



# Oxfam Impact

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## More than Water: Hope for the Future

Reliable water sources lead to a better life in Ethiopia

by Liz Lucas

Before the rain finally came to this remote region of Ethiopia in mid-March, the land around the Gololcha watering station was dusty and dry. Cows walked slowly toward the troughs, some too weak to pull themselves up the hill.

Drought—the worst that village elder Dida Haleke had seen—had taken its toll on the herds of cattle and goats, sheep and camels on which people in the region depend for food and income. Sitting on the edge of a flat stone back in February, before the rains, Dida had surveyed the scene around him through narrowed eyes, his weathered face reflecting a lifetime spent in this remote part of Ethiopia. Pastureland had shriveled. Water sources had dried up.

Yet here, at the Gololcha watering station, despite drought, water was plentiful. The livestock wandered idly as herders sat under trees shading themselves from the hot sun. Animals nudged in to get to watering troughs and children splashed each other at the water taps.

“The water provided [by Oxfam] has kept us alive so far,” Dida told a visitor.

Built by local partner Action for Development and funded by Oxfam America, the watering station at Gololcha is one of more than a dozen constructed recently by the agency for herders in Borena zone in Ethiopia’s Oromiya region,

bordering Kenya. It’s one of several forms of assistance provided by Oxfam that has helped people in this area survive the erratic weather that has plunged millions across East Africa into a food crisis.

The success of the Gololcha station was evident: During the drought it had meant the difference between life and death for animals and herders alike.

### Success at a price

But that success had come at a price—popularity. In this arid area, the watering station proved so vital that the population in the area around the station doubled,

**Photo:** Collecting water in jerricans in Ethiopia. *Crispin Hughes/Oxfam*

speeding consumption of local pasture. The animals had water, but one could see evidence of the shortage of food in their gaunt appearance. Villagers had to set out from home for Gololcha as early as 4:30 a.m. to get to the only available water, and the trek was a strain on their animals.

“The water problem is solved as far as we are concerned,” said Dida. “Our problem is food.”

The herders in Gololcha were clear about their predicament. There was water in Gololcha but no means of feeding their animals. What should they do?

The welfare of livestock is particularly important in pastoral areas such as this because people rely on their cattle. The health of Borena’s herders often mirrors that of their animals. Cattle deaths will have long-term ramifications for future food stability among the people.

“We Borena people are healthy if our animals are healthy,” said herder Garacha Muda from Tuka, a community near the Kenyan border. He and his brother had already lost 57 head of cattle and 10 more were facing imminent death.

Though the recent rains have restored some of the pastureland and the grass is now growing again, the animals remain weak and susceptible to disease from their long months of deprivation. Recognizing those problems, Oxfam has responded to



The Gololcha watering station in Ethiopia, funded by Oxfam, provided much-needed water during this year’s periods of drought. *Retta Lemmal/Oxfam America*

ongoing need in Borena by providing feed and veterinary care for the animals.

#### Next steps

Oxfam is offering both immediate support and long-term solutions. The aim is to help strengthen communities to face future droughts more successfully. Last year, Oxfam built water stations, such as the one at Gololcha, to ensure that both people and livestock would have reliable access to water. These watering points are well used and help herders manage in droughts—even those as bad as the one that Dida Haleke had just survived. But more water

stations are needed to eliminate pressure on existing sources and on local pasture, and reduce the distance people and their animals travel for water. When people are not struggling just to get water—spending sometimes hours a day traveling to retrieve it—they can turn to other pursuits.

Now that there is water at Gololcha and his cattle are regaining their strength, 22-year-old herder Barako Huka considers his future hopefully: “After this, I will go to school. I have not yet been, but I will when this is done.”

## Do one more thing today: Support our East Africa appeal.

East Africans have managed in drought conditions before, but the current situation may be the worst in memory. Millions of people in Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, and Tanzania are struggling to cope with the effects of erratic weather that created severe shortages of food and water and contributed to the deaths of much of the livestock on which people in the region depend. Recent spring rains have brought relief in some quarters but in many areas rain has only meant more challenges—exposure to disease and restricted access to food aid. Oxfam is delivering water, food, and other vital supplies to more than 500,000 people in Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, and Tanzania but we need your assistance to scale up our response to meet the level of need.



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