

# AFAR PASTORALIST DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION QAFAR DACARSITTOH DADALIH EGLA

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## LOOMING DROUGHT CRISIS IN VULNERABLE DISTRICTS, EFFORTS TO COMBAT IT AND DEVELOPMENT NEWS

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### 1. Declared drought areas

Overall, the short rains of March – April have been far below average leaving most of the most vulnerable drought – prone districts totally dry. The total rain amounted to very localized and erratic storms on March 15<sup>th</sup> and then again on April 30<sup>th</sup>/ May 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>. The Regional Government is currently appealing for assistance for water trucking to thirsty communities. The herd has begun to die as the pasture is dangerously dry and malnutrition is on the increase as a result. A regional plan of action has been drawn up involving supplementary animal feed and veterinary care; surveillance and response to malnutrition and water transporting. The main districts requiring this assistance involve Eli Daar in the north east; the adjoining districts of Kori and Biru; parts of northern Dubte directly south of these districts including eastern Awra and Uwwa; Erebti and Afdeera north of Kori and Biru and Magaale on the western border. In the far south west border, Sema Robi is strongly affected by animal loss and the districts directly north of this are affected as far north as Dawwe. Districts in the north and the northwest are the most concerning since they are all in the now notorious drought – belt of the region.

### 1.1 Rain distribution

Rain distribution has been highly irregular due to the extreme localization of storms. However, there are some woredas/ districts where pasture has been adequately watered such as a strip on the western boundary of the region beginning from Talalak including western 'Adda'ar almost 60% of Sifra, western Uwwa, Awra, Goolina and Yallo. Rain has also fallen in Konnaba, parts of Dallol and Barahale in the northern Zone 2 of the region. Rivers coming of the Amhara and Tigray highlands brought well below average water into the region leaving Teeru in central Afar Region with muddy pools of water and no rain. Rain around Assaita, Afambo, Mille and southern Dubte as well as Zone 3 was scanty and poorly distributed. Again, temperatures away from the western border are well in the 40's so pasture rejuvenation from this rain is poor.

### 1.2 The menace of thirst

Thirst this year was first evident in February and APDA has transported water since then to affected communities in Kori, Biru and Eli Daar using a donated second-hand water truck and woreda – owned vehicles. Women of Kori, for example are walking up to 24 hours making a round trip with camels to collect water from Malkaay as this was the last remaining water source after the dam in Bargaale dried out. Tragically, a woman died of thirst in Bargaale just 10 days ago. Individually donated money has greatly assisted to pay the vehicle fuel to move trucks out after a short project fund completed.

The regional government has calculated the need to hire 45 trucks to keep communities in Eli Daar, Kori, Biru, Erebti, Teeru, Magaale, Dallol and Sema Robit in the south with water. APDA is working hard to repair damaged water sources as well as to construct new sources. See below.

### 1.3 Pasture deterioration leading to herd loss and malnutrition

Herds from the worst-hit districts have now migrated: from Kori, Biru and parts of Eli Daar, the herd is using what remains of grazing land near the Awash in Assaita and Afambo; herds from the central grazing districts of Geega and parts of Mille are in western Sifra, 'Adda'ar and Talalak. Similarly, herds have centered on grazing pasture in Goolina and the western border from Teeru and northern Awra. Much of the Zone 5 herd is now in border areas of Amhara Region. In the case where the herd was too weak to make the distant migration, these herds have begun to die in their homelands. While there is no specific animal

disease outbreak, diseases range from pasteuriosis; respiratory infection, internal and external parasites – all diseases exacerbated by pasture stress. In Kori and parts of Eli Daar camels are dying.

In the month of April, the number of severe acute malnourished treated was 1,587, an increase of 361 cases from the previous month. Again the number assessed as acutely malnourished requiring treatment in May is 169 above those treated in April. 253 new cases were found in Teeru and 206 new cases in northern Dubte and Central Eli Daar. Treatment continues in northern Eli Daar, in the Assaita refugee camp, Erebti, Magaale and in the previously flood – affected communities of Kutubla in Assaita Woreda and Buurimudayto and Gawwaani in Zone 3. APDA does this treatment by sending out teams of health workers who conduct nutrition and disease surveillance each time while treating those identified with severe acute malnutrition using UNICEF – supplied RUFT through the Bureau of Health. Each case requires a 15 – day supply of RUFT that is replenished each 15 days by the health worker team going house to house. This activity includes awareness – raising to promote disease transmission prevention particularly that of diarrhea among such vulnerable people.

According to the regional DPP &FSB, currently 472,229 people are benefiting from direct food assistance through the Productive Safety Net Program and 132,995 persons are receiving emergency food relief.

#### 1.4 Activities increasing water supply and access

With the joint objective of increasing water supply preventing thirst and improving livelihood as well as specifically lowering vulnerability to the killer disease, acute watery diarrhea (AWD) through improved sanitation and hygiene, APDA has recently completed one project adding 27 new water sources in thirsty districts and is implementing 2 projects rehabilitating a total of 49 damaged water sources and constructing a further 14 new sites in drought and acute watery diarrhea – prone areas as follows:

District/ woreda	Reason for selection	Construction	
		Rehabilitation	New
Assaita	AWD – prone	1 borehole	1 hand dug well
Afambo	Flood affected/ AWD - prone		3 hand dug wells
Mille	Flood affected/ AWD - prone	5 cisterns, 2 boreholes, 2 shallow wells	1 hand dug well
'Adda'ar	AWD – prone	5 cisterns, 1 borehole	
Sifra	AWD – prone	2 shallow wells	
Kori	Severely drought affected	8 cisterns	3 cisterns, 1 hand dug well <sup>1</sup>
Geega/ Dubte	Severely drought affected		1 hand dug well, 3 cisterns, 3 ponds
Dagaba/ Dubte	Severely drought affected		2 ponds, 2 cisterns, 1 hand dug well
Mabay/ Teeru	Severely drought affected		1 hand dug well
Awra	Severely drought affected	1 hand dug well	2 hand dug wells 2 cisterns, 3 ponds
Gawwaani	AWD – prone	6 hand dug wells	3 hand dug wells
Buurimudayto	AWD – prone	1 hand dug well	6 hand dug wells
Ami Bara	AWD – prone	4 hand dug wells	1 hand dug well
Awash/ Fantale	AWD – prone	12 hand dug wells	4 hand dug wells

The great excitement is to get water in a new well that is fit to drink (water quality testing is being done on site and the sites changed if obtained water is salty). These projects are providing the first – ever covered wells in Geega, Dagaba, northern Awra, Kori and Mabay. After the planned rehabilitation is completed, there will be a further 3 sites in 'Adda'ar and 2 in Mille that require assistance currently unplanned for.

Water shed management scheme in Finto, north eastern Awra is now complete, the community having constructed 5 check – dams on the rehabilitated gully and having terraced the surrounding hills. This area has not received rain but will begin the process of 'greening up' once rain does fall and water is collected in check dams to eventually establish a permanent dam that will be able to irrigate the surrounding land and

<sup>1</sup> This is to be placed over a sub-surface dam completed in 2010. Kori water table is extra-ordinary deep and to date they do not have one single covered well constructed

hand pumps will be put in to get potable surface water. A further such scheme is beginning construction in southern Uwwa.

### **1.5 Working for sanitation and hygiene**

Again, with the project mentioned above, APDA is constructing 5 exemplary latrines in the central and northern districts in schools that will be managed by a committee and connected to a water supply and 4 in the Middle Awash in investor farms to encourage investors to construct latrines for their daily workers. Accompanying this, there is a very strong awareness – raising campaign on the 5 essential messages to prevent as well as respond to AWD in all above districts as well as districts affected by malnutrition. Close to 70,000 in total were given awareness through health workers going house to house as well as the organization music band and drama group touring districts singing songs and showing dramas on sanitation and hygiene in the past 3 months. Soap distribution and water chemical distribution has been part of the activity.

Aside from that, APDA is repairing 43 bio-sand filters that were initially constructed by the organization in Buurimudayto and building new water filters in Ami Bara.

### **1.6 Current needs and plans**

APDA is closely discussing with the government to see if there is need for further water tankering. APDA is very anxious to provide supplementary animal feed in 2,500 households identified that are very close to destitution. This builds on past experience of 4 previous drought responses where such animal feed not only saved the last remaining goats but increased milk to the household remarkably. This must be accompanied by animal treatment. Again APDA wants to increase food security among the worst affected through cash for work in constructing more water cisterns and feeder-roads.

## **2. Development news: small strides for a productive future**

### **2.1 Afar language to become the internal working language of the Region**

After much effort and the timely discussion in the December-held Afar Development Conference, the Afar government has now mapped out a plan of 3 months wherein Afar language will become the administrative language firstly at the woreda level and then within the regional bureaus. For this purpose, APDA is informed by the Afar Language studies and Enrichment Center (ALSEC) that there are 14 established schools for learning communication Afar in the town of Samara alone as well as in each woreda.

### **2.2 Afar Language Center**

The language center linking the Samara University Students Association, the Afar Language Studies and Enrichment Center and APDA as mentioned in the past update remains in earnest need of voluntary English teachers both for the university students in Samara and for those in the Logya town community who want to learn English including many of APDA's own staff. Afar literacy teaching is ongoing and attracting remarkable numbers since the government decided to change the local administration communication language from Amharic to Afar. Even a group of 63 Afar women are learning in Logya.

### **2.4 Formalizing strengths based approach within the organization methodology**

Responding to HIV transmission through youth and the organization the Regional Government has a particular campaign to increase coverage in voluntary testing and counseling through the regional HAPCO (HIV & AIDS Prevention and Control Organization) in collaboration with APDA using mobile testing teams. APDA was duly delegated to facilitate testing in Logya, the largest town (population of around 40,000) aiming to gain 10,000 tested. In the first round, some 2,000 people were tested of whom 8 were found affected. Again, APDA – formed youth groups in Goolina, Assaita, Sifra and 'Adda'ar assisted with testing campaign mobilizing the community along with government and other NGO representatives in the district. The youth report achieving in persuading people to stop chewing kaat, the inebriating amphetamine leaf that allows people to venture into unsafe sexual practice. A senior clan leader in 'Adda'ar is now the focus of conversation as he has almost succeeded in giving it up.

## **2.5 Working with youth**

APDA is expanding its collaborative work with local youth groups: two new youth groups along the line of the Sifra and 'Adda'ar youth groups whose objective it is to forge an exemplary way to prevent HIV transmission, preserve culture and language while being dis-associated with *kaat* chewing and the like have been formed. These 4 associations have deliberate links and are highly strategic in the western Afar market-belt where potentially harmful town practices are present – Sifra, 'Darsa Gita, Eli Waha, Yallo and Kalwaan weekly markets. The youth use the market days to raise awareness and influence other youth.

## **2.6 The emergency maternity hospital in Mille**

This 28 – bed unit is near completion. With the voluntary assistance of 2 British plumbers, this hospital will have 'state of the art' drainage and hospital function including a grey-water saving system and construction taking into consideration each and every possibility of preventing hospital infection. Through its overseas supporters, it has attracted the interest of hospitals and humanitarian institutions in the west as the aim is to establish the best possible sustainable unit in the hands of qualified Afar people. A voluntary obstetrician is on site in her double role as an engineer and plumber as well as a surgeon.

Plans in the community to strengthen TBA involvement along with health workers and women extension workers using district – level referral units/ waiting areas for mothers are underway. This plan includes strengthening community literacy, response to stop harmful practices affecting delivering mothers and to improve food security as well as deepening relation with trained and equipped traditional birth attendants.

Voluntary midwives are coming to lead training and to establish the hospital as exemplary along with the obstetrician. Medical equipment and instruments as well as a security generator are now in the port of Djibouti for the hospital. It is expected the hospital can receive the first patients in June although informally, the hospital is already assisting the closest community. The actual opening ceremony is expected to be in September. A memorable celebration is planned therefore anyone interested in participating is most welcome.

## **2.5 APDA's working relationship with the local government**

APDA's mandate in establishing health and education services in remote areas is to eventually hand it over to the respective woreda. This has been very successful in Afdeera, in part in 'Adda'ar and APDA is in process to hand-over teachers in Eli Da'ar, Mille and Assaita. A very recent woreda conference in Eli Da'ar has mapped out how this will happen.

In recent visits to woreda administrations where APDA-trained people are now working, it is apparent that these workers have breathed new life into their respective woredas of the love and the appreciation of the Afar language in education as well as the ability to go from house to house in remote areas in the woredas to work. In most woredas, it is ex-APDA teachers who are teaching the woreda administrations Afar literacy. The other aspect that is very pleasing is the team-work between the APDA field workers and the government field workers: sharing transport, joint monitoring and planning, assisting each other to see that there is an Afar teacher in a particular remote area and generally supporting one another. What is clear is that where APDA established Afar education under a tree, the government has come along and constructed a school. There are 3 such sites in Sifra and 4 in 'Adda'ar as well as in other woredas. In discussing APDA's ongoing relation with the woredas, the officials stressed the need for APDA to include their workers in APDA training courses, particularly for those workers who were taken over by the local government from APDA. Woreda officials stressed that APDA's trade-mark of the utilization of Afar language and culture and ability to mobilize the people is not found with other NGOs and therefore they are very keen to retain a relationship with the organization.

## **2.6 New support organization for Eritrean refugees**

A new organization named the Red Sea Afar Relief Association has just gained government registration and is ready to assist the ever - increasing number of refugees coming in from Eritrea. APDA is willing to offer support services to the new organization until they establish a strong management. The immediate needs to address include refugee nutrition support, water support, refugee education and assistance that refugees gain a household income to integrate into the host community. It should be remembered that refugees are living among some of the most drought – affected communities in northern Eli Daar, Erebt and Afdeera.