

# AFAR PASTORALIST DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION QAFAR DACARSITTOH DADALIH EGLA

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## DEEPENING EFFECTS OF NO RAIN IN AFAR REGION'S DROUGHT – BELT DISTRICTS

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### 1. A season lost and the ravishes of the long dry on already weakened communities

The December winter rains (Daddah) have decidedly failed in region and, with persisting cold night winds, the communities in all of Zone 2; Eli Daar, Kori and northern Dubte district of Zone 1 and much of Zone 4 are now radically affected. See map below.

The overriding affects are:

- **Extreme thirst** due to the fact that many water sources have dried up including hand-dug and shallow wells leaving communities no option but to migrate or to walk up to 12 hours to collect water
- **Serious lack of food** since the animal herd has little to no pasture and is not producing milk and grain prices have been as high as 500.00 ETB (the price of 2 drought-affected goats in the market) per 50 kilograms since late December. One household needs from 100 to 150 kilograms in a month.

The community is responding by

- a) **Distant movement:** from the western border districts of Zones 2 and 4 are up to 30% of the people and their herds are in Tigray and Amhara Regions respectively. Upwards of several hundred households have fled to their respective woreda (district) center unable to cope with the extreme thirst and lack of food in remote kebeles (sub-districts). Eli Daar, Erebti, Afdeera, Dallol, Barahale administration towns are all hosting drought-displaced people. From Kori and parts of Eli Daar, people have gone Assaita. The remaining pasture in Barantu, Teeru now consumed, the herdsmen are migrating toward Magaale and 'Aba'ala.
- b) **Schools are emptying and closing.** The government predicts that very soon, more than 50% of all students in affected districts will have dropped out of learning primarily due to thirst and secondly the fact their families have migrated to save the herd.

One storm of rain on the western border in Sifra, southern Uwwa on January 15<sup>th</sup> meant that herds from the dry inland and east immediately descended on the pasture that did rejuvenate.

The results in the community are becoming clearer by the day:

- Malnutrition is spreading to previously not - affected kebeles especially in Eli Daar, Kori and Erebti. Dallol maintains an extremely high level of severely malnourished people
- Animals especially goats have begun to die off. Their body-weight makes them now not saleable and diseases are erupting in small pockets in most affected districts since there is no pasture. Existing pasture is now consumed in most of the major grazing areas. The better off herdsmen are selling animals to buy concentrated animal feed.
- The number of destitute and border-line destitute households is growing daily.

The government report having secured the needed relief food as well as some support for veterinary medicines and vaccinations. However the serious gaps continue as follows:

- a) While around 50% of the water trucking appealed for is either pledged or in action, more water trucks are desperately needed. The frightening ogre that up to 50% of students in the drought-belt have or will drop out of school due to lack of water has to find solution. The government is able to provide school feeding.
- b) Insufficient supplementary food to meet the needs of those found moderately malnourished. In Magaale, for example, the secured supply will leave 7,500 moderately malnourished unaided.
- c) Supplementary animal feed to keep the few remaining goats alive and milk-producing is urgently needed in Eli Daar, Kori, Bidu, Erebt and parts of northern Dubte. APDA has so far only secured sufficient to assist 350 households in two kebeles of northern Dubte woreda.

## 2. APDA's response to the community's emergency

### ➤ Relief activities

To date, APDA has been able to mobilize 2 rented water trucks and is supporting the government to move another 2 by paying the fuel costs. This is assisting in Eli Daar and Kori. As mentioned above, supplementary animal feed has begun for 2 Dubte Woreda kebeles - both these communities have not seen rain in 18 months. APDA health workers go out each 15 days to treat severe acute malnutrition cases in now 13 districts. Each time, nutrition surveillance, basic treatment and awareness teaching on hygiene and sanitation are part of the action.

### ➤ Through our development activities

Realizing the deep - entrenched vulnerability of the pastoralists to drought and food security vulnerability, APDA is increasingly learning to utilize a strong **community disaster risk reduction (DRR) strategy** in all sectors of the organization. This involves mobilizing the community to be pro-active to use all the resources at their disposal: their knowledge systems to understand and predict weather patterns; their known coping mechanisms to reduce the affects; their strong egalitarian social laws; the use of markets; diversifying income and so on. Much of this is natural to Afar but repressed by various systems coming into them from outside. Therefore APDA

- a) Strongly maintains training and capacity building within the community that their members are the actors in all development and emphasizes the deliberate participation of community women.
- b) With the community, seeks out the best way to secure water. In the last 2 years, APDA has learnt the means of damming underground water to obtain a perennial source that can have a hand pump put on it. This is indeed a remarkable answer in such notoriously dry districts as Kori, Eli Daar and others.
- c) Facilitates the community to slow down water and soil erosion that the landscape eventually greens up and gains a permanent water source leading to the possibility of food and fodder crop production - system known as water shed management. This was devised some years ago in northern India.
- d) Re-seeding of wind-damaged pastures is also important to re-gain lost grasses. Also, the community is constructing shallow trenches that any rainwater is caught for some weeks encouraging the germination of dormant grass and tree seeds.

In order to lessen the current crisis, the organization is encouraging APDA - formed **community cooperatives** to invest in government - bulk food such as sugar and grain and sell it off cheaply in remote communities to decrease the food crisis. APDA is also eager to further small saving and credit groups, particularly in the hands of women since they have proven they are more efficient savers as well as more reliable in returning loans. With over 630 women currently involved in these activities, it would be a great poverty release to triple that in 2013. To encourage and stimulate entrepreneurship, the organization is circulating a brief market update in Afar that allows for advertising and describes community marketing successes to all known associations and marketing groups. The market in Sifra and less in Yallo is still very lively and there are good signs that women's groups from Eli Daar selling traditional mats are now entering into this western market.

**In education**, the organization is trying to place solar lighting in each site that the community can readily learn at night. The light is collapsible and can be taken as the teacher moves with the community. The community development committees in each site manage the strategy to prevent school drop-outs and to assure that students do not lose their education chance. The hostel system that APDA has recently begun housing children from remote communities in towns to continue their education beyond the primary level is vital to this. In this regard, there is so much need and the current 4 hostels supporting a total of 112 students needs to be better facilitated as well as expanded. The greatest challenge this system faces is getting community confidence to allow girl - students to participate in hostel - living. This then means literacy needs to be accelerated in all communities; the community dialogue to discuss harmful traditional practices that both harm and isolate females from development needs to reach practical solutions.

**The APDA health team are extremely alert**, responding to any reported disease outbreaks; constantly giving awareness on hygiene, sanitation and preventing disease transmission; distributing soap and water purifying material to communities drinking contaminated water; carrying out ongoing nutrition surveillance (in February, 2 more communities requiring severe acute malnutrition treatment were found). Particular care is being taken of pregnant and breast-feeding women that their early treatment and anaemia is addressed as well as their malnutrition. The organization system of registering all pregnant women is assisting in this and the program's women extension workers are all armed with lentils to give to any mother in dire nutritional status.

Linked to this, medical referral of pregnant mothers for antenatal and delivery assistance is now slowly increasing reducing the risks of problem - pregnancies. The challenges here are summed up in the recent experience of APDA's education coordinator in Sifra, the woreda that links by road to our emergency maternity hospital in Mille, an hour and ten minutes drive away. He heard of a young mother desperately ill in labor 25 kilometers south of the town of Sifra. As the health coordinator was away at the time, he decided to go and investigate. As he entered the nomadic home, it was clear the family were gathered for the worst and they had given up all hope. The young mother was seemingly comatosed, her eyes rolling back and her body motionless. Using APDA's instincts, he declared he was bringing a vehicle to transfer her - the father declared they were waiting the process of God and she should be laid to rest. He strongly disagreed, rang and got a pick-up from Sifra town. Forcefully, he grabbed the young woman and bundled her into the vehicle and demanded the driver go as fast as he could manage to Mille. APDA's gynecologist immediately operated and delivered a live baby girl and the mother recovered. He now looks back with utter surprise to his own actions and says he is utterly convinced that more awareness needs to reach the community about early referral and has his team of 40 community teachers drilling the message into their respective students.

### **3. The regional legal status regarding environment protection**

In January, the regional Bureau of Justice and the Afar Language Development and Enrichment Center attached to the Bureau of Education hosted a conference on integrating traditional law into the regional law. This includes social laws as well as environment protection and all aspects of community life. Senior clan elders discussed with government officials coming to strong consensus on how Afar laws and the knowledge that form them can be utilized. APDA recorded the conference and assisted in disseminating the information. A further conference directly involving forest protection is planned in view of the growing use of the remaining forest for charcoal production and firewood sale, particularly reflecting on the situation in 'Adda'ar, Mille, Dubte and Assaita.

### **4. The special challenge in properly assisting Eritrean refugees in Afar Region**

The 34,000 - odd and growing number of Eritrean refugees in Afar Region are too increasingly vulnerable since they live in the drought - belt woredas and in the first instance, come all but empty - handed. The government has established two camps for them: one just 2 kilometers outside Assaita town and the second in Barahale. These camps are still poorly equipped for a reasonable and safe life and require better

infrastructure. When there are refugees living among the community, sharing the community resources. APDA hopes to enhance Afar literacy and education for these people, improve their chance of gaining a reasonable livelihood through vocational training and IGA assistance, as well as work to protect the environment they live in. In the case of refugees in the far north, the organization through its partner has requested food support to diminish the current status of food insecurity and malnutrition.

