

AFAR PASTORALIST DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION QAFAR DACARSITTOH DADALIH EGLA

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*The Tigray conflict adds yet another layer of inevitable suffering to
isolated pastoralists*
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1. Tigray conflict – affects on Afar Region

Afar Region forms Tigray's eastern border with 6 directly adjoining districts. Today as we write, we expect a massive influx of Mekele – city of displaced people. The Federal government assault on Mekele is about to happen and they report 80,000 people fled Mekele yesterday and today. The Afar Regional Government is now scrounging to prepare for the influx into 'Aba'ala, the closest district to Mekele city. This is all today's news.

Further south in Yallo, fighting 11 days ago on the border and inland to the north-south roadway resulted in a horrific yet-unreported massacre wherein reportedly 'scores' of people unable to flee were hacked to death, burnt or shot. Afar men from the town of Yallo went to bury the dead understanding the town of Chercher and surrounds was deserted discovering a grotesque scene of slaughter – mostly women and young children, elderly, blind and the like, bodies were already decomposing when they reached. Yallo in Afar Region is utterly related to Chercher in southern Tigray, socially, economically and in having almost merged cultures.

Yallo had the largest animal market in Afar Region, mostly selling into Tigray. Now the market has died, the surrounding districts to the center and east of Afar have nowhere 'local' to sell their herds and purchase daily needs. Again, food, fuel and other commodity prices have soared in the last days costing up to 4 and 5 times the comparable prices they knew from Tigray.

With the conflict now already 21 days in the making, Afar Region is still in shock: the umbilical cord of electricity, marketing, banking, food supply from Tigray to the Region's western districts is cut leaving the northern districts aghast with no power to draw water from 8 boreholes in 'Aba'ala, water supply for 56,000 people. These people now either purchase a 25-liter jerrican of turbid water from the river or trek to pick it up themselves. No bank services, no market is fast – blooming into food insecurity since even if there is food available, people cannot buy it.

2. The layers that have mounted up

Starting from a bad position of overriding malnutrition due to households without goats or too little to produce milk for the family from the losses of previous droughts including the 2018/19 drought that broke in July 2020, this year has seen a deluge of disasters all pointing to increasing food insecurity and with the backdrop of the

pandemic outbreak of coronavirus that anyway has interrupted normal life movements. With the drought-breaking rains of August, flood that overtook 14 districts displacing and dispossessing over 124,000 people still has its ramifications in now malnutrition and destitution since farmlands and livestock were lost.

Then with the rain, the desert locusts came back. As a result, all major grazing plains are barren leaving households without animal feed facing an early milk shortage (normally milk dries up in the community around February/ March). While the locusts did go as of a few weeks ago, the herd remains sick in many districts from the sprays used to kill the locusts as well as apparently from the locust droppings. This is particularly problematic in Sifra, Dullassa, Erebti and Magaale districts. APDA has sent out veterinary supplies and supported animal health workers to try and avert further death in the herds.

Now as pointed out above, markets are not functioning leaving the community unable to assist themselves. All this is adding to food insecurity and feeds into malnutrition.

3. The solutions APDA is looking for

a) Immediate

- Advocacy to get the massacre in Chercher and surrounds investigated by Ethiopian Human Rights Commission and any other such body.
- Immediate 'first-aid' support to people crossing from the Tigray conflict. There are still around 400 shocked and terrified people sheltering in river valleys not far from Chercher. They need food and shelter as well as psychological support to resume their lives.
- Continuity of malnutrition screening in remote areas of Afdeera, Teeru and Bidu as well as food support for pregnant and lactating mothers.
- Animal treatment matched by fodder distribution in locust-devastated areas
- Constant health team presence to see that communities do not fall into disease outbreaks such as cholera and the like and the ability to support with water purification and soap

b) Short-term

- Support particularly for women rendered destitute by flood to make an income through traditional mat weaving
- Once-off support for women dependent on petty trade in Yallo and other border markets who are supporting families that had become herd – destitute.

c) Medium to long – term

- Marketing support through cooperatives enabling livestock to regain selling takeoff: this may well involve the chain including logistics, animal fodder and treatment till sold and finding the sellers. The aim here is that economic movement returns to all Tigray – conflict affected districts enabled by community-based cooperatives.