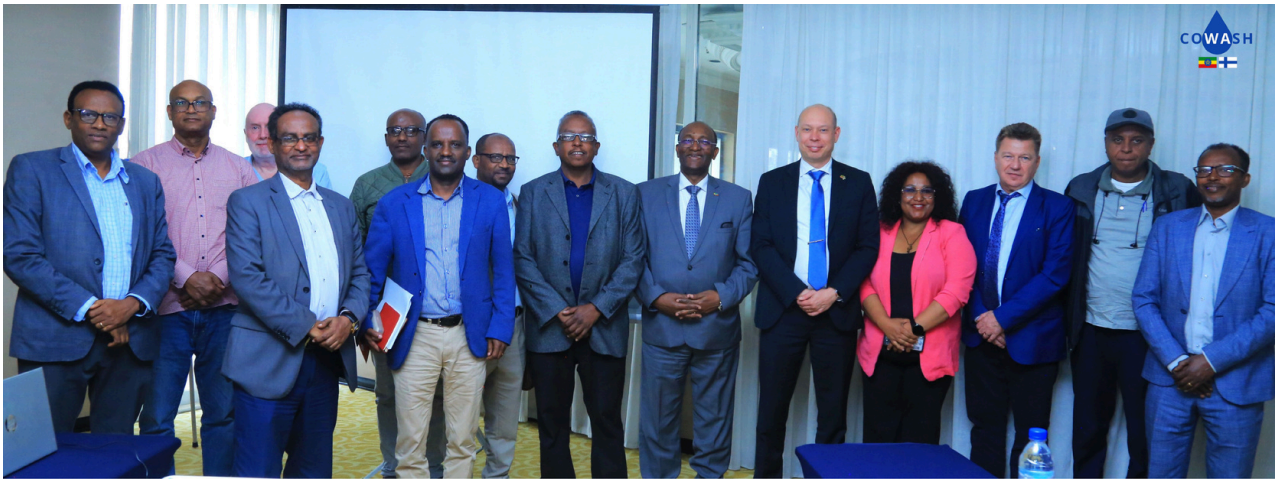
Monitoring and Evaluation — 4

- Number of Training Programs - 6
- Regions - Central Ethiopia, Sidama
- Participants - 22
- Focus - Data quality, management & reporting

Hygiene and Sanitation — 5

- Number of Training Programs - 15
- Regions - Central Ethiopia, Sidama, Oromia
- Participants - 150
- Focus - Social & Behavioural Change

COWASH IV NATIONAL STEERING COMMITTEE CONCLUDES ITS OCTOBER 2018 MEETING



The COWASH IV National Steering Committee successfully concluded its key meeting on October 15, 2025, at the Capital Hotel. The committee reviewed the project's significant progress, assessed key operational issues, and discussed the way forward.

The committee meeting, which included representatives from the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Water and Energy, and the Embassy of Finland, was co-chaired by Ambassador Asfaw Dingamo (PhD), State Minister of the Ministry of Water and Energy and Mr Tomi Särkioja, Head of Cooperation at the Embassy of Finland.

COWASH IV Chief Technical Advisor Neil Chadder presented project updates for the committee, including major works completed in the Ethiopian Fiscal Year (EFY) 2017 and outlined plans for EFY 2018.

Neil also presented a general overview of the utilization of funding received from the Governments of Ethiopia and Finland. Following this, Assegid Teklu, COWASH IV Project Finance Coordinator at the Ministry of Finance, provided a detailed financial report specifically on the Government of Finland's fund utilization in the project.

The committee held critical discussions on challenges, forward plans and the potential COWASH Phase V programme document.





Key Achievements

A major highlight of the meeting was the announcement that, with one year remaining, COWASH IV has already reached over 1 million beneficiaries (1,003,325) against its target of 1.1 million, as of the end of June. In EFY 2017 alone, the project delivered substantial infrastructure and capacity improvements. During this period, the project constructed 1,235 new water points, directly benefiting 307,487 people.

Infrastructure was also improved in institutions, with water points established in 160 schools and 112 health posts, and improved latrines built in 29 schools and 61 health posts. Furthermore, the project completed 31 Menstrual Hygiene Management centers and provided capacity building training to 14,068 individuals.

Since the beginning of Phase IV, the project has established 292 WASH SLAs to foster financial independence for household latrine construction, alongside 26 MSCs to provide accessible and affordable sanitation supplies to rural communities.

In addition, the project continues to raise awareness and engage actively with school staff, WASH and gender clubs and local communities to drive positive long-term change in hygiene practices.

To strengthen its impact, COWASH IV launched community conversation flipcharts and started training volunteer community members who will facilitate community conversations aiming to reinforce its Social and Behavioral Change efforts. The project continues to raise awareness and engage actively with school staff, WASH and gender clubs and local communities to drive positive long-term change in hygiene practices.

Overall, the Steering Committee meeting successfully highlighted the project's achievement and concluded by agreeing to move forward with the presented plan and the points discussed.



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.

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Community-led Accelerated WASH IV

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