

# AFAR PASTORALIST DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION QAFAR DACARSITTOH DADALIH EGLA

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## **Recovery: hoping for rain and working on livelihoods**

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### **1. The best rainy season in 10 years!!!!!!**

This is what one clan leader in Sifra on the region's western border was observed to say and this is what the traditional leaders of Geega, Dubte Woreda predicted in December 2012 when Sub-Sahara Famine Early Warning System (FEWS) was stating the contrary - namely that rains in 2013 would be well below average. Almost the entire region except for a few die-hard drought vulnerable areas has had substantial rain. As of September, the regular downpours of August have stopped and the rain-clouds are beginning to peter out. The areas without rain include Buure in Eli Daar's north where some rain has fallen in the surrounds but the actual town where many of the population reside stayed dry. The proximal grazing forest to Buure, Andabba, did not actually receive rain but was watered by river-shed flowing in. The rest of Eli Daar did get rain – the very drought-affected communities along the Eritrean border, western Eli Daar and the south are now relieved. Probably the least rain fell in Kori. There, a significant rain-shadow is evident: almost no rain fell in Guluble directly north of Guyah that got rain, Gad'eelu, Kori kebele, Darra and part of Daaba. Here the cisterns that APDA constructed are not filled and communities are looking elsewhere for water and grazing. During storms, high winds ripped off almost all corrugated iron roofs in Soddonta, Bidu's administration town and 18 families in three scattered localities of northern Eli Daar lost all their goats burnt in lightning strikes.

### **2. Affects on the pasture and the herd**

Certainly, most of the land has changed from dusty brown in early July to rich – green. The picture below, 10 kilometers before Logya in Mille shows low shrubby – grass appearing between the ancient volcanic rocks. This makes excellent camel – grazing but dries within 6 to 8 - weeks since the roots are very superficial.



Again, in Awra's grazing plains on the western border in particular, rain has brought '*bunkut*', another shrubby grass that flowers and remains for around the same time but then dries leaving the plains barren. Some 10 years ago, the western plains were the rescue areas for the Afar herds having waist – high grasses. Now the land is in sore-need of rehabilitation, these indigenous grass seeds having been lost in dust – storms. Without that rehabilitation, the local communities of Awra will again venture cross-border into Amhara Region looking for grazing, daring to face conflict with the local farmers whose farms they graze the periphery of.

While grazing is good, animals are, never the less on the move. The herd below of around 120 breeding camels managed by 7 camel boys has journeyed 3 nights that the camels drink the salt water around Harsis in Mille from Awra in the west. These camels represent the major asset of one group of households. Believe me, the camel's milk was delicious!!



The Afar herd is now just beginning to take on body form having looked weak to emaciated by July. While camel's milk is the most sustainable of all the species, goat milk is now only just coming in and in some herds, will take another month or two. Thus malnutrition cases remain and in some communities have increased slightly. APDA continues to treat a current total of 785 cases of severe acute malnutrition in Eli Daar, Erebti, Magaale, 'Adda'ar, Kutubla (Assaita), Afambo, Teeru, Awra, Afdeera, Gawwaani and Buurimudayto districts. This number will jump in the next month as international NGOs who were supporting this

work have come to the end of emergency projects as of August/ September leaving APDA and the government to pick up the tab – APDA taking the job to screen and treat in remote areas beyond the reach of government health workers. Despite the good news of the rain, this then is the dilemma: malnutrition does NOT go away with rain and DOES require a livelihood – strengthening intervention to get rid of it. In July/ August, APDA has screened house to house in Kori, Eli Daar and Teeru to establish the baseline to begin 3 months supplementary animal feed support in almost destitute households (families with less than 8 remaining goats). In so doing, the organization documented almost 3,000 households in these 3 districts alone that are totally destitute (322 such households were found in Akuule and 'Aba'a alone, two of the worst-hit kebeles in Eli Daar). The destitute household is then dependent on other families in the community to feed them. Therein lies the dilemma: while this IS the culture of the Afar, household economic recovery/ gain is very slow and fragile due to the level of existing destitution. This requires re-stocking/ income generation support to relieve it.

### **3. Landscape recovery shaping up in parts**

#### **- Water**

Great excitement was afloat in Sardo, Dubte Woreda that suffers enormously from water shortage when APDA's drilling rig crew secured water at 140 meters in September – water with a temperature of 65 degrees centigrade requiring a thermal pump to access it!! – They exclaimed that several government and NGO crews had tried over a period of 30 years and this is the first success!! Having been an extra-ordinary difficult well to sink, the program crew has gained good experience and is going on with plans for another 5 wells in the next 2 months. Other communities are seeing stored water on their door-step for the first time with this rain since APDA has constructed 8 new cisterns, 6 sub-surface dams and 6 new ponds in the last 3 months – all within communities that face thirst and where women are forced to walk up to 12 hours to collect water.

#### **- Water shed management and pasture rehabilitation**

In Erebti, a district devastated by now 6 years of repeated droughts, almost 800 hectares of pastureland has been sown with grass-seed, the community having prepared the land prior to the rains. These seeds are now coming through. All of APDA's 8 watershed management schemes are 'greening' up, the hillsides having been terraced to slow down rainwater – shed; gullies closed to slow down the flow of the rainwater. In each of Uwwa, Yallo, Guulina, Awra and 3 sites in Mille, small –scale irrigation to grow food and fodder crops is beginning. This will make a substantial contribution to household food security; community marketing and to diversification of diet as well as income. Too, the substantial – sized community irrigation farming scheme from the Awash River in Mille ('Ass Mohammad Kuudi kebele) will not only increase incomes and food security but also provide a center for community learning on crop production and

rangeland management since the scheme includes a physical training center, tree nursery and demonstration plots. APDA plans to introduce durable fruit trees such as mango, pawpaw and banana as well as research into getting the indigenous species of trees, shrubs and grasses back.

#### **4. Working with the refugee community**

The Ethiopian government and UNHCR estimate that Afar Region may well be housing over 40,000 refugees from Eritrea. There are two official camps: one in Assaita in the east and the other in Barahale in the north but the majority of refugees continue to live with the community in various districts that are adjacent to the Eritrean border. Camp - living is particularly miserable, both camps having meager social services let alone shade for the households to enjoy. With its partners, APDA has increased assistance to these people through the government and UNHCR particularly addressing needs of shelter, Afar education, income generation with a focus on the environment to improve the barren surrounds they live in. Refugee women in Barahale camp are engaged in making traditional mats from dry palm-leaves that will be used for their own housing rather than living under scourging plastic sheeting for example. While APDA is currently leading, a newly – formed local NGO, Red Sea Afar Relief Association is taking up implementation responsibility while being mentored by APDA aiming to go it alone at a later stage.

#### **5. Progress in the utilization of Afar language as a new school year begins in Ethiopia**

The excitement of Afar language being used as the medium of administration is still bubbling throughout the region: each district – level administration is now facing the challenge of using Afar rather than Amharic. The early effects of increased community involvement in the development process are coming to light. Afar are establishing translation services; youth are presenting books for publishing; APDA is being demanded to give more teachers to the government and to be more involved in government education and language issues. A new NGO for culture and language has appeared and they want to look at the fact that while harmful traditional practices are condemned generally, good traditional practices are not in fact encouraged or supported. Thus, the intellectual potential of the community is not being utilized.

For APDA, as previously discussed, one of the greatest challenges is to increase the volume of available literature in the community that the community develops reading and writing culture. For this, a local printing press is needed as well as more writers and facilities for them.

The second challenge is to provide the means that herding children from remote communities can continue education beyond the alternative basic education the government and APDA provide on to the second primary cycle of grade 5 to 8. When the new academic year opens on September 16<sup>th</sup>, APDA wants to increase its current hostel – students from 112 by a further 20 females – this is the plan. However, getting the community to allow girls to live and learn away from the home is an extra-ordinary challenge. Awareness has been raised and discussions have been held with the religious and clan leadership who are the final decision-makers – APDA is hopeful this can be realized.

#### **6. Always more to be done for mothers giving birth in the region**

The organization's central objective to contribute to lowering maternal death and injury remains all – engrossing. More and more mothers are being referred out of the community where they would normally deliver at home to the district health center and to the organization's hospital in Mille. These are those who are in desperate need of rescue. But there seems to be more often than not a less than perfect/ good outcome. For example, Barbara May Maternity hospital was able to save the life of an 18 year old with a ruptured uterus 2 days ago but the only option was that her uterus was removed. She came from Datta Bahari in Dubte. Four other very young mothers were put into the Addis Ababa Fistula hospital for repair the same day having suffered obstructed labor and waited too long to get professional help.

As well as increasing community awareness on early referral of mothers with obstructed labor and the need for regular antenatal checking, APDA is very anxious to establish waiting areas for mothers at risk managed by midwives linked to the obstetricians in the Barbara May Maternity hospital – the plan is for the hospital to train these midwives establishing the relationship then for APDA to construct traditional housing for the waiting center within the compound of each of 8 government health centers within 250 kilometers radius of

the hospital in Mille. Too, currently the hospital is looking for a second obstetrician while working with the service of short-term staff for the time being.

#### **7. Networking and joining ideas**

APDA plans to hold its annual pastoralist youth conference in October – hoping to network with Afar youth in the Diaspora. Secondly, the now long – awaited 3<sup>rd</sup> Afar Development Conference is provisionally planned for after Ramadan in 2014 – around July wanting to involve the Diaspora as well as interested partners and friends.

APDA has just produced a documentary film of the overall program that will be released on the website – [www.apdaethiopia.org](http://www.apdaethiopia.org).