



# Stories from Afar

Transformation and innovation in adapting to climate change in Afar, Ethiopia

Islamic Relief, working alongside communities and government, has transformed the lives of thousands of people affected by the climate change crisis in Ethiopia's Afar region. New approaches, transformational change and innovative technologies have together turned fear and loss into strength and hope.



Pastoralists and their animals at the deep water trough.

In September 2012, rains have failed amid a worsening drought in distant Afar region of Ethiopia. Pastoralists dependant on the rains coming twice a year are desperate without the water they need for their goats, cattle, sheep and camels. Islamic Relief is called in and begins an emergency distribution of food, and arranges for water to be trucked in from the nearest wells over 50 kilometres away.

By April the next year the drought is over. But Islamic Relief knows that its efforts will have to be repeated again and again as the droughts are becoming more frequent. It understands that pastoralist families must be helped to cope with the challenge. Government agrees, and works with Islamic Relief to identify the three elements critical to the survival of the animals and the people who depend on them: water, pasture and veterinary services.



Drought in Afar February 2012  
Shaista Chisty/Islamic Relief



The borehole where Islamic Relief is installing hybrid solar-powered pumping equipment

Rivers and streams running through the area once provided sufficient water even during the dry season. But with successive failed rains - the worst in 2014 to 2016 - something had to be done. Digging wells was a possibility as ground water acts as storage and is replenished directly when the rains return. Islamic Relief picked up a borehole project which the government had abandoned, and with local communities brought in the equipment needed to bring water to the district.

The work is impressive. Islamic Relief directly managed a high quality infrastructure project costing £350,000. Underground polythene pipes from the borehole supply three water points for domestic consumption, and two water stations for animals and a storage tank. It has transformed the area.

One of the water points is at the local primary school, providing drinking water as well as washing and sanitation facilities. The other water points provide plentiful water located close to homes, so people no longer need to trek to distant water sources.



Water points have made a big difference to Fatima Hana

Widowed mother-of-three Fatima Hana says that before Islamic Relief established the water points she had to walk to the river every morning. The journey took three hours in each direction, and she had to keep her son from school to help her carry the water home. Now the water points are just five minutes away.

“My life has changed. I have time now to look after my few animals and can help out with my neighbour’s herds. I don’t have enough income, but our culture is one where we help each other. The water has made all the difference”.

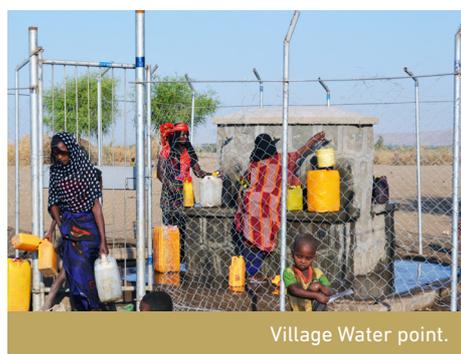
Islamic Relief’s greatest innovation has been in resolving the problem of pasture. The serial droughts have meant that the grass seeds have not been replenished in the soil. Vast areas which used to be rich in pasture remain bare even when it does rain. To compensate for this loss of natural pasture, Islamic Relief in cooperation with the local agricultural service has introduced the pastoralists to the idea of growing fodder for their animals.

A ten hectare field of fertile soil has been set aside next to the borehole, and the ridges prepared for gravity flooding irrigation. A small plot of newly introduced alfalfa crop has been planted, and the local pastoralist cooperative has been active in learning how to irrigate and tend the plants. Pastoralist Asker Musa says that initially it was very hard work, but “If it is going to provide a way for our animals to survive then it is worth it”.



Village water points are close to homes.

Islamic Relief has also been addressing the need for veterinary services for the animals. Government outreach workers have been able to respond to acute needs such as disease outbreaks, but there is a need for ongoing care and especially access to good quality pharmacy products. Islamic Relief has therefore established veterinary stores in each of the operational areas, with government since taking on responsibility for distributing and restocking the products.



Village Water point.



Deep animal trough.



The school water point provides water for drinking and washing.



Asker Mussa, pastoralist and cultivator.



Trial alfalfa cultivation.



A deep trough water station and storage tower.

The search for new responses to increasing challenges continues in a nearby district, where water shortages are less apparent because of the year-round flow of the Awra River. Here Islamic Relief has been looking for cash crops which might be exploited using the gravity irrigation being introduced to the pastoralists. New fast maturing mango trees have been planted, and sesame and mung bean seeds distributed. These particular crops were previously unknown in Afar, but trial crops have been harvested and farmers are so pleased with the results that they are turning over more of their land to planting. The local government agriculture department is planning to extend their use across the region.



Experimental mung bean and sesame crops under cultivation in Afar. Image: Islamic Relief Ethiopia.



Cooperative leader Toyba Gora irrigating the trial alfalfa crop.



Zahera Ahmed and children outside their home.



Images: Jamie Williams/Islamic Relief Worldwide

Islamic Relief started to work in Ethiopia in 2000, responding to a severe drought affecting the Somali region. We opened the Islamic Relief Ethiopia country office four years later. Working closely with local government and communities, we deliver both emergency and long-term development programmes in some of the most remote pastoralist regions in the country. The Strengthen Resilience and Recovery Efforts for drought affected pastoralists in the Afar Region (SERERE) project described here is a result of the generous support of donors to Islamic Relief UK.