COWASH



GREETINGS

Welcome to the COWASH IV Quarterly Newsletter. This edition provides a consolidated update on project activities and progress from January to March 2026, highlighting ongoing efforts to strengthen rural water, sanitation and hygiene services through community-led initiatives, technical monitoring and multi-sectoral partnerships across project Woredas.

MULU FILIPOSE: ADVANCING SANITATION THROUGH THE COWASH COMMUNITY CONVERSATION INITIATIVE



The COWASH IV Community Conversation (CC) initiative, which aims to improve sanitation and hygiene practices, is currently being implemented across rural Ethiopia through established community groups. At the center of this effort are the project's volunteers, such as Mulu Filipose, who lead and guide these groups during scheduled conversation sessions.

Mulu, a Health Extension Worker and COWASH IV volunteer supervisor, is currently facilitating sessions that connect technical WASH standards with the daily practices of her community in Wechale Village, Sidama Region. By bridging the gap between national health targets and local traditions, Mulu is ensuring that the initiative results in daily practices at household level.

Mulu is among the 190 facilitators and supervisors who participated in the COWASH IV capacity-building training programme conducted between September 2025 and January 2026.

This training provided volunteer beneficiary community members, Woreda experts and frontline health workers across five regions with the participatory skills required to lead the eight-session CC curriculum.

Utilizing a visual flipchart guide developed by COWASH IV, Mulu currently manages a group of 31 members, facilitating discussions where residents identify local sanitation barriers and coordinate practical solutions. This methodology focuses on shifting from external delivery toward community-led problem-solving.

The results of this initiative were documented during a field mission to the Wondo Genet and Gorche Woredas from February 9 to 13, 2026. The COWASH IV team noted that these structured conversations are resulting in significant changes in household practices.





In the village of Abaye Boreta, the local CC group, led by facilitator Kamba Hirpeto and supervisor Shegitu Taye, has achieved noticeable progress in sanitation infrastructure. All 28 member households in the group have completed the construction of improved latrines, demonstrating the immediate impact of the collective conversation model.

This physical progress is supported by a functional link to financial resources. Many participants are utilizing WASH Saving and Loan Associations, established by COWASH IV, to fund their household sanitation improvements.

Beyond infrastructure, the initiative is addressing social dynamics within the community. In villages such as Uraga and Wechale, male members have begun participating in discussions regarding menstrual health and hygiene to better support the women and girls in their households. This inclusion of men in topics traditionally considered taboo for community-wide discussion marks a significant shift toward shared responsibility for family and community health.

The progress of the model was marked on March 7, 2026, with the graduation of the Abaye Boreta Kebele CC group. During a ceremony organized by the Wondo Genet Woreda Health Office, 28 members were recognized for completing the full two-month curriculum and achieving 100 percent latrine coverage within their group.

This graduation serves as a benchmark for the initiative as it expands across Central Ethiopia, where 20 additional groups in Tembaro, Lemo and Abeshge are currently engaging 551 participants. For supervisors like Mulu Filipose, these milestones represent the practical application of the COWASH IV initiative: establishing a community-led framework that translates group dialogue into visible sanitation improvements.

DID YOU KNOW?

Access to safe water is a fundamental human right. COWASH IV works to realize this right through the Community-Managed Project (CMP) approach, a unique model that empowers local communities to take full ownership of their water infrastructure. To date, this approach has enabled COWASH IV to serve over 1.1 million people through the construction of 3087 new community water points.

STRENGTHENING RURAL SANITATION MARKETS THROUGH PROFESSIONAL BRANDING AND PROMOTION



Following the launch of COWASH IV's Market-Based Sanitation Centre (MSC) branding initiative, the project team conducted field visits from March 11-12, 2026, to deliver professional visibility materials to pilot centres in Central Ethiopia and the Sidama Region. The delivery represents the latest phase of a collaborative branding process where members of the Roori MSC in Sidama and the Tesfa Zer MSC in Central Ethiopia worked with consultants to define unique brand identities. Moving away from standard templates, custom logos and color schemes were designed for each centre to reflect specific local business goals and community contexts.

To support these businesses in professionalizing their community outreach, the project provided a suite of branded assets including professional workwear, such as branded gowns and t-shirts, alongside storefront signboards, roadside posters, and roll-up banners featuring tailored marketing content. During the visit, project teams met with MSC members and Woreda partners to discuss strategies for business sustainability. Members indicated that the combination of technical training and professional branding materials has increased their capacity to build community trust and stimulate demand for sanitation products.

The delivery of these materials builds upon a week-long training programme conducted from January to February 2026, which focused on marketing, sales skills, and brand visibility to help transition the centres from local producers into market-driven businesses. The initial training sessions were held from January 27–29 for the five founding members of Roori MSC, followed by a session for the three members of Tesfa Zer MSC in Hadero Tutno Woreda. Both centres were established by COWASH IV in collaboration with regional governments to improve the accessibility of affordable sanitation supplies.

Beyond the delivery of physical assets, the joint team continues to conduct follow-up visits to assess implementation and provide real-time feedback. These visits ensure that the businesses are operationally equipped for long-term success. The strengthening of rural supply centres remains a core focus of the COWASH IV initiative, aiming to create a sustainable link between water supply and accessible sanitation infrastructure for rural communities.

COWASH LAUNCHED PILOT INITIATIVE TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO REUSABLE SANITARY PADS IN SCHOOLS



COWASH IV has launched a pilot initiative to improve access to high-quality, affordable reusable sanitary pads through the development of localized supply chains. The initiative follows a community assessment and direct consultations with students conducted at the end of 2025, which identified significant barriers regarding product quality and supply chain reliability.

Based on the assessment findings, the project partnered with a selected local manufacturer to provide high-quality reusable pads for testing. The project team recently distributed 50 packs of these pads across two pilot schools in Fofa Woreda, Central Ethiopia. To ensure the solution is driven by user experience, feedback questionnaires were distributed to the participating students to evaluate product quality and guide further supply chain development.

The project team is scheduled to collect and analyze these evaluations in April 2026. Should the student feedback confirm the quality of the products, COWASH IV will facilitate formal linkages between the manufacturer, Market-Based Sanitation Centers (MSCs), and local stakeholders to establish a regular supply. If the feedback indicates a need for adjustment, the project will identify alternative manufacturers to ensure the final supply chain meets the students' requirements.

The pilot aims to establish a sustainable access pathway, reducing dependence on irregular supplies and supporting consistent product availability. This effort builds upon broader COWASH IV initiatives, which include production training for school communities and local tailors. The long-term goal remains to strengthen menstrual health support and remove practical barriers to education for schoolgirls through reliable, community-led distribution mechanisms.



COWASH SHOWCASES GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE COMMUNITY-LED WASH MODELS AT UN



COWASH IV presented practical, evidence-based lessons from the project's gender-transformative and inclusive WASH programming in Ethiopia during global policy discussions at the 70th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70). The Project Gender and Inclusion Specialist Firewoyni Solomon and Development Advisor Pietari Arikka represented COWASH IV at the United Nations Headquarters from March 9-19,2026.

Advancing Inclusive Policy through Field Evidence

The project team used the global platform to demonstrate how community-led WASH models and gender transformative approaches transition women from beneficiaries to active decision-makers. The team shared insights with international NGOs and government delegates, highlighting the critical links between WASH services, menstrual health as a human right, gender-responsive climate action and disability inclusion. These discussions demonstrated how the project's community-led successes translate into practical solutions for global sustainable development priorities. By sharing practical lessons from the field, the team also presented COWASH IV's implementation in Ethiopia as a scalable blueprint for inclusive gender-transformative programming in low-resource environments.

From Policy to Action

Key messages emerging from CSW70 emphasized that gender equality must move beyond policy commitments into concrete and measurable action.

Discussions also highlighted that climate justice is not gender-neutral and that women's leadership must be meaningful rather than symbolic. These global mandates affirm the value of COWASH IV's experience and continued initiatives to advance women's leadership, gender-responsive climate action and inclusive governance within community-based WASH systems. They further demonstrate that the project ongoing work in these areas aligns with international best practices.





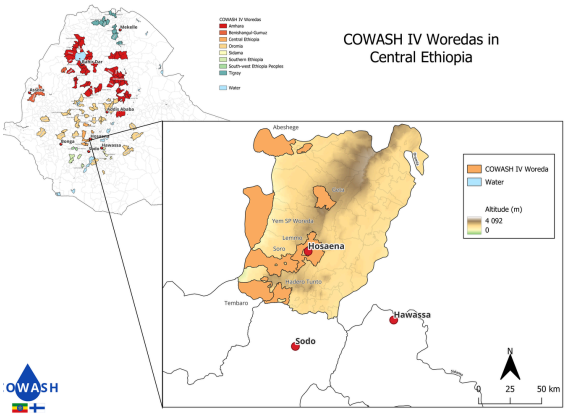
Upcoming Global Dialogue

Following the session in New York, the team established new professional connections for future collaboration. As a direct result, Development Advisor Pietari Arikka will join an expert panel in mid-April for the webinar "Rewiring Climate Systems: Women Redesigning Governance and Finance Across Africa and the Caribbean."

The upcoming event will connect CSW70 insights to practical experiences in gender-responsive climate governance and adaptation strategies across the continent.



COWASH IV AND MAX FOUNDATION LAUNCH WASH AND NUTRITION INTEGRATION INITIATIVE



Following five months of intensive preparation, COWASH IV and the Max Foundation have officially launched the first phase of a new initiative designed to integrate Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) with Nutrition and Nutrition-Sensitive Agriculture (NSA). Implementation commenced with a comprehensive capacity-building training programme held in the Central Ethiopia Region from January 12-16, 2026, for 50 government experts, health extension workers, and local enterprises.

The curriculum focused on three critical pillars designed to ensure the programme's long-term success. The first pillar addressed maternal and child nutrition, with the Max Foundation leading sessions on adolescent health and infant growth monitoring for health and nutrition experts. This was followed by a focus on nutrition-sensitive agriculture, a collaborative effort with the Seqota Declaration team to train regional experts on how to integrate nutritional goals directly into local farming practices. To ensure the private sector can support these objectives, the final pillar, led by COWASH IV team, provided business skill development for sanitation enterprises, covering financial planning, cost structures and market segmentation.

The rollout follows a successful action plan validation mission to Fofa Woreda, the initiative's selected pilot site. During the mission, the joint team inspected health centers to verify that tools for growth monitoring were in place and confirmed critical integration points with local health, agriculture and energy offices. By aligning the action plan with the Woreda's specific priorities and existing systems, the project aims to ensure that the integration of WASH and nutrition is both sustainable and locally led.

This multi-sectoral initiative marks a strategic shift in how rural development programmes address the intersection of health and agriculture. By empowering local experts to cascade this knowledge to their communities, the programme aims to move beyond traditional infrastructure, embedding health and economic sustainability directly into community-managed WASH services.

The initiative is set to enter its next phase in the coming months, as health extension workers and Woreda experts begin cascading the training directly to community members.

WATER QUALITY MONITORING AND SAFETY PLANNING IN SIDAMA



The COWASH IV technical team conducted a water quality monitoring mission across the Gorche and Wondo Genet Woredas in the Sidama Region from February 17–19, 2026. During the mission, 11 water supply schemes were tested for pH and turbidity parameters to ensure compliance with national and World Health Organization (WHO) standards.

Beyond technical verification, the mission focused on strengthening local capacity through on-the-job training for 12 experts from Woreda and Regional offices. The training centered on the implementation of Water Safety Plans, a critical component in ensuring the long-term safety and management of community water resources.

Significant improvements in WSP implementation have been documented in both Woredas compared to the performance of the previous Ethiopian Fiscal Year (EFY 2017). In Gorche, Water Safety Plan implementation has commenced for all community water projects planned for EFY 2018.

Similarly, in Wondo Genet, WSPs have already been prepared for four community supply schemes scheduled for construction during the current fiscal year.

These efforts reflect the broader COWASH IV strategy of moving beyond the physical construction of water schemes to ensure that supply points remain safe, functional, and sustainable through rigorous monitoring and localized expertise.

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.

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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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