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Out – of Season Rain: to what effect

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Rain on February 14th ...

As with other parts of Ethiopia, Afar Region was surprised by rain on February 14th – rain that fell without wind or lightning and covered a considerable part of Afar Region. All the western border districts got quite a soaking as well as some areas in the center.

The most prominent area that needed rain and is still dry is northern Eli Daar where APDA is water trucking. Whereas all Kori did not get rain, there is now sufficient to keep the otherwise thirsty community for around 1 month – the communities of Daaba, for example will walk around 1 ½ to 3 hours to collect water sharing from the filled neighboring cisterns and ponds.

The BIG question is what rain was this?? – had all the characters of winter rain – no lightening; steady falling with the land left with cloud cover for a few subsequent days. In discussion with the traditional meteorologists, they are calling it a VERY late winter rain – the wind that directed this rain was typically for them, a winter season wind. This then leaves the region guessing as to whether the next season ‘*Suggum*’ or short rains will come on time or 6 weeks late as this season was. Most of the elders believe the next season cannot start before April and maybe mid to late April.

Animals and possible pasture growth

The rain has come at a time of relative cool: skies remained cloudy and temperatures still not reached their notorious maximum. It can be expected the livestock will get rejuvenated pasture. With the fact unusual migration had already set in December, many herds are currently far from their homelands. Therefore there is danger that particularly well - regrown grazing spots will get a pounding from various herds. That said, it can be expected that grazing opportunity is now extending for around 6 to 8 weeks. This will greatly boost the health of the smaller, weaker herds in the wake of the short rains.

However, veterinary support to the herd should not be neglected. While the need for supplementary animal feed to prevent the herd from drying of milk is now distant, that they should be treated is undisputable. In fact it is an opportune time to vaccinate the herd.

Acute Watery diarrhea (AWD) still lurking around..

After AWD had broken out in Assaita in late January, it then went on to repeat again in Gala’alu, Zone 3, a district that has had on – off outbreaks for the past 4 months. A further 2 people died and 8 affected. Currently Dawwe woreda in Zone 5 has an outbreak affecting 3 kebeles – the woreda administrator is asking for APDA health workers to come and lead the community awareness and mobilization.

The revised strategic emergency needs

- a) Water trucking in Eli Daar cannot stop. This is needed from now till the next rains of predicted late April (7 to 8 weeks). Again, it is so far estimated that Kori will fall back into utter thirst by mid-March. There too APDA is likely to be requested to provide a minimum of 30 days trucking support
- b) Animal treatment and vaccination to ward off any untoward disease outbreaks that would result in animal death.
- c) Strong awareness on water purification; use of soap to prevent all diarrheal diseases but particularly AWD

And again, take the opportunity to re-build the livelihood...

Now indeed, there is opportunity to work on re-building the pastoralist life in fully destitute households thus enabling the overall community recovery. The sooner this happens, the better since as previously described, the situation is an overall downward pull without any recovery intervention.

To the delight of the community in Erebti, 100 totally destitution households have just each received a loan of 4,000 ETB – they will work on this for 4 months and then the returning will begin at the rate of 10% of the loan. By this system, more destitute households will benefit on the collection of each month's loan returns – in the first year, a total of 45 households will be the additional beneficiaries and from then on, it will gradually snow-ball.

APDA is about to restock a further 220 households in Eli Daar.

This overall momentum must increase to break the back of drought shocks and sliding destitution.