



How to turn setbacks into Comebacks: The story of the young, female Artisan trained by COWASH, Arba Minch Zuria Woreda.



W/o Meseret Hana/May 2019/Yohannes Melaku

Her name is W/o Meseret Hana. She is 21 years old and a mother of one baby boy. She completed High School at grade 10. She recently joined motherhood three months ago. She is the only female artisan in the Arba Minch Zuria Woreda. What setbacks did Meseret face to try the traditionally male dominated sector? Follow the exciting story.

Meseret lives in Genta Bonke Kebele, one of the Kebeles in Arbaminch Zuria Woreda. After completion of High School at Grade 10, Meseret was not able to find any job despite her effort. Due to lack of employment, she was not able to finance her basic needs. Thanks to COWASH created opportunity, in the beginning of 2015, she heard about the Artisans training which made her think through and regurgitate about the opportunity several times as the sector is mainly male dominated. Initially, she was not sure if she was able to get the chance itself; however, she chose to apply and see how it goes. She said "I was so surprised to be selected with other 3 males in the Woreda". Later in March 2015, she took the Artisans training with other 14 males in the Woreda. She complements, "without prior experience in the construction Industry, my interest in the area helped me succeed during the screening interview and later in the actual work".

We asked what were the areas and duration of the training, Meseret responded as "I took the training from March 2015 to April 2015 (2007 EFY) together with 14 males for 45 days including Saturdays. The training was given both in theory and in practice. The theoretical

trainings included occurrence of hand dug wells and springs, how to select spring and hand dug wells site, types of construction materials, how to work together with community, and recording and reporting progress of construction. The practical training, we took was mainly in the construction of spring with collection chamber and we constructed one spring with collection chamber fully. Meseret added "In addition, we were given some theoretical training in hand dug well construction and also were shown a completed hand dug well".

Further to the training, Meseret said the Woreda Youth and Sport Office supported them to form an Association which they called it Andinet meaning Unity, Water Supply Construction Enterprise. Forming the association was instrumental to commence business as of immediate and also to obtain a license. Since the very establishment, Meseret assumed a leading role in the association and worked as a Treasurer until she was replaced by another person during her maternity leave. Meseret did not deny the challenges to win businesses in the post training period. She said in 2007 EFY (2014/15), the training was conducted after the construction activities were fully awarded to another enterprise and hence didn't get any. In 2008 EFY (2015/16), there were few constructions and hence nobody was willing to give them the chance due to their lack of experience. It was in 2009 EFY (2016/17), they started their first construction project which was spring development. In 2010 EFY (2017/18), they completed six (6) springs and handover to the community. As of 2011 EFY (2018/19) to date, they completed four springs and nearly to sign new contracts with various WASCHOs. Currently, their association is growing day by day and planning to win more contracts.

Currently, Meseret believes that she is well experienced not only in building the components but also in quality control, daily follow ups, records management and quite conversant in managing construction supplies.

With regards to financial returns Meseret said "We got better job opportunity last year and I got Birr 3,600 working for few months. I got relatively lesser payment than other colleagues as I was pregnant and my involvement was limited only to some sites out of the 6 springs. As I was also on maternity leave for the past three months, I was not able to be involved much. I am sure that I will be fully involved next year and hope to get more financial benefits."



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In terms of challenges, Meseret classified the challenges into two as Personal and Collective. Personally, she was challenged in taking part in laborious works such as carrying stone and other construction materials and also travelling long distances in a difficult terrain due to inaccessibility of number of project sites. Collective challenges include delay of construction of schemes due to delay in supply and procurement of construction materials by WASHCOs, limitation in number of sites as compared to the capacity of the enterprise. She added, this discourages members and forces to change their work and be involved in other activities and finally less motivation in enterprise development and the focus on now than the future. She reiterated as "As a treasurer of the enterprise I have a fear that if money is required for various purposes such as upgrading of license, there is not enough money in the enterprise account."

Despite the personal and collective challenges, Meseret has not stopped dreaming big. She asserted *"My main future plan is to continue working as an artisan as I like the profession too much. But as the construction of water schemes is seasonal usually from January to June, I will also continue to work in the construction of private houses at different levels from daily laborer to assistant Mason. As I am, now married and my husband is a weaver, I will assist him in preparing some weaving materials and sell his products in the nearby market so that we can have more financial capacity to lead a better life."*

For Meseret, being the only female artisan in the Woreda has more meaning than the mere immediate financial returns. She is inspired and motivated to see her involvement reduces burden of women in fetching water. She was quoted saying "my intervention pays me more than the money I earn from the work". She expressed her commitment to continue as an Artisan and all other plans will be handled if they do not affect her main goal to continue to be a lead Artisan in her community.

As call to action, first and foremost, she encourages her female friends to join this sector as she did not face any discrimination or major challenge because of gender related issues. Secondly, she requests the Woreda to create more jobs to all existing construction enterprises.

During our conversation, Meseret was smiling, cheerful and looks contented with her job and life style. She also dreams big and doesn't feel alone in the sector. Her commitment, energy and drive for results were contagious and captivating.

We in COWASH welcome such initiatives and would like to applaud for the Woreda for their efforts in promoting women in all WASH activities.

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