

AFAR PASTORALIST DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION QAFAR DACARSITTOH DADALIH EGLA

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The Long, Dry Season: from Coping to Recovery

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1. First up, communicating

There is nothing more important for APDA than keeping up to date and communicating that the struggle to bring safety and equality to the pastoralist life goes forward. APDA wishes to point out that there are changes to our address as well as to our phone numbers as contained above. After many attempts, the organization webpage is back up as mentioned as a changed address, www.apda-ethiopia.org. APDA's Facebook site is re-activated as above under the organization new communication officer.

2. Thirst has come around again

While all the efforts are afoot to bring about a sustainable water source for the most vulnerable communities who perennially suffer thirst, the reality of thirst is back again. There are 3 districts that most urgently in need: northern Eli Daar, Kori and Bidu. While the extremely scant winter rains did bring around 20 days of relief water to some of the communities in Kori, Bidu and northern Eli Daar have not seen rain since early September and in some pockets of these communities, rain has not fallen for the past 2 years. The 4 sub-districts most endangered in northern Eli Daar have survived since APDA stopped water trucking on December 31st 2017 till now by eking out the water in 4 cisterns the organization had rehabilitated and left full of water in December. Now that water is consumed. In Bidu, the government has managed to hire one truck but no more to assist almost 22,000 people. Those who cannot get this water in Bidu are trekking up to 12 hours to the Afdeera salt-lake over moon-scape volcanic lava flats to pick up brackish water. Thirst in these communities is rife and all consuming on a daily basis. APDA urgently needs a minimum of 4 water trucks over the coming 6 weeks until the expected short rainy season comes – provided it comes.

- Medium to long-term solutions for thirst

APDA continues to struggle with a 280 - meter - deep borehole that was drilled in 2016 in Kori and inadvertently the thermal pump was lost down the well shaft – water comes out at 70 degrees hence the need for the thermal pump. The pump is retrieved and it is hoped that in the next days, having had another set-back, the people of Kori will be able to benefit from the first – ever such constructed well in their district. Instead of trucking water 540 kilometers round trip from Logya, trucks can be loaded in Kori for the thirsty communities in the hinterland. A second borehole in Musle, Kori also recently drilled produces salty water and needs a desalination plant installed. Currently, Kori has around 9,500 people who are extremely thirsty.

Secondly, APDA is in the process of completing the first - ever steam-well in Bidu. For the northern Eritrean border kebeles of Bidu, condensed geothermal steam that rises to the ground surface from a sub-terrain stream passing through molten lava is the only source of getting sustainable water supply. The system of collecting steam is long-known in Afar traditional coping but the steam surfacing in Bidu is too powerful for simple traditional structures as are made in other parts where thermal steam is harvested. The project is providing harvested steam coming out of a natural fissure in the ancient volcanic lava flow that it is captured into a reservoir to serve around 850 households with water. In order to overcome water trucking in the area, a further 4 such steam wells are needed. The structure is of re-enforced cement over the steam vent capped and piped into a large cistern capable of holding up to 10,000 liters where it cools for community collection.



This is the steam-well under construction: steam comes out in the foreground, goes into the cement structure and then water is piped into the cistern in the background.

3. Malnutrition

As the dry season drags on, more and more communities are falling to malnutrition. A community with strong load of destitute households is the main stimulus of this declining motion since they have no food to share or survive. Again, as is in the case of Teeru, the main cause of child-malnutrition is diarrhea since their water is so highly contaminated. The most drastically affected districts are Teeru in the Region's central north where a recent rapid assessment found ---- severe acute malnutrition cases of the children checked; Erebti adjoining Teeru on its northern border; Eli Daar, especially in the far north; Gala'alu in Zone 3 where well below average rain fell in 2017 and diarrhea persists; Kutubla on the terminal ends of the Awash River, a community of 25,000 people centered in Assaita but reaching to Dubte in Datta Bahari and Afambo on the Djibouti border.

In a sense, Kutubla is the hardest to reach of the above – mentioned areas since it is normally seen as a fertile, well – water area of relatively safe – living. Due to irrigation use of the Awash River, the Awash channel normally sustaining this community is now all but dry. The grazing forest has died and the community cattle are perishing. As never before, the community are dispersed into the Gammerie Plateau as well as toward Dubte in Datta Bahari. Here 25,000 odd people are endangered without progressive and sustained nutrition surveillance and treatment.

IF rain the short rains fail, there are several other districts that will follow this pattern of thirst and malnutrition. The vast grazing valley of Geega as recently visited in northern Dubte is now tinder-dry. Communities are engrossed in their thirst and to date, dispersed within the 150 kilometer – long valley with extremely limited food supplies since the animals no longer have milk. Without the expected rain of April, they will be pushed to migrate out of the valley up to 300 kilometers to try and rescue their animals. They currently dig in the Geega River bed for water but this will dry up as the season gets hotter – Afar Region is on the end of a peculiarly cold winter now.

Animal disease outbreaks are exacerbating poor nutrition particularly in northern Dubte, Kori, Afambo, Gala'alu and Gawwaani. Overall basic household commodity inflation is also making it near impossible for a rural household to sustain soap purchase; sugar and the like. With weakening animals, the market price is unfavorable to the herdsmen leaving them struggling to get basic food - grain.

APDA needs to urgently mobilize teams of health workers surveying the remote areas where government services are not reaching and the communities that are necessarily that worse off. The time is now critical for measles; whooping cough and pneumonia outbreaks. Campaign vaccination needs to happen in Kutubla, Teeru and Afdeera to avert outbreaks.

4. Planning with partners for sustainability

Having held the first gathering on November 3rd, 2017, APDA plans to advance the recommendations reached on that occasion with a further meeting on Friday, March 16th 2018. A group of 8 partner NGOs and agencies first met to discuss how APDA/ Afar Region could break the cycle of disaster shock (mainly drought and flash-flooding) rendering further damage to the already weakened pastoralist livelihood to attain recovery and sustainability to these shocks. Through the facilitation of a pastoralist – sensitive consultant, the group reached the conclusion that APDA needed to widen its perspective, perhaps change focus and strengthen its strategies. APDA was given the task to draw up a proposal of how it was prepared to do this given all the challenges the organization faces. Describing where support is needed to develop more skills and how APDA can utilize its opportunities efficiently such as the newly - formed organization social enterprise; Afar community FM radio and more. For this, APDA invites any other organizations or interested people to join the half-day discussion in Addis Ababa on March 16th and will send documents to be presented to those planning to attend.

5. Increased efforts to recover household economy and nutrition in Erebti and Eli Daar

Through 2 new projects, APDA is now able to close 2 distinct gaps that are fermenting more and more poverty:

In Eli Daar, a community that migrated due to devastating herd loss in 2011 and were partly rehabilitated getting goat re-stocking for 100 households and camels to move back their land in 2015. There are still another 100 households existing 10 kilometers from Manda town on the Assab Road who need the same rehabilitation to put that community back to full productivity. This will happen in April.

Erebti, a once prosperous goat-herding community of over 65,000 people have progressively fallen into destitution since the first killing drought for them in 2010. Now, with well over 2,000 destitute households a system of recovery is being established:

- 100 totally destitute households in Imbiile and Daali Gasso will be restocked as part of the project re-stocking Eli Daar
- A water spreading weir will be constructed in Fiyaatu adjoining 3 other kebeles and planning to assist around 2,500 households with water and pasture as well as food – crop production.
- Through the water the weir harvests, a tree plantation; fodder crops and food crops will be established that 240 women use as a production base to change the community nutrition as well as to create market. These 240 women will begin a micro-finance system in the community that will progressively move on to get households out of poverty. Aside from crop production, these women will run small businesses of animal fattening and marketing; petty trade and the like.

6. New steps in education

As the Federal Government is moving toward the approach of securing remote pastoralist children in learning as far as level 6 as they struggle with the challenge of delivering these children education opportunity, APDA is preparing to increase its alternative basic education program to cover level 4 by the new school year that starts in September/ October 2018.

As part of this extreme challenge to improve quality of education for pastoralist children, APDA is especially working with 3 schools in Zone 5: 2 in Daali Fagi and one in Tallalak and has just completed school rehabilitation. In these particular districts, APDA plans to link the 31 newly – established alternative basic education sites with these 3 schools so that the pastoralist children go on to complete

their education.

APDA is working to increase the number of reading books in Afar available to the children.