

Water for Ethiopian Villagers

Recently, TPRF made a grant of \$25,000 to the International Relief and Development Organization ([IRD](#)) to support an emergency effort to supply clean drinking water to 24,000 villagers in Ethiopia. The grant to IRD is one of three TPRF has made to organizations working to help East Africans survive the worst drought in sixty years.

This week, we are fortunate to have Scott Webb's on-the-ground report of the situation in two villages where IRD is working to supply clean water to some of the most vulnerable people in the region bordering on Somalia.

Scott Webb is IRD's Program Officer for Relief and Humanitarian Assistance.

On September 1, I visited seven *Kebeles*, or villages, throughout the Dollo Ado and Dollo Bay *Woredas*, or counties. The local *Woreda* administrations indicated that these villages were some of the most vulnerable and in urgent need of water.

Dollo Ado and Dollo Bay (pronounced like "bye") are in the southern Somali state of Ethiopia along the southern border region where Kenya, Ethiopia, and Somalia meet, and the people are all Somali. Most of the Somali refugees from the Somalia side of the border live in four different UNHCR-administered refugee camps in and around Dollo Ado, which has become the base of operations for all international NGO's serving refugees in southern Ethiopia.

Dollo Ado is therefore a bustling, booming town, with NGO workers buzzing around monitoring and catering to the refugees, and enterprising Somali businessmen selling everything to the NGO's from building materials, vehicle fuel, and bottled water to cell phone cards and espresso.

While refugees come to Ethiopia with their own heartbreaking stories of malnutrition and violence from Al-Shabaab-controlled Somalia, the surrounding host communities of southern Ethiopia are in the midst of a crippling drought. The region has barely received any rains in two years.

The Somali people are pastoralists. Their livelihood depends entirely on their animals. Somali families live in sedentary villages near usually consistent water sources, and the men and boys herd sheep, goats, and cattle around the region in search of grass and water. The villagers subsist on milk and purchase their food by selling various animal products such as milk, hides, and meat.

This lifestyle depends 100 percent on the rains. A mere 200 to 400 millimeters of rain per year can support hundreds of thousands of villagers, replenishing grasslands and the leaves on trees, filling up watering holes, and maintaining the water table.

Villagers use various coping mechanisms to deal with the scarce rainfall. One of the most effective

methods involves digging wells by hand and constructing *burkits*, which look similar to in-ground cement pools with roofs. In the intense rainstorms that normally occur, water rushes into the burkits and can be safely stored for several months until the traditional water sources dry out.

Each village has a water committee comprised of select members of the community (including women) who help maintain equitable and fair water access for the community. In the villages we visited, notably Bangol, the burkits had just dried out, within 48 hours of our visit.

Thanks to generous support from The Prem Rawat Foundation and other donors, IRD is able to help the people of Bangol and 15 other communities in the region. Immediately after visiting the region, Abdulahi Muse and I negotiated a temporary water-trucking contract with Egal Mohammed, a local water-trucking company. Water was delivered to the target villages starting that very day. By September 7, all villages, including Bangol, had received 5,000 liter water tanks, hundreds of extra jerry cans, and daily deliveries of clean water.

Photos by Scott Webb, IRD

