

# AFAR PASTORALIST DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION QAFAR DACARSITTOH DADALIH EGLA

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## A Desperate Situation of Heat and Thirst for Thousands of Afar

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### The drought

It is said in Geega, Dubte district, one of the most prominent grazing plains in central Afar where around 25,000 herdsmen live, rain has now not fallen for 2 years and the migration they face for water and pasture is the most severe in 10 years – those who could go (had pack animals) and were able to walk the distance have gone. Never have they seen their grassy plains so barren and water collection for those remaining behind is up to 12 hours walk away.

Temperatures above 45 degrees giving a furnace – effect when the wind blows, the isolated areas that did receive one storm in May are now scooping the remainder water out before they too join the ranks of the thirsty. The problem the Afar face then is thirst (very stressful in this fasting month of Ramadan as there is often insufficient water to break the fast at sunset) and drinking dirty, unprotected water.

The animals are growing weaker by the day and diseases that are stimulated through poor nutrition are ever prevalent the most common being pasteurlosis and PPR (a form of animal pneumonia) both of which are highly contagious and camel, goat/ sheep pox. This is most terrifying for a household with only a handful of surviving goats from previous droughts. Certainly the household diet has degenerated to merely grain ground to bread or cooked as porridge with black tea. This is very telling on pregnant and breast-feeding mothers since they immediately suffer vitamin C deficiency as well as having inadequate protein and iron content for them or the growing child. They and their under 5 year olds are now in a very desperate condition.

Within the emergency frame, APDA continues to re-stock destitute households successfully having vaccinated, treated the re-stocked herd and supported them with supplementary animal feed in the most severe season. In April a further 290 households in Eli Daar were re-stocked making a total 965 destitute households brought back to recovery since 2016 in both Eli Daar and Afdeera. This is both an emergency action in that the household gets milk to battle malnutrition and a recovery action as the goats go on to reproduce.

The most stressed areas are Eli Daar and particularly the northern 7 sub-districts; adjoining Bidu district; four kebeles in northern Dubte; among children in Afdeera who have suffered whooping cough earlier in the year as well as throughout the drought – belt where households have sunk into destitution or close destitution through herd loss. The situation in Bidu is exaggerated by now over 720 households displacing from the border with Eritrea in a state of hunger and destitution – having no pack animals, in order to reach help they are abandoning their houses and coming with just their children. Bidu woreda government has pleaded with APDA for assistance since they are unable to support aside from additional food for these people.

Most of the water points in Gawwaani, southern Afar Region are not functioning and the community is drinking river water. This is resulting in malnutrition and the threat of acute watery diarrhea.

Due to the extremity of the daytime temperatures, there are wind/ dust storms into the evening and night. However, the change to hail the onset of the rainy season may well not come until mid to late August since the short rains of March/ April were 6 weeks late in onset and extremely sparse in productivity. The community may well endure a further 6 to 8 weeks in these most critical and stressful conditions. This in mind, APDA has the following shortages that need urgent attention:

- It is adamant to keep water trucking to now over 56,000 people whom APDA is assisting – funds stop on June 20<sup>th</sup> – there are even more in the locality who need assistance. The government is ‘hands- tied’ to assist as it is the end of the finance year and funds will not be released for a further 6 weeks. The organization is alone in supporting water trucking
- Lack of veterinary medicines and support to send out paravets to diseased herds
- Ongoing need for basic hygiene and sanitation support: soap, Water PUR to de-contaminate drinking water
- Support to conduct nutrition surveillance in remote communities the government health team/ other NGOs are not reaching since there are no roads – APDA’s health team is adept to walking to such places
- Support to vaccinate the most vulnerable children in remote areas – APDA is now completing vaccinating Eli Daar, Erebti and Magaale districts but there are pocket outbreaks of measles and whooping cough evident in various drought- affected communities. Teeru, Afdeera, Gawwaani and Gala’alu need urgent vaccination.
- Shelter assistance to drought displaced in Bidu.
- Support to repair damaged water storage cisterns and wells

At this point, acute watery diarrhea seems to have stopped – there have been no new outbreaks now for 9 weeks.

## **Other Development News**

### **a) Working on supporting female participation**

In a recent assessment of under five year olds in Eli Daar, from a total of 2,896 girls examined: 54 had no cutting at all; 1,209 had the ‘lesser cutting done or *‘sunna’* as the Afar describe. Of the 1713 girls who had full cutting to all but close the vagina, 281 were under 1 years. While these remain frightening results, what it does show is that there is a movement to stop: 54 girls are not cut and will be exemplary in the close-knit community; the 1432 girls between 1 years and 5 years would have been cut in the first 10 days of life – that there are only 281 under one years cut means that the attitude is changing and the momentum must be kept up to accelerate the change. On the basis of this assessment, APDA has gone back to the woreda government, the community and worked out a new plan to build awareness and to convince people that there is no *‘sunna’* and cutting is overall not tolerated.

### **b) Community FM radio moving forward.**

The developments in the Afar community FM radio are daily – the fledgling broadcaster is now bounding along as a growing child taking on more and more challenges. Through community popularity, the radio is taking on the daily issues of its listeners and with them, finding solutions. More and more youth that are able – bodied are getting employment contracts in the construction work in Samara as a direct result of the radio dialogue on the topic. The program manager has 20 years experience in Afar language radio broadcast and has constructed an exacting system of engineering the best way to develop listener exposure to an issue using a well – structured check list before passing a program for broadcast. Due to its novelty of community involvement, several people have asked to get positions as volunteer to the program making and broadcasting – particularly young women. This will have a ripple effect as the female voice is more and more exposed. The station inauguration is planned for July 6<sup>th</sup> – this again will prove to be an exposure opportunity wherein government officials from the line bureaus; NGOs; companies will join in the celebration and commit to the ongoing support to make the radio the vehicle of community conversation.

### **c) Water spreading weirs**

The water spreading weirs that APDA has constructed are now functioning with water for the community and grazing is not dry around the structure. The largest yet weir is close to completion in Musle, Kori with a capacity of 705 m<sup>3</sup>. This will provide a vast dam in an area perennially short of water and with the extended, long wings from the weir dam wall, it will stimulate vegetation growth rejuvenation on a wide basis giving sense again to the once prosperous Musle grazing plain. This will indeed be a great move toward both water self-sufficiency and recovery of the herd and environment.

Similarly, a water spreading weir is being constructed in another drought – devastated area in eastern Uwwa woreda. This is being done alongside training of women in income generation and saving that they become the producers and the marketers of food crops grown from the water of the weir.

### **d) School year ending**

All over the region, students are struggling in the heat to accomplish their exams. APDA's hostel students are among them and there is considerable hope they will do well having had careful coaching in out-of-school hours. Equally in alternative basic education (ABE) sites, students are struggling to attend to complete the school year – in some sites, water trucking is making this possible. The plan then is to begin mapping out the next year and to discuss with communities still reluctant to allow students, particularly girls to attend learning in a government school after completing level 3 in ABE in the rural area.