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## **RAINS, Flooding and dynamic development meetings**

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### **The situation in summary:**

After having had the best short rains for the past 5 years from March to April this year, the region now looks set for a good main rainy season: rain began on July 10<sup>th</sup> and there were nightly storms for the first 7 days in much of the region. The season is expected to continue until September but already the amount of rain is above average and the temperature has fallen dramatically into the 30's – again, this is very unusual since in previous years, the heat did not abate until September. While there is now considerable relief in many districts, flooding has occurred in Mille due to the huge volume of water that came down from the Amhara Highlands on July 20<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> and there are many other woredas now endangered along the banks of the Awash River.

### **1. Rain distribution and pasture status**

The northern border districts close to Eritrea in Biru and northern Eli Daar continue to be dry with the occasional, poorly distributed storm. Kori district was very worrying with acute thirst reported as of late June but has since begun to receive the benefits of the season. The rain has not reached Erbti yet or the northern kebeles of Afdeera (Harsuma and Daabure). Otherwise the region is now experiencing the rainy season in varying extents. Also with lower temperatures, there is hope that pasture will rejuvenate well.

### **2. Malnutrition and human health**

By and large, severe acute malnutrition has resolved through herd recovery in the drought affected grazing areas. A few isolated cases of severe acute malnutrition remain in isolated pockets such as in Dara, Kori Woreda but APDA health workers are finding they no longer need to treat such cases in Dagaba, Geega and Teeru where milk is now available. The lingering cases are among the Eritrean refugees in the Assaita refugee camp as well as in the Su'ula/ Buure district where newly arriving refugees temporarily settle since these people have almost no herds. In all, there are currently 123 cases in Eli Da'ar and 108 in the refugee camp as well as over 600 highly vulnerable people with moderate malnutrition among them. Erebtu where drought induced herd loss has been so severe has over 100 severe acute malnutrition cases.

The region remains in high alert to avert an outbreak of acute watery diarrhea (AWD), this time of the year being the peak starting time. There are no other major outbreaks but with the rain and cooler weather, malaria and fly – transmitted illnesses (diarrhea, eye infection) will take front stage.

### **3. Flooding in Mille**

As of July 22<sup>nd</sup>, a total of 1,008 homes with all their contents were swept away in the eastern Mille kebeles of Kaaylu kee Kuddi, Diyyilu kee Gararro, Sana'as kee Kusorto and Gasiyo kee La'as. It is still not known how many heding animals were lost but the estimate is over 6,000 since 1,850 goats, 300 cattle and 6 camels drowned in Sana'as alone on 23<sup>rd</sup>. The problem was that the Awash is now dammed

and the Mille brought a vast volume of water down from the highlands in Amhara region pouring it across the junction between the two rivers. There are 3 known human casualties of pastoralists trying to cross the flood swollen river higher up in Sifra. While the regional emergency desk reports there is sufficient dry ration (both safety net and relief food) to assist those displaced and supplementary food will arrive in days from Addis Ababa, household utensils, shelter, clothing and blankets are required. APDA has primary health work, women extension and Afar education in the 4 affected kebeles and these development workers are most anxious to prevent the situation from deteriorating through lack of supplies. The government is now warning all communities on the banks of the Awash to evacuate to higher land realizing the rainy season has only just begun.

#### **4. Working for recovery and to prevent possible catastrophe**

APDA continues with the following:

- a) Systematic and ongoing awareness for acute watery diarrhea including water purification material distribution and soap among those most vulnerable
- b) Construction of rain-water cisterns (5 near completion); dams and shallow-wells through community participation to increase water access in drought-prone districts
- c) Pasture rehabilitation through community land preparation (cash for work) and re-seeding in the major community grazing lands
- d) While supplementary animal feed is now no longer needed in Geega, Dagaba and Awra, Eli Daar and Kori have minimal pasture recovery. The project supporting the remaining goats of households with less than 10 goats continues to function in these areas through feeding and animal treatment.

#### **5. Three major community dialogues setting the scene for accelerated development:**

##### **A. Conference on environment protection**

APDA had conducted research in 4 adjoining central western districts of the region to assess environment damage over the past 10 years and to what extent the community is using traditional laws of environment protection. A conference involving the 4 target districts as well as elders from most of the region's 32 woredas gathered from July 19<sup>th</sup> to 23<sup>rd</sup> to discuss the outcome and way forward. The researchers presented a shocking picture of environment destruction through drought and now traditional neglect stating that the Afar pastoralist society had begun to spiral down as a result of the crippling famines of 1973/74 and 1984/85 that displaced pastoralist breaking down clan boundaries. Again, the Dergue Regime's anti-clan elder stand and urbanization are cited as factors in the decline of traditional governance and law. The discussion was highly energetic and recommended

- Research should not stop in the 4 districts (Sifra, Uwwa, 'Adda'ar and Awra) but should be done periodically in all drought - affected districts
- There needs to be a pilot project of 3 years to rehabilitate the environment through traditional knowledge systems
- People whose total livelihood is their animals need to be supported accordingly and where needed should be re-stocked, there should be increased water access and pasture rejuvenation enabling them to maintain a mobile lifestyle.
- People who have left pastoralism through herd loss and are now living between the rural and urban life making an income on the only thing available – that of firewood and charcoal in small roadside hamlets need rehabilitation so that they can enter trade or gain a vocation that suits them in the towns.
- Those who live near the Awash river basin need to be taught to develop appropriate farms. The 100 - year experience of Badda (near the Eritrean border in Barahale) was discussed where farmers farm food crops for 6 months of the year and grow fodder for 6 months thus supporting milking herd.
- Nurseries nurturing and growing trees, shrubs and grasses indigenous to Afar Region must be raised up for grass – seed, plants and research preventing extinction of local varieties.

- The meeting saw the cultivation of the *Lusina* tree as an exception. While it is an outside tree, it is very good animal fodder and shade and not considered a noxious plant.
- The *fiam* system of *mahisso* needs enforcement and strengthening. This is where the traditional association leader has the authority to immediately punish by surprise any person who violates the traditional laws preserving the the balanced use of grazing land, water sources, migration routes and the like. There are laws and respective punishments for all types of social life including where clothes are washed, not defecating under shade trees, seperating anima land human water. The tradition of *desso* or *maganna* in clan land needs strengthening – this is the tradition of reserving grazing land for hard times in effect of grazing and in preserving adequate distance between households not to disturb the environment by over use. The tradition prevents migrating communities from using the settlement areas of clans. The '*kukta*' or announcement of the *desso* that is in the hands of the clan elders and the *fiamat abba*. In clan land, there must be permission given to use water for animals. No grass can be cut in communal grazing land since it dries out without its seeds whereas a tree can be cut but in a particular way. 'The law is the fence'. This needs mobilization and awareness as well as practical application.
- Any institution who wants to assist Afar people must begin with the animals. The asset must be preserved as well as the mobility of the animals within the landscape. The meeting discussed the example of irrigation in Awra and Uwwa describing it as inappropriate. The elders from these districts say that there should be fodder grown in conjunction with preserving the forest cover – not clearing the land. The meeting declared that irrigation was only appropriate on the major river basin of the Awash, not on the smaller rivers. It was noted that the Mille River now stops running in Mille Woreda for part of the year due to irrigation in Sifra.
- Every Afar should plant trees. There needs to be massive mobilization for individual tree planting where it is possible. Again, food – for work/ cash for work and safety net projects should concentrate on re-forestation and tree planting.
- An environment committee that is highly motivated and mobilized needs to be established at the woreda level containing the chief clan elder of the area, the clan elder appointed as woreda advisor, pastoralist desk and kebele leaders. This committee will assure that all traditional laws are followed and will accuse the kebele leader who permits traditional law to be broken – they need annual gathering to review progress and compare with other woredas.

### **B. Conference on traditional law**

The Regional Bureau of Justice having conducted research into the traditional law and its status in the community in 2009 chaired a meeting to discuss the outcomes under APDA facilitation. Those attending included a delegation from Djibouti led by the Head of the Afar Education and Culture Development Center (JDC); the regional vice president; Heads of Bureaus of Pastoralism; Water, Women's Affairs, Capacity and Afar Language Development and Enrichment Center as well as the Head of the Islamic Council, senior clan elders – a total of 160 delegates. The purpose of the conference was to discuss

- What constitutes the Afar traditional law
- What are the similarities between Ethiopian government law and traditional law and what are the differences
- How can the two laws be joined.

The Afar law was described as being 5 oral laws that are similar and differ only in the punishment requirements. The Bureau of Justice declared that it must be written so that it can be analyzed, modified and changed as need be from time to time. The discussion then described the value of the Afar law. This is available through the conference report on APDA's website or through APDA.

The conference concluded with the following recommendations:

1. Awareness and discussion on the law must continue and accelerate at the local level
2. Research should be extended to include other districts and include all Afar society. This research should facilitate the stopping of revenge killing of the innocent person as well as give equal rights and value to women in law. This needs to be changed in the society.

3. Traditional law must be known in the government and utilized
4. The traditional court system as permitted by the constitution should be introduced as supportive to the government system

### **C. Regional youth conference**

On July 20<sup>th</sup> 100 pastoralist youth from 20 districts (35 girls and representing 6 established youth associations as well as woreda youth representatives in the process of forming associations) met in Logya for APDA's first ever regional youth conference. The energy and excitement of the youth in meeting and befriending each other was tangible. The theme of the gathering was youth response to HIV transmission and living with AIDS as well as how they view their future, a parallel discussion to the pastoralist women's conferences held each year from 2002. They chose to discuss on

- a. Identifying harmful practices and the means to stop them
- b. HIV transmission: the affect on youth and how it should be tackled
- c. The effects of *kaat* chewing
- d. Use of Afar language
- e. Education
- f. Importance of associations and how they can be effectively run
- g. Developing the society through learning useful trades
- h. Environment protection
- i. Sport
- j. Traditions of the Afar to be encouraged

On all issues, they gave clear action to be taken. As with the above meetings a report will be put on [www.apdaethiopia.org](http://www.apdaethiopia.org) as well as being available directly from APDA. Some of the highlights were speaking very strongly on female education that must not be interrupted by marriage with equal opportunity for males and females; no marriage without the partners knowing their HIV status; that *kaat* must be recognized as the first enemy of the Afar people and development; places organized for public *kaat* chewing should be closed; Afar youth should join together to demonstrate to the government their demand of the use of the Afar language and the language should be celebrated annually as a Mother-tongue Day; properly organized and managed youth associations are very important to the way ahead; those cutting live trees must be imprisoned; sports centers should be opened in each woreda; Afar have over 180 different traditional dances that should be developed and learnt – Afar culture should be taught in the school as well as the culture of relationship in the Afar society such as *nagaltino* (culture of helping each other); *ibnayatino* (culture of visitor respect) and so on. The finished with the demand to hold conferences each 6 months!!! – APDA is planning annual youth conferences and looking for the means to network the youth in the region with other Afar youth in the Diaspora.

### **6. Plans for a development conference**

Energized by the discussion of the above meetings and realizing the essential benefit of bringing people's thinking together, APDA is planning to host the 3<sup>rd</sup> Afar Development Conference in December 2010. The 1<sup>st</sup> conference in December 2004 and the 3<sup>rd</sup> in January 2007 clearly outlined the issues hindering Afar development within the pastoralist setting. This conference will take the dialogue further under the three major headings of Afar language development; Afar in the economy and conflict. This message is to alert our sister organizations and all those wanting to be part of the discussion to mark off a visit to Afar Region around December 24<sup>th</sup> for a week. The meeting will be in Afar and English.