



Capacity Development for Local Government Brings New Vitality to West Belesa

The West Belesa *woreda* administration considers adequate **water supply** to be one of the major challenges faced by both the administration and the people of the *woreda*. One of the people working hard to alleviate this is Getnet Mekuriaw, team leader for the water resource management department under the Water and Energy Secretariat of the *woreda*. His team oversees both coverage and management of water supply in the *woreda*, and the **challenges** faced in these areas are **multifaceted**.

When CARE launched its **SWEEP** project in 2017 with the intent to **increase household access to water**, Getnet and his team were ambivalent because efforts by both governmental and non-governmental organizations to increase water supply often fail to materialize or become non-functional for lack of sustainability. True to Getnet's concern, in East and West Belesa, CARE, in 2019, found that only 40% of water schemes constructed were functional.

"From the get-go, the **approach** was **different**. Instead of simply constructing water supply points, CARE would continually **engage the community** to increase awareness and sense of **ownership**," says Getnet, who adds that this methodology is one of many the *woreda* has adopted from CARE through this project. The project, SWEEP, was launched by CARE in 2017 through the financial support from the Austrian Development Agency to **improve the food security and resilience** of chronically food insecure households by means of increasing household access to water and building capacity to implement **sustainable water resource management** and **environmental conservation practices**.

When SWEEP first began its intervention, Getnet remembers the **water coverage** to be at **27%** for the *woreda*, a **tragically low** number that left many in the community to take drastic adaptive measures. Some of these included using pond or river water which wreaked havoc on the health of the community. "We would often have Acute Watery Diarrhea breakouts in the community which further bogged down the administration's capacity to rollout new technology or meet the community's demand," reminisces Getnet, who also remembers the lack of sustainable water coverage bringing the administration unforeseen financial burdens like it did five years ago when a drought hit Belesa.

"Of course the community has gained so much through SWEEP, in the last three years the project has been here, the **water supply coverage has grown to 61%**," says Getnet, but he adds that he feels the *woreda* administration has gained even more. The relief of increased water supply to the people of West Belesa already opens up Getnet's team to tend to other water management issues in the area, but the transfer of knowledge and best practices has been the icing on the cake for Getnet and his team. "We received **training** from CARE on nearly everything water-management related, everything from site selection to building the actual supply posts. And most importantly, we gained **technical knowledge** on designing water supply schemes with inclusivity towards disabled people in mind," says Getnet, who has also participated in the

training himself.

Other best practices Getnet's team have since picked up are a more **holistic approach to site selection** when constructing water supply posts, **engaging the community** in conversation, and even **mobilizing a water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) committee** to oversee each constructed water post. The technical knowledge that the team has gained from CARE has also extended to sustainable water resource management and environmental conservation practices. "Previously, farmers here relied on traditional irrigation methods utilizing natural water sources which added much physical labor on the farmers. Not only that, because the climate is arid, natural water sources are not entirely reliable for year-round use," says Getnet, looking back on the way of life for farmers not too long ago. CARE, besides **building dams and reservoirs**, has instilled knowledge within the community and technical *woreda* staff like Getnet, on how to build more modern **irrigation systems that rely on the dam water**.

The impact of improved water supply is equally felt by women of the area, if not more. Not only do the **water supply posts and water sources** constructed by CARE significantly **cut down the commute time and burden on women**, but it has also spared them from the gender-based violence that often occurred as they commuted to distant water sources in the past. "CARE made it its mission to empower women through this project, and so it appointed community-elected **female chairs for each constructed water post**. WASH committees were also composed of women at least by half. This has significantly **increased civic participation of women** who previously had inexistent presence in informal decision making spaces," reflects Getnet, pleased to now see women attendees at town hall meetings held by his team.

The change in perspective has also made continued efforts by Getnet and the entire administration far more effective. Getnet notices that community members are far more invested and involved in the many civic activities of the *woreda* including water supply, and he believes this is deeply rooted in the sense of **ownership** CARE was able to instill within the community. He also notices people have **much deeper know-how** regarding water supply management and operation. However, what takes the cake for Getnet is seeing children in West Belesa growing up with the correct understanding of **hygiene and sanitation**.

Getnet is confident the *woreda* is able to sustain and even build on the efforts made by CARE through SWEEP. "There has been thorough handover between the *woreda* and CARE's team. Not only that, both **community members** and relevant *woreda* staff have been **trained on maintenance and basic troubleshooting** to deal with issues that may arise in the future," says Getnet, whose team has also continued to adopt the best practices learned from the project.