

# AFAR PASTORALIST DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION QAFAR DACARSITTOH DADALIH EGLA

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## Fighting on with the effects of drought and household destitution

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### Late main rainy season

All drought-stricken communities are now waiting anxiously for the annual main rainy season, 'Karma'. Each year, July, August and September are the expected months with the greatest production during August. While southern Afar – zones 3 and 5 have seen the beginning of the season from around mid-July and storms have begun further up on the western border with Amhara and Tigray Regions in Zone 4, where the rain is urgently needed, it is still dry. Some of the perennial rivers such as the Geega River that passes through the highly drought-stricken northern Dubte grazing lands have brought rainwater into Afar Region from rain in the adjacent Amhara Highlands but actual rain to revive pasture has not fallen.

### Water trucking – still saving lives

As mentioned in the previous update, water trucking is continuing as a lone-measure in the region to save lives: the Afar government were without accessible funding due to the end of the finance year and other NGOs have not involved. Currently APDA is able to continue trucking water to some 61,000 thirsty beneficiaries up until August 31<sup>st</sup>. These communities are in northern Eli Daar, Kori and northern Dubte along the Seykoyta Road, in Geega, Sardo and Saha. This has been the most intense water trucking APDA has ever attempted faced with extremely wide - spread thirst and without other support teams. The hope is that rain DOES fall for these communities in the coming 3 weeks.

### Counteracting the need to water truck

The good news is that a government – sponsored drilling team has successfully tapped ground water in the northern Eli Daar town of Buure with a borehole down to 320 meters. It remains to install this with pump and generator and water distribution lines. This is indeed historic, it will bring to an end the almost annual need to truck water to the surrounding population of Buure as well as Buure town – a population of around 7,500 people.

In Kori, there are now 2 new sunk boreholes again that are not yet functional: in Musle and the administration town of Kori. The borehole in Kori that APDA struck has an installation problem requiring for the well to be re-opened and very particular thermal pump system properly installed – the water comes out all but at boiling point.

Once these 2 wells in Kori are functional and the well in Buure is serving the community, this will drastically reduce the need to water truck in dry, thirsty times reducing the annual regional burden from these 2 notoriously dry districts. This will not only be life-saving but allow these communities to better plan for education and health services with available water.

Again, in Kori, APDA is completing a huge watershed management scheme having constructed water - spreading weir of 705 m<sup>3</sup> capacity. Once this system on the perennial Li'I River is charged through rainwater gushing down and being caught behind the weir, both ground water and surface water will collect. This will enable both the herd and the community to get water readily all year round and will produce soil moisture that indigenous shrubs and grasses reappear. Aside from the immediate adjacent communities of around 9,000 people, this will become part of the coping mechanism for pastoralists as far away as Guhum and 'Addala, a radius out from Musle of around 45 kilometers. Again, APDA has constructed a smaller, 53 m<sup>3</sup> water spreading weir in Kori that is now functional for 18 months providing pasture and water support.

In the Andaale of Dagaba, northern Dubte, a new cistern is nearing completion. Here, APDA has tried unsuccessfully to site boreholes. Cisterns of 220 m<sup>3</sup> both serve as a reservoir for any rainwater that falls and a storage for trucked water as is currently required under emergency. One cistern serves from 120 to 300 households for up to 3 months once it is full. An even larger cistern of 300 m<sup>3</sup> is just completed in Besinka, the dry eastern side of Uwwa Woreda adjoining to Geega. Again, another 3 damaged cisterns in Awra and 4 in thirsty, northern Eli Daar are undergoing repair. This method of collecting and storing water is traditional to the Afar for the past 150 years. APDA took up the method in 1999 and has now constructed over 500 such structures in 14 of the region's chronically drought – affected districts. Each one provides saving grace from thirst and drought stress particularly helping females who may walk up to 24 hours to collect water.

### **Veterinary services and needs**

With the current prolonged drought, the domestic herd is currently utterly vulnerable to disease and low productivity. In fact, communicable diseases are currently reaping havoc in Sifra; parts of Uwwa and Awra. APDA is most anxious to be able to respond.

Three animal treatment campaigns are being carried out in Eli Daar where rain is utterly needed but they have some remaining dry pasture from rain that fell from one storm in May.

### **The situation in Bidu, northern Afar Region**

Bidu, the woreda with perhaps the most desolate landscape in the region is receiving a continual trickle of Eritrean border people into Ethiopia – proper. There are now over 750 displaced households that have moved out of desperation to get food and relief assistance, moving without their possessions as they had no pack-animals. These people need the mats to set up traditional Afar, portable dome-shaped housing. The mats are made in the region locally woven from dry palm – leaves. The government is supporting them in food.

### **Other Development News**

#### **a) Afar community FM radio now inaugurated**

Finally the Afar Regional Government along with the Federal Ministry of Communication inaugurated the region's first – ever community FM radio. The ceremony took place a week ago and opens the door to the regional government line bureaus using the radio to convey their messages; to the community's enhanced relation with these bureaus and to the entire civil society sector of the region to be more interactive. Indeed, this a tremendous break – through for the Afar people and the region!! With government facilitation, the radio will now gain access to a broadcast antenna that will bring in almost every community in the region!!

This then will speed up and consolidate efforts for all manner of community development improving accountability and gearing the communities to greater confidence in behavior change as warranted.

The radio management has a highly vibrant but community – driven action plan of broadcast. While the radio is NOT APDA –owned, the organization is a primary stakeholder and holds the position of chairmanship to the Board. There are several directive messages that the organization continues to battle with in terms of getting the ground-swell of pastoralist community commitment including the essence of education as the driving force of life and development; good use of medical and particularly maternal services; utilization of the market and indeed, actually stopping harmful practices. Therefore this inauguration is a massive celebration for APDA!!

### **b) Water spreading weirs**



This beautiful green landscape is the result of a **water - spreading weir in Gaali Koma, Guulina** (central western Afar Region). Their land had been thoroughly eroded and devastated by dangerously fast rain-shed pouring down from the Ethiopian Highlands to the west and grass-seed had blown away in dust - storms. After each rain - storm charges this scheme it will improve and strengthen its return to environment recovery and sustainability.

### **c) The Afar and the New Zealand society**

Having launched the Afar New Zealand Friendship Society in 2009, on July 31<sup>st</sup>, this society with the full blessing of leading members of the New Zealand government, the Kiwi – Afar Charitable Trust was launched. This is indeed exciting and adds to the objective that Afar development should work towards self-sufficiency. The oldest such organization working in partnership with APDA is Afar Friends, Sweden working out of Uppsala and the second is Can-go Afar in Ottawa, Canada.

Kiwi – Afar Charitable Trust has immediately adopted the idea of promoting sponsorship for children from remote pastoralist communities to continue their education. For them, this will work out at 2.57 NZD per day for 10 months in the year aiming that the student reaches qualification to go on to tertiary learning. APDA has a total of 64 such students needing this support of the 204 under the organization program. The Trust is also looking to other means to support education in the pastoralist society, ironically the most difficult component of development to find funding for and yet the actual cornerstone.

### **d) APDA's Barbara May Maternity Hospital**

With the eventual completion of a second building housing antenatal and gynecology outpatients; the pharmacy; laboratory and hospital administration, the hospital is now able to be more efficient and functional. In the new building, there is a wide courtyard where a plasma – screen TV is being set up that the outpatients and community can watch and benefit from ongoing awareness on the basics of safe motherhood and reproductive health emphasizing the community need to deliberately know about and access services in a timely fashion. Indeed, the hospital looks forward to a progressive but metered out development toward it being a center for practical learning for the community as well as for the health care providers.