

Rehabilitated Water System Brings Back Health and Harmony in Drought Affected Villages



Photo: Mercy Corps/2023

Chaos emerges as a group of locals gather with their yellow jerrycans that hold 20 liters of water around the cattle trough, fighting for their turn whilst trying to ward off the cows who also continue to use this water source. Mariama Muhumed, 40 and a mother of 10 children, recalls the chaos.

“There was a clash between the people, their jerrycans and livestock... many jerrycans were damaged. All that chaos is for one jerrycans of water, barely enough for our daily consumption,” says Mariama.


A broken water system left the residents of settlements in Gedi kebele, Dhagahabur woreda of Somali Region to use the cattle trough as a source of water. Disagreements were common as impatient community members waited for their turns to fill the jerrycans. “Water pollution due to animal defecation and silt build up in the pipe also caused my family illnesses, diarrhea was common,” said Mariama.

Mariama now lives next to a functioning water point and has a time slot when she goes to collect water for her household. Like most of her neighbors, Mariama is an agro pastoralist, relying on livestock and agri outputs as her source of income. The Somali region of Ethiopia is water scarce and prone to drought, leaving Mariama reliant on the new water system for potable water.

The water tank and the corresponding system were recently cleaned and repaired, with the support of RIPA Program investing about 12,500 USD. The entire water system and its connections were rehabilitated after being dysfunctional for multiple years. The water system, initially installed 12 years prior, is now fully functional and provides water to 1000 households up to 3km away. The investment helped repair the chamber box, establishment of 5 operating water points and restored 4 cattle troughs. Additionally, the committee received a 3-day training course on the maintenance of the system. The water rehabilitation activity is part of RIPA North's crisis response for drought affected communities, whose effect depleted water sources and coping mechanisms.

The 5 committee members and 2 attendants oversee the water system, monitoring the condition of the water, and supervising water collection times. Ensuring fair access for all households who rely on the water points. The committee charges community members 5 ETB (approximately 0.09 USD) per 20 liters of jerrican filled. This amounts to almost 7,000 ETB (about 125 USD) made monthly, which is used to pay the attendants salary and maintain the water points.

Yusef Mahmud Hype, an agro pastoralist and father of eight children is one of the attendants on duty. Yusef holds the key to the gate of the water collection points, only opening the gate and allowing people in according to the predetermined schedule, making about 150-200 ETB daily (2-3 USD). Having attended a training in Jigjiga on water safety and how to operate a generator, Yusef is confident in his abilities to maintain the new structure and fix small problems, including replacing faulty faucets with the money the committee makes.



“I attended a training in Jigjiga on water safety and how to operate a generator. I fix minor problems such as replacing faulty faucets. I think I am doing a good job of protecting our asset,” said Yusef.



Both Yusef and Mariama draw attention to the importance of the fence that has been built around the water points as it prevents animals or little children polluting the water. Yusef, notes that the repair and need to clean the system was caused by increased salination as the pipes became contaminated, as it was difficult to keep livestock or young children at bay. Mariama notes that “the fence around the water point is a relief, we don't crash with the livestock anymore”.

As the water point is located near her house, Mariyama no longer takes the two hours trek to the nearest water source.

“Life is easier now; “Alhamdulillah” says Mariama.