Abeba, Tena, and Teguade are from Enemay District of northern Ethiopia. They recall the daily agonizing journeys they used to take, waking from their sleep at 3 and 4 in the morning, risking encounters with hyenas, and enduring the misty, cold weather only to fetch a bucket of unclean water from a lake and make the same journey again the next day. Today, filled jerry cans are but 10 minutes away leaving them more time to tend to their children and their homes.

In rural Ethiopian communities, up to 43% of households lack access to safe drinking water. Households are forced to walk long distances to fetch water, a task which almost certainly falls on the shoulders of women and young girls.

In July 2018, USAID’s Growth through Nutrition Activity installed a solar powered well with a hand pump in Enemay District of northern Ethiopia. On this breathtaking countryside peak, high density polyethylene pipes connect an 80-meter-deep borehole to a water tanker with a carrying capacity of 10m cubed. The water is pumped by eight solar panels that produce 37 volts of power, and in a fenced area next to this assemblage is a cement block out of which 6 taps channel quality tested, drinking water.

The community elected WASH committee members Wudu, Sentayehu, Ade, and Habtam oversee the management of this solar powered water source. “We ensure it’s safe and maintained, that no one is using the taps inconsistently so they don’t break…that users don’t take more water than needed. This is our job,” explains Wudu Belay, a 45-year-old farmer and father of four.

USAID develops one WASH committee per construction site and trains them on water supply system management, user fees, operation and maintenance, developing bylaws, and accessing spare parts and services.

When asked about plans to maintain the well, Wudu continues “We make sure users pay annual fees to cover the cost of maintenance and pay for a guard to keep watch of the site.”

Growth through Nutrition’s brand new solar powered pump will provide water to 170 households, or 700 individuals and their livestock in Enemay District. To date, the project has handed over 35 shallow boreholes to communities and trained 95 WASH committees in four regions of the country.

Not only has USAID supported the construction of an ecologically friendly, safe, accessible drinking water source, but also established and capacitated committees whose genuine commitment to the upkeep of this new found asset is discernible. They are proud custodians to whom the community has bestowed this invaluable asset, and for which they have accepted full responsibility.