

AFAR PASTORALIST DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION QAFAR DACARSITTOH DADALIH EGLA

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The annual rains, both devastation and restoration... September 10th 2019

1. The rain and its effects

Unlike the Ethiopian highlands where the rainy season began as early as late May, the annual main rainy season of *karma* began in Afar Region during the 1st week of August and appears to be petering out right now having produced an average rainfall for the better part of the Afar Region with the exception of the northern Eritrean border districts – see below. While having filled all dams and cisterns bringing immediate relief to communities that were walking to collect water from up to 12 hours distance, violent storms reeked havoc to herds and buildings with high winds, lightening strikes and hail storms. Upwards of 15,000 animals (mostly goats) died in dramatic hailstorms in Digdiga, Teeru and in central Erebti. In Digdiga, a vast grazing plain, herds had gathered from Teeru's central areas of Iwiidi, Barantu and Yewe Dullul where *prosopis juliafora*, a weed – shrub has almost totally blotted out grazing areas as well as there being local herds. 413 households lost a total of 10,000 goats to hail along with household property such as food sacks and housing due to a flash flood – carcasses littered the land. In more urban areas, the situation in mid-August was equally as dramatic as 1,135 homes in Dubte town were severely damaged and a further 840 in the surrounding rural areas as the Geega River burst its banks. High winds destroyed homes of 124 refugees in Assaita refugee camp along with household latrines. Further south on the Middle Awash, homes were swept away in Gala'alu, Awash and Dullassa as commercial farming channels broke.

2. Where it did not rain

As is now seasonally predictable, rain was highly reduced in the most northern districts that border to Eritrea. The areas of Harsuuma and Daboore in Afdeera did receive rain in a below average amount but the adjoining Bidu and northern Eli Daar have received around one to 2 storms and in places, none. The earthen dam APDA managed to construct in Alaab, Bidu in 2018, has some water but rainwater and river-shed did not fill it to capacity. Communities in these areas in particular are left highly vulnerable and indeed, the malnutrition they have endured since late 2017 will not entirely find solution in this rain. APDA health teams have been working in Alaab and into Mogores where they are reporting extreme food shortage as well as high malnutrition rates. Households in need are still trickling in from Eritrea where apparently there is no humanitarian program. In fact, the Bidu district government has repeatedly declared that they are overwhelmed with those needing food support as well as those actually malnourished.

It must be said that Ethiopia's now extremely high inflation and market instability only generates food insecurity adding to the consequence of malnutrition.

3. Current efforts to lower vulnerability

Starting early in the year, APDA has been treating and working with animal disease outbreaks. This has had a very positive effect of lessening actual outbreaks and slowing down the rate of household destitution since households with few remaining animals were deliberately targeted in animal treatment campaigns. Since April alone, 106,000 animals have been treated from various districts of the Region. The most prevalent disease processes found are both internal and external parasites, pasteurolosis, tryptomoniasis, foot and mouth disease. Nearly invariably the animals were found compromised by poor nutrition from absolute dry-grazing. As far as possible, in the dry months before the rain, APDA transported alfalfa hay grown and supplied by the Regional Government to the most emaciated herds.

Organization health teams have been working to combat malnutrition through nutrition surveillance and immediate treatment of identified severe cases in 4 kebeles of Afambo and adjoining Kutubla in Assaita district, Alaab in Bidu, 5 kebeles in northern Afdeera and Teeru. In the latter 2 as well as Kutubla, vaccination campaigns using 10 antigens have reached out to the remotest communities.

Due to the critical situation of food insecurity and identified malnutrition, APDA is currently supporting 1,000 pregnant and lactating mothers in Bidu with supplementary food for 3 months aiming to contribute to preventing acute malnutrition and stunting in the children these mothers bare. The actual need for this support is estimated at fourfold that which APDA can afford.

4. Community efforts to cope with the shocks and the threats they face

As previously explained, APDA works to incorporate community understanding in disaster risk reduction (DRR) as widely as possible: through the organization literacy program; in training courses of community development workers (health workers, women extension workers and teachers); in decision – making for water source and rangeland management. The DRR principle puts the onus on the community to comprehend the problem and find the solution within their capacity. This is now bearing fruit in the community with various groups showing high innovation towards overcoming some of their most entrenched challenges. Daaba in Kori has endured extreme decline in livelihood security due persistent drought and its own remoteness. A previous organization teacher now leads a community rehabilitation plan whereby he has taught as many as 450 households to construct and maintain their own rainwater collecting cistern using locally acquired materials, not cement – he had obtained some training in construction and then devised his own means. Now he has added to this plan that each household have a small plot of fodder grass to feed the herd in the dry season. APDA gave him the initial grass – seeds and he has since harvested sufficient to share with his community. He is also part of a Kori marketing cooperative that tries to bring controlled – price essential household goods into the community rather than them depending on the distant Dubte and Logya markets. This effort now has the formidable challenge of high market inflation in the context of a totally uncontrolled market.

5. What is currently needed to lower community vulnerability

- a) Under the above – mentioned conditions, cholera outbreak remains a real threat. APDA needs adequate supplies of soap and water purification chemicals such as water PUR. Even better, getting more and more households with water filters is ideal. Current experience is with Sawyer filters that are capable of lasting up to 15 years and one filter can be used for up to 4 households costing 1,300 ETB per filter.
- b) Supplementary food for pregnant and lactating mothers in border areas of Bidu and Eli Daar is needed as these communities are not going to resume adequate milk consumption
- c) Constructing and rehabilitating rainwater collecting cisterns and dams lowering the need for migration
- d) Grass -seed that is indigenous that households can develop their own fodder plots
- e) The development of sustainable veterinary services that animals are not burdened with diseases such as internal and external parasites
- f) Livelihood rehabilitation of communities such as those who have just lost herds in Teeru: both

re-stocking and alternative income generation through petty trade.

On the development side:

Preparing for a new school year:

As a new Ethiopian Year (2012) will dawn by September 11th, APDA prepares to bring back the students it is supporting to complete their school years aiming that they go on to professional learning and training. Of the 199 students currently at hand, the organization has assured funding to support 150 of them in their daily living. Not wanting to disrupt the learning opportunity of any child, APDA is seeking support for the remaining 49 students. The organization is both searching group sponsorship for them as well as individual sponsorship. With food inflation considered, it will cost 11 USD per week per child to feed, clothe and equip the child for learning. This support is needed for 10 months of the year, a total of 473.68 USD for one child. Please urgently contact the organization if you can contribute.

The organization has recently succeeded in gaining an agreement with the Regional Teachers College in Assaita to train alternative basic education facilitators from 21 of the program's 54 sites. This is indeed a breakthrough to attaining better quality of training as well as aligning these facilitators with the government system in terms of teaching methodology in the remote pastoralist setting.

Giving pastoralist youth a voice and responsibility in determining their future:

APDA sees youth as highly potential in securing community change needed for safe reproductive health as well as in engaging females in the community to their full capacity. Therefore along with women extension workers (trained women from the community who are raising awareness toward change and facilitating a breakthrough wherein women can participate) the organization is now partnering them with voluntary youth (male and female) in the effort to fully express the need for change. These people are beginning to engage with the traditional custodians of the community, the clan leadership. Again, in schools, APDA is using the strategy of youth leading discussion; writing booklets about their desires for change and competing to see who has the most dynamic change material. The issues these people address including the stopping of FGM, early and forced/ obligated marriage, household daily job – sharing that females can participate in learning, freedom from gender-based violence.

Previously – constructed ponds and watershed management schemes

As is seen now with the current rains, these areas are becoming spectacular oasis in the landscape having generated the regrowth of both ingenious shrubs and grasses. This is seen in watershed management schemes in Gaali Koma, Guulina; Namma Ara, Teeru; Maska, Eli Daar; Bahri, Erebti; 'Aadu, Magaale and so on. The essence of getting these sites to be sustainable is the DRR training mentioned above; the insistence of community management to protect rejuvenating areas and the ongoing work of the community to protect surrounding landscape from erosion. With ponds, a similar situation emerges as the over-flow of the pond is sufficient to create soil moisture to rejuvenate dormant vegetation.

Plan to hold an Afar Development Conference

People in the Afar Diaspora and in the Region think it now high – time a conference was held between the Afar communities of Afar Region, Djibouti, Eritrea and the Afar Diaspora with the Regional Government. It is thought with all the plans needed, January will be the earliest this can be arranged. APDA will facilitate but needs the support of the Diaspora to hold such an event. The aim would be to take the opportunity of the new ideals in the government to forge a joint blue-print towards development between the Afar civil society and its government realizing the thorny challenges that exist in the society and the region. Again, the meeting would hold a final Declaration Day inviting all agencies and NGOs working in the Region to hear what has been agreed to that they can see where they can be part of the plan. The last such conference was held in 2010 then being the 3rd such conference.