

# AFAR PASTORALIST DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION QAFAR DACARSITTOH DADALIH EGLA

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## Update on the Critical Situation in Afar Region and Program Development Activities

May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2009

### **In summary:**

The rain that was reported as having begun on March 27<sup>th</sup> fell for 1 to 2 days and that was IT for the short rains of 'Suggum'! As of April, temperatures soared into the early 50's by midday in Logya (centre of the region) and there were a few short sharp, extremely localized storms in mid May. These storms are of little use as the land is so hot and rain so limited.

The most seriously drought – affected districts continue to be northern Eli Daar, Erebti, Kori and Biru, northern Afdeera, northern Awra, parts of Geega and Dagaba in northern Dubte. Also parts of Mille and northern Gawwaani are extra-ordinarily dry.

### **a) The status of pasture and the animal herd**

Currently, the pastoralist community is again highly dispersed since pasture in many grazing areas is dry and the herd endangered. Many of the large breeding camel herds are on last of the grazing that appeared on the 'Kurub Baha' the sandy desert between Dubte and Assayita. There is goat forage in limited areas and most animals are in fair to moderate body shape. However, grazing in Teeru is now limited to Barantu and Ibiidi with vast herds using the land from Magaale, Erebti, parts of Goolina and Yallo. Again, there are Goolina and Awra cattle grazing in Awsa, Assayita Woreda in the far east of the region having journeyed some 250 kilometers.

FAO and the government are producing molasses – based animal feeding blocks that are now available in the Assayita area as well as in the western woredas of Sifra, Uwwa and Awra through production in Sifra. Also a community – operated plant is making the blocks in Awash.

### **b) The fear of AWD looms again!**

As of early May, acute watery diarrhea (AWD – the fast killing diarrhea and vomiting disease) began in Buramudayto in Zone 3, quickly spreading to neighboring Gawwaani. Daily farm laborers from the Walayta in Southern Ethiopia appeared to bring the disease with them as well as spreading it in the community. The worst affected are 4 kebeles in Gawwaani where large farm-laborers camps are on cotton plantations (Galayla Dora, Gabaya Bora, Yiggile and Urafiita. Over 400 have fallen victim of whom 70% are farm-laborers. There have been a total of 17 deaths of whom 5 were Afar children. This wake-up call sparks memories of the awful outbreak in the same area in 2007: the main mode of contamination is the water of the Awash River. It is a reminder that long-term prevention has not been established in terms of a clean water solution: the 10 or so shallow wells in Gawwaani produce salty water. Again, this is a stark reminder that Afar Region has a mere 7.5% sanitation coverage.

Bureau of Health has rallied stakeholders to fast action including the investors since the unsanitary living conditions of farm-laborers are a major cause of the outbreak. According to the investment bureau, there are 15,000 farm laborers in the two affected woredas and a further 20,000 non-Afar who have stayed on to make charcoal in the area!! The new APDA health workers in Buramudayto and Gawwaani are working with health extension workers under the government to raise awareness and treat cases as soon as they are affected. The fear of course is that the outbreak will come down – stream to Mille, Dubte and Assayita or otherwise spread by people commuting from the area to other towns along the roadway.

### **c) Disease outbreaks and malnutrition**

Chicken pox is now the epidemic of many districts having replaced measles. This is affecting all ages as well as children with a strong fever, chest and throat ailments. While whooping cough is still playing havoc in Teeru and other parts, measles is less. The Bureau of Health is currently organizing to launch a region-wide campaign to improve the measles vaccination coverage. APDA will assist in gaining coverage in remote areas.

Severe acute malnutrition is now reduced in most of the areas APDA has been assisting. Since screening is ongoing in the organization, other cases have however been identified in small numbers in other areas such as in Geega, northern Dubte and a small number among the refugees in the Assayita camp. See below. Overall, APDA continues to treat around 550 cases of severe acute malnutrition in districts described above as in the drought – affected. However since grain prices are still high. Right now grain prices are slightly down due to the fact that the maize in Assayita is being harvested. Prices vary from 135 to 150.00 ETB per 50 kilograms. Prior to inflation, grain was 80.00 to 100.00 ETB per 50 kilograms. Other food commodities remain high.

### **d) Refugees and their needs**

People displaced from the Eritran border and refugees from Eritrea now live in various scattered camp and semi-camp locations: Barahale and Erebti in Zone 2 in the north; Su'ula, Eli Daar in the north east and Assayita in the central east. The Assayita 'open camp' is in the most baking hot, dust flat in the shadow of an ancient lava flow plateau that emanates burning heat all day. The 3,110 residents are living up to 5 families in one 'daboyta' – traditional Afar mobile house – UNHCR has supplies them with the palm mats and wooden frame to make the house and there is still need for more houses. In all, they have around 25 goats. UNHCR has supplied them with a very capable band of Afar youth to teach them both regular school classes and reading and writing. This they do in a corrugated shelter. There are constructed toilets and a regular water supply. The overriding sense is of 'nothing' is there: people who were herdsmen are now absolutely destitute and waiting in searing heat daily. APDA health workers have screened them and so far found 15 children with severe acute malnutrition and a variety of chronic and not so chronic sicknesses.

The crying need for these people is that they re-gain their sense of productive dignity: perhaps land in Assayita to farm; re-stocking with goats or other types of cottage production that could be marketed since the food ration is totally inadequate to keep them.

### **e) Drought recovery project now complete**

APDA has now completed the drought recovery projects at hand working to assist the most severely affected in Kori, Biru and Eli Daar Woredas. It remains to:

- a) Increase water access through building on the good experiences of dam construction; sub-surface dam construction and cisterns that have all stored the rain that fell in late March. The sub-surface dam has water in a totally notoriously dry area that is being accessed with a hand-pump.

- b) Provide supplementary animal feed to the most vulnerable households that are still suffering malnutrition until rains expected in late July/ August/ September preventing any further loss of already depleted herds
- c) Re-stock already identified destitute households. APDA managed to re-stock almost 450 households but there are a further 500 – odd households that need to be relieved of destitution to resume herding and getting milk in the house. This activity is vital since the international economic crisis affects Afar directly in their house. This then curtails/ prevents Afar from following their normal coping mechanism of assisting one another in the time of need. If increasing numbers of destitute pastoralists come to the towns, this is unsustainable as there are no jobs available and town living in itself has added expense.

## **News of the APDA development program**

### **1. Afar Language Development Conference: April 24<sup>th</sup> 2009**

Some 90 – odd Afar linguists and interested individuals representing Djibouti, Eritrea and Ethiopia gathered to participate in the 6<sup>th</sup> language development conference led by the Afar Language Development and Enrichment Center in the Bureau of Education, Afar Region and the UDC Djibouti. The conference assessed the past 2 years progress since the Upsalla Afar Language Development Conference. It was then agreed that all effort must be made to put Afar language into administration use. The Afar Language and Enrichment Center stated that all that is needed is prepared: an Afar to Afar dictionary and a new grammar book are ready to be launched. All administration formats are prepared in Afar. It remains for motivated effort and for regulation at all levels. The urgency of Afar language development was described in perspective to the entire development of the society. The issue that Afar literacy teaching remains vital was discussed as well as the need for all to fully utilize his/ her language rather than leaning back on expression in Amharic or another language as so commonly happens in towns and market areas.

### **2. Red Sea Afar Conference**

Some hundreds of Afar and human rights support visitors from Canada attended the 2-day Red Sea Afar People's Conference in Samara on May 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>. The meeting re-iterated the ongoing suffering of people caught between the militarized government of Eritrea and hunger. Several people spoke of their own experiences and there was a call for the International Community to recognize this silent suffering: the individual cases of extreme torture and inhuman imprisonment; the ongoing flow of refugees fleeing the situation; the untold destruction of the society as it is: all since the conflict that arose between Ethiopia and Eritrea in 1998/2000 remains unresolved. The Afar Regional Government pledged support to any active movement to alleviate these shocking conditions inflicted on people. There was an urgent call to UNHCR and other non-government bodies to assist in providing the basic needs of those entering Ethiopia. It is now estimated there are upwards of 40,000 refugee and border displaced people living under the most precarious conditions in the Afar Region.

### **3. Strategies to build quality into education**

APDA is currently working in a number of its education program woredas undertaking the following:

- A) Training of community development committees who have the overall responsibility to work with the community teacher and mobilize the community to education. In this exercise, APDA has been extra-ordinarily pleasantly surprised with the innovation these committees have developed and their overall sense of community development.
- B) Holding community conferences so that all local stakeholders can plan and decide together how pastoralist children can continue their education beyond the Level 3 provided through the APDA program. Again, the commitment to construct rural boarding schools and the like is most encouraging.

- C) Increasing the amount of literature available in Afar through writing more material and deliberately linking to the similar work of UDC in Djibouti
- D) With the Bureau of Education, formulating a curriculum for adult functional literacy suited to the pastoralists.
- E) Building the capacity of program teachers through long-distance learning.

#### **4. Launching a new environmental protection project**

APDA has launched a project aimed at forging the way to utilize Afar traditional knowledge and law as the basis of environmental protection and management. The project is in a pilot phase of collecting an information base to determine the extent of damage and on the other hand, the situation with traditional environmental laws and practices. Initially, the project will take on board communities and their traditional leadership in the adjoining woredas of 'Adda'ar, Sifra, Uwwa and Awra - all essential to the pastoralist society in having communal grazing land and on the wetter central western border of the region. Eventually, the project aims to empower local leaders to be the project actors in environmental information collection and analysis, using their traditional knowledge – base to teach and guide others how to make sustainable, environmentally friendly development rather than rashly working from the situation of the moment. Given the absolutely critical decline in forest and pasture coverage in the region as well as the inevitable persistence of drought, this project is essential to the proper balance of land protection and human development.

#### **5. A new strategy for APDA**

APDA is planning to revise and re-structure its program strategic plan in early July. This will be done in view of the fact the current plan is from 2005 to 2009 also that the international financial situation demands a closer look at how resources can be secured and finally, since Ethiopia is installing a new NGO policy, APDA needs to revisit its own place in pastoralist community development.

#### **6. Mille women's treatment center plans**

While there has been some short-fall in funding to complete the construction due to inflation doubling of construction material costs, the dream of actually having a center to respond to the terrible maternal mortality and morbidity confronting pastoralist families taking shape is a joy. The construction is as designed by a senior architect in Australia and takes into consideration the hot windy conditions of our region. The design includes capacity to provide training and recreation for patients as well as in service training for the center staff. It will be equipped with its own small operating/ delivery unit with space for up to 16 inpatient beds.

Within the community, discussion is opening up regarding the 'rights of women' to safe motherhood: previously, no pastoralist mother had access to antenatal or postnatal checking and care while in her nomadic community. That mothers need particular and extra food is known but increasingly hard to fulfill as meat is no longer readily available, milk/ milk products limited and market inflation crippling to the household. One of the more isolated communities of Afar, the Kutubla proudly reported that they had granted a young mother a divorce for the first time – she having found her marriage intolerable. Kutubla had the reputation of forcing girls/ women in marriage until they took risks to actually harm themselves.

#### **7. The ongoing 'face-lift' for [www.apdaethiopia.org](http://www.apdaethiopia.org)**

Slowly we hope our website is becoming more useful and usable. APDA is about to put information on community cooperatives and water harvesting on the site as well as an up to date profile.