

Story of Change – Gebreselassie family, Ethiopia



Photo: Thomas Omondi

At a glance

Most Ethiopians live in rural areas, where levels of hunger and malnutrition are very high. Droughts and food emergencies are frequent.

SCIAF partner in Ethiopia

ADCS (Adigrat Diocesan Catholic Secretariat)

Solution

- Rain water reservoir tank
- Concrete irrigation canals
- Agricultural training
- Business skills

Outcome

Many families used to eat only one meal a day but are now able to eat 2-3 times a day, because they are able to grow more crops. There is food to eat, and extra to sell, meaning families have an income to buy the essentials.

Introduction

Levels of hunger in Ethiopia are amongst the worst in the world. The Gebreselassie family live in a remote part of Tigray, a drought-prone area in the north of Ethiopia.

In the past few years, the rainy seasons have been very poor. The rocky, harsh landscape also makes it difficult to grow food. On top of this, the global food crisis has meant that food prices have gone up. Families in Tigray struggle to have a sustainable source of both food and income, and many are used to eating only once a day.

How SCIAF has helped

SCIAF's partner, ADCS, together with the community, have constructed rain water reservoirs, so that when the rains do come, the previous water is stored, and isn't simply lost. Concrete irrigation canals channel the water to the fields. Previous traditional ditches lost a lot of the water and it didn't reach the crops.

Agricultural skills have taught the Gebreselassies and their neighbours better farming techniques. They now know what to plant and when, how much space to leave between seedlings, and they grow a wider variety of crops, including fruit and vegetables, which they both eat and sell at market. This provides much-needed income.

They have also learnt business skills, so that they can negotiate a better price for their fruit and vegetables and so that they are selling them for the right market price. ADCS have also created a local market, not far from where the Gebreselassies live, which means all the families in the community can easily sell their produce.

Quotes

“Years ago, living here was tough. Now, it’s much better than before. Water used to get lost and was just going in to the ground. Thanks to ACDS, now we have an irrigation system and we have water. We are happy and we are having a better life.”

“Before, we didn’t know which crops were best to sell e.g. which ones were in demand at the market. Before we simply took the things we produced and sold them at a low price. Now we know the real price of different foods and can make a profit.”

Full transcript of interview with Gebreselassie

How did you get involved with ADCS?

We are poor. We are one of the vulnerable families.

What is it like to live here?

Years ago, living here was tough. Now, it’s much better than before. Water used to get lost and was just going in to the ground. Thanks to ACCS, now we have an irrigation system and we have water. We are happy and we are having a better life.”

How have you benefitted by being involved with ADCS?

The advantage for me and my community is that the water used to get lost. Since the concrete canal was built, we can cultivate our crops and garden and have a better life.

What would life be like if you were not involved in this project?

Had I not been involved I would have had to migrate to Asmara, in Eritrea for a better job. I would have had to have sold my cattle for food, life would be very difficult.

What food can you grow now?

Tomatoes, peppers, potatoes.

Do you eat the food or do you sell it?

(laughter) Of course we eat the food! We first eat well ourselves. And then we take the leftovers to the market.

What did you eat before the irrigation system was put in place?

We used to eat just bread, and beans and sauce. Now we have variety and other vegetables and we can buy oil. We are more advanced.

Have you noticed a difference in your health?

Yes, before we were not healthy and we were very hungry. Now we have food, we are clean and we have no health problems. We were able to buy a bed and a cement floor.

Do you have more energy?

Yes, apart from the fact we are getting old!

Have you benefitted from agricultural skills?

We had some limited agricultural skills before. But now with the new skills we produce many crops and have been trained in marketing and crop rotation. Which crops are best to plant at what time of year.

Tell me more about crop rotation.

We now know that maize and wheat are better for the rainy season (July - August). After September it is potatoes, tomatoes, onions and chilli peppers. In December it is barley.

What are the business skills that you have benefitted from?

Before, we didn't know which crops were best to sell e.g. which ones were in demand at the market. Before we simply took the things we produced and sold them at a low price. Now we know the real price of different foods and can make a profit.

What effect does the weather have on your life?

Before, the rains used to come at the right time, in the rainy season, in July and August. These days we cannot trust in the rains coming. Years ago we wouldn't have needed an irrigation system because the rains would come. Now the climate has changed and the atmosphere has changed.

Tell us more about the benefits of being involved with the project?

The first benefit is the income – we are able to dress ourselves with nice clothes, we bought bed sheets and food items like oil. We also send the children to school.

What hope do you have for your family in the future?

I want to see my sons and daughters live a better life. To go to town and get a better education than you get in the country. I want to build a second house for my children so they don't have to worry about paying for a house.

What is your weekly routine?

We work Monday to Friday and on Saturdays and Sundays we rest. Some days we do the crops, my wife also makes handicrafts to carry to the market. She carries stuff on her back and I carry on my head. This basket is called a kafer. We fast on Wednesdays and Fridays, we don't eat meat, eggs, butter, milk but we eat all other foods. After 10am we go to church in the early morning.

What do you do in your leisure/spare time?

We sit, relax and enjoy a coffee ceremony. During the week, we just boil coffee but at the weekends we have a beautiful coffee ceremony. We drink the coffee together as a family.