

# AFAR PASTORALIST DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION QAFAR DACARSITTOH DADALIH EGLA

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## The Hope of Ongoing Livelihood Recovery

November 5<sup>th</sup> 2018

### 1. From the annual main rains towards the dry season: the status in the communities

The main rains of July to September eventually brought average to good rains for most districts in Afar Region with the exception of a few pockets such as Daboore in northern Afdeera where the pasture has not rejuvenated and parts of the northern Eli Daar/ Bidu border with Eritrea where the season onset was very late and again, rain insufficient to affect pasture re-growth. In fact, throughout the central/northern districts of Afar, the landscape 6 weeks on from the close of the rains is striped: the grazing shrubs are green at intervals while the land between is already turning dusky dry. Where the acacias did green up well, they are flowering to produce the all too valuable goat – food seed pods.

Overall, drinking water is within closer distance to pastoralists' nomadic settlements and will probably remain so up until early December. From then on, the pastoralist women will have to walk 2 hours up to 12 and even 16 hours to collect water from distant collection points. Along with grazing, the pastoralists have a detailed plan of how to utilize water sources in the most effective and safe way, given the resources they have. Grazing will more likely stay longer lasting up until late January/ February before the animals must be moved to stay alive. Mid-way in the winter months of December/ January a very short but needed rainy season as is known of but these days, hardly expected as repeatedly, with the onset of the effects of climate change, it is fails – the season of 'dadda'a'.

#### - **Water access:**

The pleasing thing for APDA and its partners is that all the cisterns, dams and now water spreading weirs that have been constructed and rehabilitated over the years are full of water being used by the community in the measure of their pastoralist planning.



Photos of the newly constructed water-spreading weir in Bahri, Erebti in October 2018. This is the first rainfall the weir has caught. With the pasture improvement, there is accompanying market/ income generation activities.

Getting clean water is the great challenge. The most recent outbreak of acute watery diarrhea (AWD) that caused so many casualties has brought this home all too graphically. **Water PUR** (water purifying chemical that drops down sedimentation) as taught to the community and distributed is a temporary solution and, in fact, unsustainable since its not on the local market and a household needs a minimum of 2 sachets per day to purify 10 liters of drinking water. The organization is installing two water filtering plants (**Emergency Water Kits – emwat kits**) that filter and store up to 12,000 liters per day in 2 of the most AWD affected communities in Kutubla, Assaita and Afambo. The kits will last the up to 5 years but require fuel and oil for the pumps.

Then in Teeru where chronic diarrhea became the perpetual trigger for malnutrition, **Sawyer household level filters** are proving highly effective having lowered diarrhea by at least 50% in the 350 initial beneficiary households who have been filtering their water for the past 4 months. With this result in view, APDA is increasing the coverage of the filters. A filter will last again up to 5 years and costs around 47 USD per piece. An 80 - liter water –storage drum with an accessing tap at the bottom is also given to the household, households so far contributing up to 250.00 ETB to help roll on this benefit to other communities.

#### - **Malnutrition:**

Dry season household food shortage was relieved when milk production recommenced in the pastoralist households. However, the region is left with areas of serious concern. Probably the most worrying of these is the border districts with Eritrea where for over 20 years, access was prohibited by the then unresolved Eritrean – Ethiopian war. Borders open as of August 2018 provides a continual display the misery these people struggled under. Neglected from any form of contact, these communities in northern Eli Daar and in Bidu remain without road access, very distant from the closest market. APDA's visit to these areas in October showed substantial numbers of poorly nourished children and mothers. While a rapid assessment is being done, it remains to reach them with full nutrition surveillance and treatment of those identified as affected. Again, communities in Teeru and northern Afdeera are seriously affected needing house to house surveillance in their remote settings. The chronic malnutrition that is eroding the communities in Gala'alu and Gawwaani in Zone 3 has not gone away with the rain. Their issues are multiple including the lack of grazing land due to the invading shrub, *prosopis juliafora*. Finally, those communities that suffered AWD so severely are now extensively malnourished as the organization's surveillance reports show in Kutubla, Assaita and Afambo. APDA is looking for support to reach these areas. The cold of the winter will only complicate a malnourished child with pneumonia and in many of these communities, poor to no vaccination coverage is an additional concern.

#### - **Strengthening communities to build their own responses:**

As is clear, community development is highly challenged by the external effects of climate change and all the devastation that this incurs; the growing invasion of the weed-shrub, *prosopis juliafora* and poor market access and infrastructure. This all adds up to a declining livelihood and increased vulnerability to shocks that inevitably involve herd loss. Realizing this, APDA is increasingly using the strategy of community disaster risk reduction to allow those affected and targeted to jointly get a handle on the causes of their respective shock/ chronic decline. Once they have grasped how this happened over

time, then to establish how to reverse this and establish the recovery they need using their own potentiality: human power; traditional knowledge and joined experience; time backed by the resources they can afford to muster. Again and again, this is proving to stop those in decline from slipping further and giving new life to the ancient Afar culture of assisting one another through hardship. In Awra, for example, communities assisted through animal disease outbreak have established the means whereby the animal treatment scouts they have will go on serving them and the herdsmen paying cost – price for the medicines. Another community in thirsty Kori has begun a system where each and every household constructs a water storing cistern (albeit very small and of rudimentary material). Now the same principles of disaster risk reduction are about to be used to stop children dropping out of school when local grazing and water dries up. This system too is making communities contributive to project – effort to bring destitute households out of poverty through microfinance. Communities are providing support for these households to reach the market and to access goods and services.

Indeed, the principles of community contribution are all the more vital when the situation is desperate that human dignity is preserved and the way to recovery is already the ray of light beneficiaries gravitate to. For this very reason, in mid-November APDA will sit with the clan leadership of Kutubla and Harissa, 2 communities that lost over 150 people dead with AWD in July, to undertake an identifying, planning session on the future development of their communities. Aside from how to secure clean drinking water and how such isolated communities can secure their livelihood, the focus will be both education and that of the female role in development, the 2 most critically difficult issues for the community to grasp. APDA's presence in the conference is that it has been the sole partner to these communities in finding development and its role is to see how the community can take the lead into the future. The community is the host, APDA the guest.

## **2. Joint - partner sustainability plan advancing**

Having met on October 17<sup>th</sup>, the group of now 5 NGOs supporting APDA to find the way forward to a strategy that centers on community recovery and resilient sustainability discussed the proposed strategy map to do this. While much of the top-level objectives were agreed on, the major task remains to find the right indicators to measure progress as well as to set milestones in the coming 5 years for each of the objectives. It is planned to undertake the activity of forming the indicators on November 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> in Addis Ababa. Again, anyone/ any organization who would like to involve is most welcome.

## **3. Back to school for another academic year**

Realizing the critical status of education in Afar Region, the effort to find how pastoralist children can learn in their language giving them a sound base for taking learning on into the government system of higher education is now ever more poignant. APDA's strategy to have hostels that children from isolated areas can feed into once they have completed alternative basic education (ABE) in remote rural communities is being dynamically pursued with the 6 communities that the organization has so far benefited. While there are signs that the pastoralist community is now realizing the place and function of education in their drive to find development, they are not utterly convinced this is as essential as preserving the life of their herd. The organization has had to work hard to police the tendency to take out one child and put in another child wanting to 'share' the benefit and also fearful that the child who continues on through education to grade 12 might lose his/ her contact and base in the society. This is all the more telling in the case of the girl-child. While girl-students from Kori were doing brilliantly, their clan leadership withdrew them from learning at the completion of school year in 2017 mostly to get them married. Having discussed with the families and then bringing that discussion to the clan leadership, the organization managed to get written agreement that school completion will be supported for each girl. For most, this is now possible in Kori since school teaching in the district has reached grade 7 in 2018. APDA is just taking the girls who have reached grade 8. Of these girls, 2 of the 4 had actually married and had their first child. The utter determination of these two new mothers is now shining through as one has arrived with baby to learn and the other has arranged to enter in the second semester – one is determined to be a water engineer and the other wants to study medicine. Again, not wanting to allow any community to neglect the support of their girls, APDA has succeeded at

getting the first 6 girls from the Geega community having established the fact that the organization could no longer support development in Geega if females were going to be narrowed out of the opportunity to manage the development at the highest position through their professional qualification.

#### **4. Part of the Africa – wide campaign to end female genital mutilation (FGM)**

Recently APDA was part of the Ethiopian delegation that joined 29 other nations in discussions led by African Union (AU) and UNICEF/ UNPFA. AU has announced their continent – wide campaign to end FGM by 2030. APDA presented its experience in tackling FGM among the Afar, considered among the most deeply-rooted nationalities in Africa. While the campaign has stunning hopes, in the reality of the Afar, legislation does not reach such communities. This then leaves the organization to greatly heat up the rhetoric with the clan leaders to themselves declare any cutting illegal and police and punish it through the clan system.

APDA is particularly pleased with the work adolescent girls are doing to back each other in refusing unwanted marriage and to uncover where and who is practicing FGM. Very recently, 3 young girls were protected by their peers from the fate of forced, unwanted marriage. Breaking barriers like this is sending a ripple of news through the communities adding to the effort to end harmful practices.

#### **5. Working on to improve obstetrics and gynecological services to Afar women**

APDA's Barbara May Foundation Hospital in Mille is busy learning new skills and working toward a more inclusive treatment for women and girls whose needs are otherwise isolated to themselves and neglected in health care service. Again, 7 fistula patients have just been repaired as well as the ongoing work to repair prolapsed uterus and treat the issues surrounding FGM. The service to detect and immediately treat cases suspicious of cervical cancer is underway. With the help of voluntary medical staff as well as teaching connections, staff education is also improving.

Again, the organization has been offered the opportunity to establish a much wider solar electricity back-up in the hospital – there are currently 2 panels in place – as well as establish a mini-blood bank and to realize some of the other facilitating dreams of the premises that will improve overall services. The next step is to construct skills laboratories on site that both the hospital midwives and any in the Region can come voluntarily to improve their skills in emergency obstetrics and more.