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Floods and carcasses: rain falls in highly weakened communities

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1. Rains: so far, so good BUT

The long thirst is over, rain has fallen as of 3 days ago in now all highly stressed communities filling cisterns and ponds particularly in northern Eli Daar where APDA bulldozed out dams of 7 to 8,000 m³ capacity some 6 months ago – this is the first water they have collected. The real rain of the season started around August 8th in other locations – almost 6 weeks late for the season - bringing much – needed relief to Kori and northern Dubte where APDA had been water trucking while Eli Daar remained desperately dry to 3 days ago. In order to prevent people dying, with the support of the district government, APDA provided water truck fuel only getting water to people at an extremely bare minimum of ration. Now the communities can scoop up just – fallen rain, unprotected water but ample.

Malnutrition:

While the fear of thirst is over, it cannot yet be said rain is adequate: torrential storms caused a run-off but now the land needs soaking that the vegetation can revive bringing breeding- animals nutritious pasture that goats will reproduce safely and bring milk into the home. According to APDA's emergency nutrition officer in Eli Daar, the community have now switched to hope having adequate water to drink. There is already a bright change. Since they are no longer sharing the prescribed food for recovery from severe acute malnutrition to all in the house, some of the most severely malnourished are showing signs of turning the corner. However, as he cautioned, this does not reflect on the level of moderately malnourished children and mothers as the actual amount of food in the house has not yet increased. He is appealing for the effort to treat in the remote households where his team has been working for the past 5 months beyond this, the final round of nutrition surveillance and treatment. Without health workers walking into these remote settlements and identifying the needy, realistically all the good work done so far will be in vain and the situation turn back to a full –on disaster.

APDA is also equally concerned about the extra-ordinary level of malnutrition in Teeru where whooping cough has now spread to almost all sub-districts and Afdeera where the most distant communities are particularly suffering. The organization has appealed for assistance to work on both malnutrition and routine vaccination in these 2 districts focusing on the remote communities – vaccination will be undertaken using a mobile cold – chain and health workers walking house to house to gain a coverage.

Carcasses:

As the rains fell, herdsman ventured to return their animals back to their home grazing areas from along the banks of the Mille and Awash Rivers in Assaita and from grazing lands as far south as Ami Bara, some 400 kilometers from the northern grazing lands. Tragically, the routes they travelled were littered with carcasses within days of the rains falling as the animals were just too emaciated to withstand getting wet and the drop in temperature as the rain fell. The infections they had just overwhelmed them. Thus APDA health workers have teamed up in the last 10 days to burn carcasses from Dubte all the way through Dagaba to Teeru where hundreds of cattle met their fate; in the south of the region in Gawwaani and Gala'alu where cattle and goats perished just prior to the floods as reported below and in the vast grazing valley of Geega, Dubte district where again a couple of thousand goats died. Armed with jerricans of kerosene, the animal carcasses were burnt in their thousands – those doomed to die were any pregnant animals; as well as the very young along with animals with diseases such as pasteuriosis, the stress disease. APDA is reminded that the community needs access to a contingency of veterinary medicines and animal feed to assist the herd in this migration and the transition from the long dry season to the wet season. what medicines the organization could rally, it sent to Teeru in an effort to save hundreds of dying cattle.

Flood:

With extra-ordinary waters coming down from the Amhara highlands, large areas of Gawwaani and Gala'alu on the Middle Awash in southern Afar Region are now inaccessible except by coming up through Shoa-Robit on the south – west side: 5 sub-districts of Gawwaani and 3 in Gala'alu are totally underwater. In Dangalegita, Gala'alu, people must swim into the remaining standing houses: 8 nights ago, a total of 3,340 houses were swept away from Dangalegita, Bi'ida'foo and Mooro Buuri combined. People are marooned without food and drinking water, their daily living utensils gone.

Too water has flooded into Kutubla so that many communities that APDA is currently trying to reach with AWD surveillance are surrounded – health workers are swimming to cross swollen channels. In Teeru, the worst flood for some years is in the process of occurring totally cutting off the most northern sub-districts and to reach another 4 adjoining kebeles, it is needed to wade through dangerous waters chest – deep. So far, property loss due to the flood is not reported but certainly animals will have drowned. At this stage in the situation, nothing so far is substantially arranged to meet this emergency but food; household support kits; mats to re-construct traditional houses for immediate shelter; water PUR; soap and medicines to stop disease spread are all needed.

2. Acute watery diarrhea (AWD)

The ferocious outbreak of AWD that devastated communities in Afambo and Kutubla, Assaita during July and early August has abated to the occasional case. Due to the extremity of the problem many actors involved alongside APDA health team to eventually quell the daily deaths. APDA played and continues to play the role of mass community mobilization and tracking of the outbreak giving the communities exacting teaching and support to purify water; protect children; protect the household from the spread of the outbreak taking the all too real examples just experienced as the motivation to change to the best possible level of hygiene and sanitation that their living environment affords.

3. Joint - partner sustainability plan advancing

As APDA and 4 of its supporting NGOs strives forward to structure and work jointly on a revised APDA strategy that aims to lower vulnerability to shocks such as described above and generate community – driven sustainability, a meeting is planned for mid September to review the direction APDA is thinking in – any persons or organization representatives are more than welcome to participate – please be in touch as per the address on the top of this update. For example, APDA wants to rephrase the organization vision for the coming 5 years to read: ***'Afar pastoralists have adequate opportunity to enjoy basic human rights and reach their full potential'***... then to support this, 5 levels of outcomes under the titles of 'societal goals'; 'target group'; 'internal processes'; 'learning and growth' and finally

'resources' are being formulated. Again, APDA is very wanting to share this process with anyone willing to take on the vision. It will, of course, be published on the webpage and Facebook for discussion engagement.

4. Improving/ increasing access to water

Seeing how the communities suffer and are pushed into further vulnerability through not having readily accessible water, APDA continues to take every opportunity to construct as well as rehabilitate water points. Six cisterns that were lying unrepaired for 3 years are being repaired in Erebti as well as another 2 in Geega. Being that rainwater harvesting is the immediate solution for thirsty people in remote areas, 2 more cisterns are planned to be constructed in Yewe Dullul, Teeru where there is no available surface water as well as a third in Dirma, Teeru.

Four of six constructed dams in Erebti filled with rainwater in the last 2 weeks bringing enormous joy to the people.

Connecting pipelines from a 270 - meter borehole in Kori will open up potable water within a 1 - hour radius for almost 34,000 people including a raised reservoir storing 40,000 liters which is under construction to complete this scheme. After a very long struggle to achieve this including drilling the borehole under extremely adverse conditions, this is the first borehole in the district of Kori bringing drinkable water to the community. This opens up the opportunity of safely conducting education; holding a clinic and households having sufficient water to drink as well as practicing hygiene and sanitation.

5. Five health workers qualifying as community nurses

Three years ago, APDA put five of the most capable and eager health workers into training in the Samara Health College to qualify as nurses. They are all from extremely remote communities and will soon graduate to begin applying their learning to improve health management in distant places regarding improved diagnosis and treatment management as well as safe motherhood to communities highly neglected.

6. The community approach to stopping harmful practices

Watching the doctor, the anesthetist and the midwife/ nurse team working on a newborn in APDA's Barbara May Maternity Hospital who had aspirated fluid into his lungs during the birthing process 2 days ago was a clear reminder of the extreme fragility of newborns generally in Afar Region – for every mother that dies in giving birth, as much as 6 newborns also do not make the first week of their lives. With Samara University, in the process of improving the training of midwives, some of APDA's rural health team and as well as the Barbara May Maternity Hospital staff will benefit from training on 'helping newborns breathe' so that at both levels of APDA's health program, the organization can re-think what more can be done to secure the lives of newborns.

7. Combining efforts to improve alternative basic education facilitators' annual training

A group arising out of the effort to enhance and accelerate the development and use of Afar language are giving services to improve the annual training for alternative basic education (ABE) facilitators' that is just beginning. 72 odd facilitators will benefit from Samara University's trainers along with a delegated person from the Bureau of Education in education psychology; lesson planning and pedagogy as well as Afar language grammar teaching. The facilitators will be prepared to teach as far as level 4 – Ministry of Education added one more level to the strategy of ABE to contribute to meeting the challenge of feeding pastoralist children into formal government schools to continue their learning.

Meanwhile, APDA is conducting a program – wide awareness campaign to get children back into ABE learning for the new school year starting late September as well as battling on to keep rural students in hostel learning from grades 5 to 12. The real challenge remains to retain the opportunity for girl-students to complete education against the community/ household demand that she marries.