



Oxfam Impact

Your support at work



Small herds support families during hard times

Programs that distribute goats and sheep help Ethiopian herders recover from drought.

By Coco McCabe

Six nannies. A billy. And the promise of a passel of kids.

For poor herding families in Ethiopia, that's like money in the bank. It's called restocking, and it's at the heart of three assistance programs Oxfam launched last spring as villagers in remote regions of the country continued to grapple with the hardships of drought—including food shortages that left some people surviving on just one meal a day.

Drought is a poverty maker. It stunts crops, kills livestock, and drags poor families into destitution, leaving them with few options for recovery, especially as climate change increases the frequency and duration of dry spells. Often, there is not enough time

between one drought and the next for families to rebuild the herds on which they depend for food and cash.

That's where restocking comes in. It's a way to help families restore what they've lost and strengthen their resilience to the next blow. Cattle, camels, sheep, and goats not only provide milk, a key part of many Ethiopian diets, but their offspring can be sold to pay for other essentials such as medicine and school supplies.

Restocking is just one initiative Oxfam supports as it helps villagers find ways to better cope—in the long term—with drought. Others include the repair of ponds that hold drinking water; the restoration of pastureland so animals

will have a source of food; and, in one case, the construction of a road built by the community so people can have access to markets and medical care.

Empowering women

Through its local partners, Oxfam invested about \$204,000 in three restocking programs designed to benefit 1,300 households—and eventually many more as families share the offspring with other villagers. In most cases, women were the ones who received the goats and sheep—part of a strategy to empower them in communities where their voices aren't always heard but their hard work is essential to the well-being of families.

Women gathered near the village of Gutu Dobi in southern Ethiopia one afternoon last August to receive a small herd of goats distributed by the Gayo Pastoral Development Initiative with the support of Oxfam America. As the goats reproduce, they'll provide milk for families to drink or sell at market. *Eva-Lotta Jansson / Oxfam America*

“A person with property is respected,” said Yeshi Senyi, a 42-year-old mother of seven children in Jida, a district in the highlands of North Shewa Zone that suffered severely from drought in 2008. Senyi was among 240 women to participate in the sheep restocking carried out by the Organization for Development in Action, Oxfam’s local partner. “A person with property has hope for the future—and confidence,” she said.

“The point of these projects is to help people recover their livelihoods,” said Emily Farr, Oxfam America’s humanitarian livelihoods specialist. “Most of the people who are benefiting from these initiatives have lost most of their livestock. Animals are a form of currency. They represent purchasing power.”

Increasingly, herders in drought-prone regions are turning to goats, instead of their cherished cows, as a more viable livestock option. Goats fare better during long dry spells and reproduce quickly. To ensure their good health, the restocking programs carefully select the goats and then arrange for them to be vaccinated prior to their distribution.

A new beginning

The sun was sinking behind the hills of Kanbi, a village in southern Ethiopia, as Qaballe Sirba, 30, made her way home with a small herd of goats and a smile on her face one day in August. She had just received six females and one male from Oxfam’s partner, DUBAF, as part of a distribution to 220 households in the Goro Dola District of the Guji Zone.

Sirba had had more than her share of trouble. Both she and two children had

been sick with a lung illness. Then her husband fell into a ditch and became paralyzed, leaving Sirba as the sole breadwinner. And then the drought and food crisis of 2008 struck—forcing the family to survive on just one meal a day.

“If I raise the goats—and God help me on this—I will get out of this problem,” Sirba said. And if all goes well, others may, too. DUBAF has organized the program around a traditional support network called *hirbaa-dabaree*, a system where those who are better off help those in need. In this case, when Sirba’s goats give birth to female kids, she’ll offer some of them to neighbors who also faced losses because of the drought. The goal is to strengthen the resilience of the whole community.

“A person who does not have assets can have an opportunity to build assets,” said Boka Gababa, 45, who also received a small herd of goats. “He can raise goats and get milk. And he can meet his household needs after selling the offspring.”

Hope for a better life

Household needs had been weighing heavily on the mind of Faduma Jatani. She lives in the tiny village of Charfi in the Borena Zone—another region hit hard by repeated cycles of drought. A widow, 30, and the mother of five children, Jatani had lost the eight goats she once had to disease. She had been supporting her children—and managing to scrape together enough resources for school supplies—by collecting firewood and selling it in the market, a backbreaking job with small returns.

But on a hot afternoon last summer, she talked with hope about her family’s future.



Faduma Jatani, a young widow with five children to support, was among those who received a small herd of goats during an Oxfam-supported distribution in southern Ethiopia in August. *Eva-Lotta Jansson / Oxfam America*

Clomping on the hard-packed earth around her was the source of that hope: a small herd of goats she had just received from Oxfam’s local partner, the Gayo Pastoral Development Initiative.

“I don’t have any kind of animals. That’s why the community selected me,” she said. “So now I can raise these goats and build my assets. I can get milk for my children. And after they [the goats] reproduce, I can sell them and buy other household items.”

And equally important, income from the goats may help Jatani achieve her dream.

“My parents did not send me to school, but now I want my children to get an education,” she said. “You cannot have a better life if you’re not educated.”

Do one more thing today: Learn about the herding life



Cattle is king in southern Ethiopia, but goats are beginning to play a more central role in the lives of herding families. Find out more about Oxfam’s local partner, the Gayo Pastoral Development Initiative, and its goat restocking program by watching the video we produced to educate our Oxfam America Unwrapped buyers: oxfamamericaunwrapped.com/goat.



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