

## My trip to Ethiopia

The week after my first fundraising event on January 10, 2015, I travelled to Ethiopia. My mission was to identify potential sites for the first Life Wells Foundation (LWF) water project. I visited three regions; Guragie, Kembata and Harargie, and was able to target a potential site.

The first site I visited was a school that my friends, Berhanu Zergaw and Ehite Gebre, built a few years ago for children in the Guragie region. I visited the region on January 24, 2015 with two objectives, to deliver about 1500 books to four schools in the area and to assess the water needs of the village and the schools located there (see photos below).



Unloading books

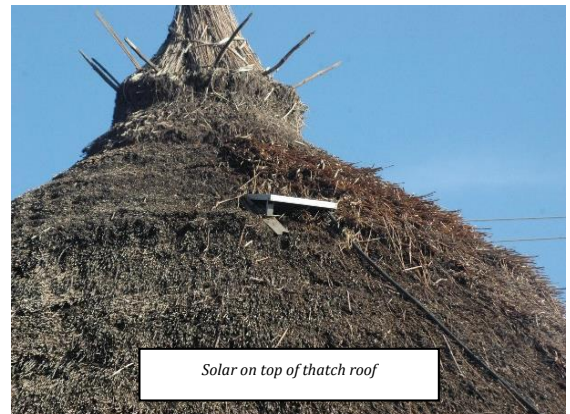


Preparing Receipt



Placing books on shelves

An interesting thing I discovered about the Guragie region is that solar power is used to light the home in the village where I stayed during my visit. There were two homes in the compound and both houses were lit by one source of solar energy (see picture right). The solar lighting system worked well at night and in fact, was more effective than the lighting in the city area. Solar energy is the most efficient and effective energy source in remote areas. The system is clean, cost effective, and relatively cheaper than the traditional electrical power, which may not even be available to remote areas for quite some time.



Solar on top of thatch roof

The second day of my visit to Guragie was reserved to visit the school that Berhanu and Ehite built (picture below).



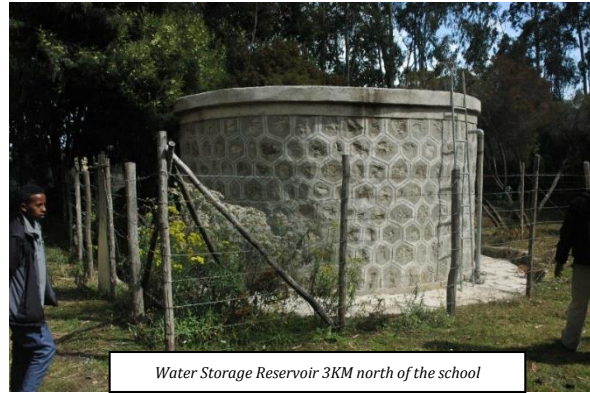
Alas Middle School



Mr. Kasim, their representative in Ethiopia and Berhanu's cousin took us to two water sites that the government identified to provide clean water to the region. The first location is where the reservoir site is located (picture below right). The construction of the reservoir is completed but operation has not begun. The reservoir is located about three kilometers north of the school. I was informed that when the site is fully operational it will serve residents north of the reservoir, but not their school.



*Location A, Well drilling under construction*



*Water Storage Reservoir 3KM north of the school*

The second location we visited was a well under construction (picture above left). A contractor hired by the government was drilling a well at the foot of a mountain close to a river (picture below). This well is about 200 meters away from an old shallow well (middle picture below) that is serving a nearby community.



*River nearby the old and new well*



*Old well by a river*



*Children fetching water using donkey*

The well drilling is almost complete, but other construction work necessary to bring the water to the top of the hill to store it at a higher elevation still needs to be done. Once the water is brought up to a higher elevation, gravity takes over and the water flows downstream to villages or cities. The villagers informed me that when this project is complete, the water from this source is planned to service villages or cities to the south of the site. This water source also does not include their village or school.

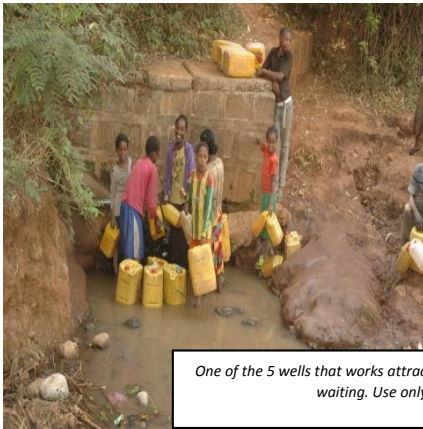
How can it be that two water sources are being built, the village/school is about 5 km from either clean water project, but neither source will provide water to the village/school?

During my time in the region I observed that most people use plastic jugs or donkeys to carry the water that they bring into their villages (picture above left and right). Even though the village/school will not be served directly by the existing shallow well or the new well being built, the proximity of water sources makes getting clean water easier than the conditions I found in the other two regions I visited.

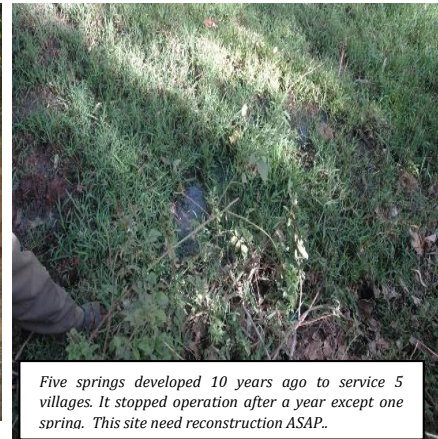
In early February I visited a second area, the Kembata region in the city of Durame (pictures below). This region



A child on top of a spring well that is operational



One of the 5 wells that works attract lots of customers and lots of waiting. Use only one outlet



Five springs developed 10 years ago to service 5 villages. It stopped operation after a year except one spring. This site need reconstruction ASAP.



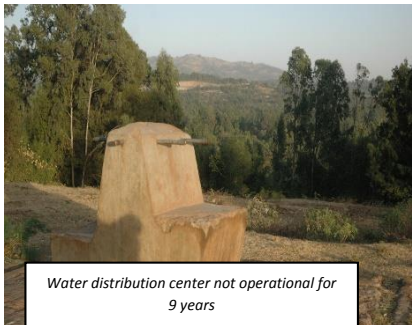
One of the access to the one spring still functioning in Durame



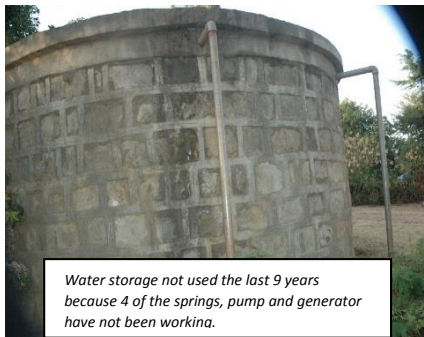
Pipe line connecting 5 springs to a pump not in service the last 9 years



Pump might be working but no water to the wet well to pump



Water distribution center not operational for 9 years



Water storage not used the last 9 years because 4 of the springs, pump and generator have not been working.



Because of the spring leak and no water to the pump, generator not used for 9 years

has received great support and assistance from my dear philanthropic sister, Bogalech Gebre, who has been serving this area for the last 20 years.

I visited seven springs that were developed in the Kembata region. Most of the springs function well except for two locations. One location was a spring developed by sister Boge, a project initially conceived by her sister Fikerte, to help five villages in the area (pictures above). Sister Boge continued her sister's dream in her honor after she passed on.

This site was completed and began providing water to the villages in 2004. However, the site that was developed with a collection of five springs was not constructed properly. The site stopped servicing the intended villages a year after operations began. Today, only one spring is functioning at this source. Four springs are leaking and the pipelines that carry water from these springs to the pump well are broken. The pump generator is also broken.

After assessing the development, I made a commitment to restore the operation and once again provide clean water to the villages from this source.

I also visited another spring location in Durame where the residents in the area and those from other places fetch spring water. This spring is located a few feet above the water level of the river, which is about 50 feet below the main road. The only way to get to this water is via treacherous paths on either side of the access road to the springs or river (see pictures below). I watched in pain as mothers and children carefully negotiated the difficult path to and from the water spring. I interviewed one mother and she said they desperately need help to get the water out of the ravine and brought to the top so that they don't have to continue to risk their lives each time they need water, especially during the winter season. She said it was a risk each time they have to go down into the ravine, whether in summer or winter. However, she noted that it is exponentially more difficult during the winter when they have to walk into the river to get to the spring. She said they have to run like crazy with or without their jug when the flood comes, often unexpectedly.

The mother that I interviewed said she is fortunate to live near the ravine and have access to the water, even though it is risky getting to the spring. She is only about 30 minutes from the location but she says there are others who have to travel 1-2 hours to get to the spring to fetch water. She also made it a point to say that she and the other people in Durame see people like me when they come to take pictures or video of the conditions.



*A child on top of a spring well that is operational*



*More children climbing the hill after collecting water from the spring in the river*



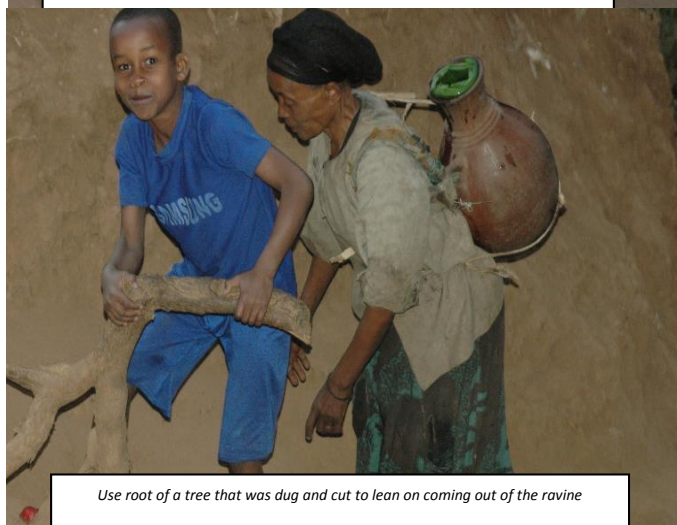
*A girl using the root of a tree as*



*Body stress carrying this load up hill shocks the back, arm and shoulder*



*Climbing the treacherous hill grabbing tree root as a support*



*Use root of a tree that was dug and cut to lean on coming out of the ravine*

The pictures above show the poor conditions at this water source and I will also soon have video to share with you that further highlights the need for action. However, she says that for many years there has been no action taken by any of the visitors. Seeing the danger involved in getting to the water and listening to the stories of those that I met led me to commit to helping the people who depend on this water. So I asked myself, how will

I accomplish what I have promised to do? Who will I turn to? And where will I go to get the help needed for these desperate, needy, neglected but generous people?

Later that week, I was introduced to Aba Teshome Fikre, a Catholic priest and responding in the Guragie region. He has been doing outstanding work, not only in bringing clean water to the region but also providing other valuable services for the people there. I was informed that the organization that he operates has been providing these services for more than 20 years.

We discussed my mission at Life Wells Foundation and Aba Teshome and I agreed to collaborate to further the shared intent, goal and dream of bringing clean water to Ethiopia. He introduced me to his engineer, Majer Behute whom I had met on another occasion, and he also showed interest and willingness for a collaborative effort. The engineer agreed to do the feasibility study for the two projects that will assess the costs for construction, materials, etc. I left Durame with the utmost confidence and trust that the connections I made will provide what is needed to move the projects along and hasten the goal of bringing clean water to needy Ethiopians.

The third site I visited was the Beroda, Harargie region, my birthplace. Seeing this area again was very emotional and the welcome I received from the people still living there was greatly appreciated and touching.



Children collect water. This source is one of the better one. Villagers near travel 3-4 miles to get water



Children waiting for the drop of water to fill their small jug.



A girl washing clothes near a water



A kid alone walk to the water or going home



My childhood friend and me. Our house use to be behind us but no more



My childhood friend, wife, children & a goat



Curious children in the neighborhood came to



I was met with so much warmth from childhood friends and strangers alike. We were so excited to see each other and it was evident by the tears that filled our eyes. Some of us openly shed tears, especially when the comment was made, *after so many years, you still have not forgotten us.* That was the most heartfelt comment I heard during my visit.

I walked around for about four hours to get to see as many people as I could. I also visited several locations that were possible sites for future water projects. I observed how much the topography had changed in the field where I used to ride horses. The fields had all been converted to farm land. Because of farming practices, land erosion turns the old fields into different topography. The house where I was born and the village that was below the house I was born does not exist anymore. The village, where 15-20 residents once lived, had been uprooted and relocated. The villagers dispersed and built each of their home near where their farm. This living arrangement makes getting clean water to the current resident difficult because of how widespread they are.

I visited several possible well locations that would be convenient to the area to develop. Everyone I met along the way mentioned how much they needed more clean water sources. There are two spring developments in the area that were developed by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). One of the sites produces plenty of water, however, the water is not controlled and flows continuously resulting in much water being wasted (picture below).



The second NGO site is almost non-functioning and very little water comes out of the spring (picture below). Both sites are located very far from the majority of those who depend on them for water, and long periods of



Women and children waiting to fill their jugs with water slowly dripping.

travel are required to get to the sites. Once at the second site, it takes a long time to fill a jug because of the insufficient water flow. The water literally drips from an improvised plant stem that leads the water from the pipe to the jug, one drip at a time (picture below).

My trip was focused on the water needs of Ethiopia. However, the absence of clean water causes a myriad of other problems for the people. Sanitation, erosion, deforestation, seasonal farming practices due to the lack of water etc., all serve to make life difficult for those living in the many villages that make up the country.<sup>15</sup> Prior to returning to Addis, I visited the city of Harar. In this city there is a person that feeds Hyenas by hand and calls them by name. Tourist flock to Harar to see this site and it was very interesting to see wild hyenas being trained to be fed in an open environment. The attraction also helps the “Hyena Man” make a living (see picture below).



*One of the high light was visiting the Hyena man and a visitor feeding a hyena.*

I traveled on to Addis Ababa where I was fortunate to meet an old friend, Messay Wolde Selassie. He was gracious enough to offer me the comforts of his home for the remaining three weeks of my visit. I wanted to ask my friend to join my team and help me in the mission of LWF, but was reluctant to appear to take advantage of his friendship. One evening we were discussing LWF and he asked how he could assist me. I jumped at the opportunity he presented and told him of my desire to have him join my team, but that I was glad he opened the door to the possibility. As a result Messay agreed to be my representative in Ethiopia. This was one of the exciting moments of my visit, because he is a man of his word, a respectful and responsible person and does what he can to help others in many ways. I am grateful to have him as part of LWF.

Now that I have completed my first fundraiser and taken my first trip to Ethiopia, there is still much work to be done to establish the LWF office in Ethiopia. First I must complete and submit an application to the Ethiopian Embassy or Consulate in the USA. I wasn't aware of this requirement prior to my visit to Ethiopia. Once the application is reviewed, and if approved in the USA, it is mailed to the Ethiopian Foreign Ministry. There it will be reviewed, and if approved, it will be sent to the Ethiopian NGO Agency for their final approval. Once that process is complete, Life Wells Foundation will have representation in Ethiopia and the real work begins.

I am fortunate to have made great connections on my trip. I am more fortunate to have the support of each of you who helped make the journey possible.