

# AFAR PASTORALIST DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION QAFAR DACARSITTOH DADALIH EGLA

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## Now that drought is broken, the opportunity for recovery

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### **Annual main rains, the results**

The annual main rains were between 6 and 8 weeks late in onset throughout the region (normally the season is from July to September). Once the rains did come in mid to late August, they were dangerously torrential and, with all incidents considered, over 100 people died of lightning strike. Flash floods swept away houses and sleeping herds as well as further eroding the now highly delicate landscape in western Afar Region.

Overall, falls were adequate to both relieve thirst and rejuvenate pasture. There are however patches of both scant rainfall and actually where it did not fall. In Bidu (Datt'Ale kebele), there was one inadequate storm that fell in early September and in northern Eli Dear, the Manda/ Buure district where the community has been water-truck dependent since February, no rain fell. Thus for these 2 areas, APDA continues to truck water, currently planned up until December 31st 2017.

The other remarkable rain-shadow areas were 3 kebeles in Erebt in the region's central north and 4 kebeles in Gala'alu, Zone 3 where pasture growth will not last them longer than early November. In Kori rain has been very irregular and over the Musle site where APDA is completing a very large water spreading weir, there was no significant rain so the weir has not been charged to the point of extending water out through the wings to gain soil moisture.

In Teeru, the central basin where the Awra/ Guulina River floods into is inundated with water and communities are unable to reach pasture as a result.

All of these mentioned districts have ongoing malnutrition that requires timely and adequate re-dress as the situation for them will only deteriorate.

### **Acute watery diarrhea still re-occurring**

Having begun among daily laborers working in construction and sugarcane plantation in and around Samara and Dubte in July, the region has been unable to set itself of this outbreak. Districts on the western border have been troubled including Guulina, neighboring Teeru; Aba'ala and Erebt as well as Dallol in the far north west. In each case, the infection was brought in from towns in Tigray adjacent to the Afar border. APDA sent teams of health workers to raise awareness and identify cases as well as distribute water purifying material and soap to the most vulnerable households.

### **The plan to discuss on a common recovery to resilience strategy**

With the above - mentioned vulnerability in mind and the repetition of news these updates bring of how the associated shocks are injuring the pastoralist household, APDA has decided to bring together those organizations and agencies that have supported to relieve the pain of disaster with APDA asking the question of what we can do together to build a constructive strategy to reverse this. Planning to meet in Addis Ababa on November 3rd, APDA has commissioned an assessment of the past 10 years in 3 representative districts as the baseline of

discussion. The assessment aims to show how indeed the climate has changed; how the environment resources of water and grazing have deteriorated; what the impact has been on the household and the ability of the household to cope and finally, to bring examples of APDA's attempts to bring about recovery as a further framework to hang a solution on. The organization strongly believes there is no time to wait. With the current level of destitution that exists in Afar Region, even if it does rain, the community cannot be free from malnutrition and vulnerability to disease outbreaks. With upwards of 90% of the community drinking unprotected water in some districts; no constant access to veterinary services and, as right now announced, the devaluation of the Ethiopian Birr, the community is highly vulnerable.

Most certainly if there are others who APDA as so far not contacted but would like to join the discussion, you are most welcome. While the outcome is not expected to be earth-shattering, APDA hopes and wants to move in the direction of deliberate recovery building a community resilient to future shocks that are indeed inevitable.

### **Ongoing emergency responses**

Meanwhile, as mentioned above, water trucking continues with 4 hired trucks; APDA is working hard to respond to a variety of animal diseases that are now in most of the major herding districts – contagious chest infection and pasteuriosis remains notably highly in several communities. Too, the animals are carrying a heavy load of both internal and external parasites that will distract from their ability to recover.

In September, APDA's mobile health team began the first of a series of 4 campaigns to vaccinate community children and child-bearing females in Geega, Dagaba, Saha and Guhum – all kebeles of northern Dubte where there are no accessible health institutions and the communities live in very scattered grazing settlements. These communities have very recently returned from distant retreat grazing and in fact, this community has not been vaccinated as such for almost 3 years. The target is to give all under 1 year olds the 10 antigens covering some of the notorious child-killing diseases such as measles, whooping cough and pneumococcus pneumonia – hepatitis B; diphtheria; tetanus; haemophilus influenzae; polio and roto virus are the other antigens given. To gain coverage, the health workers walk house to house from a mobile cold-chain (refrigerator powered by a generator that is planted as close to the community as possible). This strenuous work takes 15 days to complete one campaign with distances of over 200 kilometers being covered.

In Eli Daar and Bidu, APDA is providing community – managed acute malnutrition (CMAM) response in the most remote communities. While in Eli Daar malnutrition has plateaued, in Bidu it remains critical since there are desperate and destitute households coming in for assistance from the Eritrean border areas. As always, these activities are combined with constant hygiene and sanitation awareness as well as distributing soap and water PUR (water purifying chemical) to the most at risk households. As far as the organization can, in other areas, APDA is identifying malnourished pregnant and breast-feeding mothers and assisting them with supplementary lentils.

### **Other Development News**

#### **a) Back to school..**

As of early October, the new academic year began in Afar Region. APDA has brought back Hostel students in the 4 hostels that have now been supported progressively for the past 4 years: 74 boys in Logya and 19 girls; 54 students in Awra of whom 22 are girls - these are all project – supported and then 25 Kutubla children in Assaita as well as 26 students in Uwwa. For the latter 2 sites, the organization has been appealing for individual sponsorship and has so far covered expenses of 18 students. There is a need to cover a further 23 students' daily support costs at 1.7 USD daily.

The students that these hostels support are all from very remote communities where the child would have simply returned to a life of goat-herding rather than continuing his/ her education until graduation and tertiary learning. What is too difficult to do is to turn away students who have so far come from grade 4 to 8 and have the dream and ambition to complete that they study a profession useful for their respective community.

Another challenge APDA is facing is that the government has recently declared that alternative basic education

will take on a 4<sup>th</sup> level. What has been the case to date is that a child learns under the basic education strategy from level one to 3 and then, as possible, joins government learning in the closest town. Now the government has asked for a 4<sup>th</sup> level of learning in the rural area. This will take additional textbooks as well as all the other elementary support.

The overall basic and greatest challenge APDA battles is that the pastoralist community does not have a history and thus cultural realization of education – it does not rank in daily life as priority or even necessary. Just now, the organization music band and drama group have gone out to Daali Fagi and Tallalak performing for and with the the communities that gained education opportunity as recently as one year ago. Community FM radio is also a significant tool in developing this awareness.

### **Books for the purpose..**

The organization has written 12 Afar children's reading books to date in 2016/17. Two of these books are in the process of publication. The need to write and publish more is vast – this is one strategy that will propel the education system along in the Afar society.

### **Rain brings light to environment recovery successes**

With ponds and cisterns now full of rainwater, the community is relieved of the stress that surrounds the daily effort to assure the herd survival as well as allowing mothers and girls to spend time around the home rather than walking vast distances to collect water.

One of the truly magnificent recoveries is in Maska, Eli Daar, a kebele bordering to Kori and only 10 kilometers in from Guyah (small truck – stop) on the road going to Afdeera. Since their grazing forest had dried up and there was no surface water, this community had been burdened with almost constant migration as far away as Magaale in the north west to keep their herd alive – a distance of over 250 kilometers. Now with the river that feeds into the grazing forest put back on its track; a pond of 7,200 m<sup>3</sup> constructed and community - made hillside terracing that also has a network of gully check-dams stopping erosion, the area is radiantly green with ample water. Having had 25 of the most destitute households re-stocked earlier in the year, this community is now well on the road to recovery.

### **Recovering livelihoods through microfinance**

Wherever APDA has planted its microfinance recovery roots, it is moving on. Further generations of beneficiaries are gaining the opportunity to utilize a revolving loan to start a small business. This is happening in Dallol; Magaale; Teeru, Awra, Mille and around the Logya/ Samara/ Dubte area. In Erebti where a new scheme has been started, the second generation have just received loans. While this is relatively slow, this is a sure way of stamping out the pain of a dependent destitute household and also developing a local economy. Animal trading/ fattening; petty trade in household food commodities; clothes; soap and other basics; tea-shops/ food shops are among the enterprises people are starting. APDA still uses this to benefit women as the vast majority and links the activity to the beneficiary being literate in Afar and numeracy. Through the means of microfinance, destitution is slowly being extinguished reviving a household economy that can feed the family and move on to higher gains.

### **The power of Afar youth**

Wherever possible, APDA involves the local youth in the effort to gain the results of development. Youth groups in Afdeera, Erebti and Magaale are fighting the huge battle to lessen/ avoid the invasive character of *kaat* – chewing in their respective society. This commonly – chewed amphetamine leaf dissipates the gains of community behavior change. Youth are enabled to speak out about early marriage; the devastation of FGM; the need for education. APDA utilizes the tool of youth mobilization in most of its districts where community behavior change is being challenged and certainly, these people keep a reality check on progress.