



## Whatever It Takes

On 11 May 2007, Mr Abdinur Jeylani Abdinur arrived in Baidoa to attend, along with 14 other participants, a 2-day consultative workshop organized by SWALIM on irrigation infrastructure in Somalia. Abdinur, a farmer who lives in the Haway village at the lower end of the Shabelle river, was invited because of his active involvement in the committee for the Haway Barrage, the furthestmost downstream barrage on the Shabelle River.

Normally, the participation of one person among the 14 others would not have drawn my attention, but the 500-kilometer trip from Haway to Baidoa took a week for him, and the tremendous efforts he made to attend reflect both the desperation and hopes of his community to rebound from a devastating event that has impoverished this farming area.

At this time of year, Haway is pretty much cut off from Brava, the urban centre closest to it, because the rains inundate parts of the connecting earth road and make it impassable. With no public transportation services, Abdinur resorted to the only remaining option and started his journey with a 2-day, 56-kilometer trek on foot to Brava. He was exhausted by the time he arrived, his feet swollen and his body suffering from muscle cramps all over. In Brava he was taken in by a friend who was also invited to the workshop. There, his feet were treated by warm water and massage for two days before they started the longer journey to Baidoa. On the fifth day they boarded a bus for Mogadishu. Again, the rains add to the difficulty of negotiating this paved but badly damaged road, and the 200 kilometer distance took the entire day to cover. The two men joined other farmers coming from different parts of Somalia also going to Baidoa to attend the irrigation workshop organized by SWALIM. They stayed in Mogadishu for one night. On the sixth day,



Mr. Abdinur Jeylani Abdinur (right), with Prof. Hussein Iman of SWALIM (centre) and Haway Village Chief Maraba (left)

together with the rest of participants, they travelled the final 250 kilometres to Baidoa. Happily, the condition of the road between Mogadishu and Baidoa is better.

The Haway farming community used to be relatively prosperous with their irrigated agricultural production, and they owed their good fortunes to the Haway barrage. With the barrage gates, the farmers could control the water level of the river, closing them when it was low to water their fields, and opening them when it was high for flood control. But five years ago, one of the weaker embankments of the Shabelle River broke away just upstream of the barrage, and the water course completely turned away from its original route. Since then, the barrage has become useless, and the farmers have not been able to irrigate their plots through the gravity-fed system of canals. For the last five years, farmers have had to rely entirely on the rains, with the effect of significantly reduced yields. Of course, the effect on their crop production, and therefore their livelihoods, has been severe.

Since the collapse of central government, there has been no maintenance or repair of Somalia's once-impressive irrigation infrastructure. The farmers are desperate for any assistance to repair their barrage and bring water back into their fields again. Now, thanks to funding from the European Commission, SWALIM is looking at what it will take to repair five of these barrages on the Shabelle River, including the Haway barrage.

As SWALIM's Liaison officer in Mogadishu, I visited the area three months ago to assess the extent of the problem and the type of intervention required to channel the river water back into the canals. It was during this visit that I asked the community to select a person to represent them in the Baidoa workshop. Certainly after the tribulations of his travel, it's not difficult to understand why they selected Abdinur. Oh, and in case you're wondering, yes, he returned the same way he began his journey - on foot. He's back home now, a bit worse for the wear perhaps, but with higher hopes.



Haway Barrage – note that no water is flowing through the gates, which was the original water course. The river bed is now full of vegetation. The water in the background is the new river course, which bypasses the barrage.

Article by: Hussein Iman  
Issued on 28<sup>th</sup> May, 2007