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Critical Needs as Drought Breaks and Struggling onto Sustainability

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1. Rain and the prospects of rain

The short rains (*Suggum*) as expected March/ April started April 7th and 12th, late and anxiously awaited. To date, the beneficiary area diffused with significant gaps where the rain has not started. As is normal, southern Afar (zones 3 and 5) the western border did get rain but for them, more is needed. Drought –ridden, dry Kutubla in the east adjacent to the Djibouti border got the first storm in parts but not the second; the notorious dry belt where APDA is currently water trucking had no rain at all: Eli Daar, Kori; Bidu and Sardo in Dubte district. Not far from Sardo in Geega and Dagaba northern Dubte some rain has fallen bringing immediate thirst relief. In Zone 4, Awra, Guulina and Yallo has had 3 storms but Teeru remains without rain – the river systems coming into the district have brought some water from the highlands. News is very tentative in the northern Zone 2: no rain has fallen in Erebti, Afdeera, Barahale, Dallol till now; Magaale has had rain on the western border as well as Aba'ala.

From the APDA side, this means anxious days continue as the currently – conducted water trucking has no relief – 2 trucks are deployed in northern Eli Daar; one on the Afdeera Road assisting Sardo and 58 kilometers up the road; 2 in Kori and 1 in Bidu – these trucks hardly cover the need of around 35,000 people giving them 2 liters of water on average daily. More critical than this is that the contracts will complete on April 30th; May 3rd and 4th leaving thirsty people as desperate as ever if the rain does not fall. The one saving piece of news is that APDA did **secure the well in Kori as of March 5th**. – the first and only working borehole in that district. Now the organization is looking to install pipelines and systems so the well can be fully useful for surrounding communities; animals as well as filling water trucks from this well rather than going a round trip of 350 kilometers to collect water in Logya for thirsty households in Daaba, Kori where education all but stopped due to lack of water.

All in all, the Afar community is hopeful that the rainy season will now continue for a further 4 to 6 weeks. With the fasting month of Ramadan starting probably May 17th, people are desperate for water security.

With the steam well APDA has constructed in Bidu, a further extension of the steam outlet is needed that it is effectively converting sub-terrain steam into drinking water. This APDA plans to complete in the coming month. Other current efforts to make water available to the pastoralists include the rehabilitation of 2 cisterns in Geega, northern Dubte and 6 cisterns in Erebti along with the construction of 8 dams in

Erebt and 2 in Awra. These efforts allow for rainwater harvesting both for human and animal consumption.

In Teeru, APDA is installing household-level water filters in 1,000 households that they are able to decontaminate drinking water and store water safely in their home. This for the organization is a first using a filter costing around 40 USD. Each household is contributing around 25% of the cost to establish the means to purchase more and revolve this benefit on to other households given that diarrhea always accounts for around 30% of Teeru's morbidity and therefore a major factor in malnutrition.

2. Malnutrition

The other major concern is malnutrition which relates to the 3rd part of the pastoralist disaster, that of animal disease and animal loss. Milk/ sufficient milk has not been in thousands of households since late December. APDA has conducted/ participated in malnutrition surveys in Eli Daar, Teeru, Erebt and Kutubla, Assaita woreda in the past month. The results are by and large alarming with Teeru and Erebt having a severe acute malnutrition (SAM) rate in under 5 year olds of 2.1% and 3% respectively and general acute malnutrition rate (inclusive of moderate malnutrition) of 17.9% and 24.5% respectively. In Eli Daar, the surveillance was patchy bringing inaccuracy to the result but the northern 7 kebeles are strikingly worrying with malnutrition found in almost every house. While APDA waits to find support to help people in remote areas, the organization has sent lentils to health workers and women extension workers to try and abate the problem. Most recently – reported morbidity among these highly vulnerable people includes high level of pneumonia; pockets of whooping cough; mumps and

3. Animal diseases

With minimal to no pasture and the stress of migration, animals have progressively deteriorated throughout the region. In fact, in the recently-held APDA quarterly review and planning meeting, animal diseases drastically affecting the community were reported in almost all 19 of the organization implementing districts. Infectious chest diseases are the most worrying (PPR; camel pox; black leg; pasteuriosis to name a few). APDA has paravets working almost constantly in Awra and Dagaba to try and clear outbreaks that have occurred where herds have congregated on remaining pasture and water points. As part of this work, APDA has established community working groups that are establishing action plans to prevent/ control loss of the herd through what is known as the community disaster risk reduction process. Interestingly, communities that have so far submitted action plans want to portion off part of the herd from the relatively better – off herdsmen to sell to purchase more animal medications to establish revolving supply of veterinary medications and equipment to sustain veterinary care in the community. They realize this is one of the greatest gaps in securing their livelihood. From APDA's side, more medications are needed as the diseases are so widespread.

4. Current urgent needs in summary

- a) Water trucking support into May if the rain does not fall – quite unlikely that it will fall as the target areas are notoriously subject to failed rains
- b) Support to treat and survey malnutrition in communities not reached by the government or other NGOs on an ongoing way until the danger period is over
- c) Animal treatment medications and support as well as district – level transport to distribute government – supplied alfalfa hay for drought – weakened animals.
- d) Support to vaccinate in Teeru, Afdeera and Kutubla – APDA has not had resources to reach these remote and highly affected communities for over 2 years.

5. Planning with partners for sustainability

The process to establish a working group of APDA partner organizations bringing resources together to change the direction of perpetual and immanent disaster to recovery and sustainability is moving ahead. A third meeting is planned to be held in Samara, Afar Region involving the partners and also

government and community representatives of the three target districts of Bidu, Eli Daar and Kori. The aim of this meeting is to engage the partners with people from these 3 most drought – affected districts in the Region and then to draw up an action plan towards sustainability from the types of shocks discussed above. The working group is still open to widening membership and would welcome any interested person as the process will involve floating many new ideas and strategies to actually accomplish change.

6. Household recovery

APDA has now completed restocking 100 absolutely destitute and malnourished households in northern Eli Daar with 10 breeding goats each. The community from Akkule who have been displaced in Manda for 4 years is receiving 14 camels so that between them, they can return to their homeland with their new herd.

Similarly, restocking is being carried out in 100 of the worst households in Erebti. Re-stocked animals are supported with hay, trucked water and veterinary service during the process and the community then take over keeping them alive. This decreases the number of desperately needy households. Again, income generation providing alternative livelihood is being supported among an initial 120 households in association with the construction of a water spreading weir in Erebti that drought-destitute households will get water access; improved pasture growth and the ability to undertake small-scale food crop production. With this effort as well as the previous microfinance project in Erebti that is progressively growing, there is hope that in a year/ 2 years a substantial number of the destitute households in this district will have improved grazing / alternative income taking them out of the needy bracket.

In Sifra and Uwwa where APDA completed water spreading weirs in late 2017 and 2018 respectively, the first rain has fallen so seed planting of various vegetable crops is underway. The tree nursery in Der Geera, Sifra has survived the drought with help from water trucking and well as the determined effort of the community in carrying water some distance for the fruit trees.

7. The place of education in pastoralist society

One of the fiercest battles APDA fights in the community is probably the basic battle of development – the place education should have and is given in the pastoralist life. The urban – accepted routine of sending children to school and seeking out learning yourself to get employment has yet hardly caught on in the pastoralist community with priorities around taking animals out for grazing, collecting firewood and water for daily substance. Too often, the student finds it acceptable to take a few days off from learning to go with the camels. Hence the task is constant for women extension workers, health workers as well as teachers to drive the sense of education into the community thinking. Even in offering students hostel learning, they are inclined to drop out under community/ family pressure, particularly girls who can no longer withstand the family pressure to marry. APDA is learning to use the culture of champions within the community to establish an exemplary culture to follow.

8. Taking on stronger and more integrated strategies to overcome cultures undermining female wellbeing

Realizing strength in variety of stakeholders, APDA has recently brought traditional birth attendants, women extension workers and selected youth together with their religious leaders that they hammer out together the whys and wherefores of practices that take away from female reproductive and social health such as FGM, early and forced marriage. Having grouped them in each site, they are then able to go out into their own community and detect who is performing these cultures, who is complying and why. Have put the onus onto the actual community, then with good reasoning and leadership, they will stop the practices realizing too that they are outlawed under the Ethiopian Federal law.