



Amina Abdu– Afar Region

Themes [Emergency Nutrition Response, Outpatient Therapeutic Program (OTP) Centre]

Summary Amina’s family is highly dependent on livestock which have been affected by the current drought in Afar. At 21, Amina has two children (Momina Abdela, two, female and Habib Abdela, seven months old, male). They live in Kanturera Village in Elidaar District. Due to the subsequent failed Karma (long) and Sugum (short) rains their family lost many of their livestock. She walked with her son for three hours to get to the stabilization centre (SC) where her severely malnourished son Habib was treated. After staying and receiving treatment for one week in the SC Habib has been transferred to the OTP program where he receives a ready to use therapeutic food (peanut paste)/RUTF.

In April Save the Children supported the regional government to conduct a mass screening of children under 5 and pregnant and lactating women (PLW). Twenty-seven percent of children and 33% of women were found to be acutely malnourished. Following this declaration of emergency by the local government, Save the Children immediately responded by pulling its resources and staff to help children like Habib.

Amina’s story in her own words

A month ago, my son Habib, who is now seven months old was very sick, he had stomach ache and was vomiting, he has lost appetite and stopped taking food, as a result he became very weak and thin. At the time, I was worried and didn’t know what to do. Although I wanted to take him to the clinic, I had no money and I stayed home without help.

Ten days later, Habib’s health condition was deteriorating; he started losing body weight and was seriously ill. Finally I decided to take him to the clinic in Elidaar which is a three hour walk from where I live. There, they assessed his condition and told me that his problem was malnutrition. They said that he needs to be admitted and receive treatment. They gave him milk, syrup and an injection. After one week, Habib’s condition started to improve and he has started to breastfeed. Now I realize that if I hadn’t brought him here I would have lost my child. Today I brought Habib to the clinic for his weekly check-up and they assessed his condition and provided him 14 sachets of peanut paste. This has helped him to regain his weight.

Water is our major problem here, every day I travel more than four hours to get water, this is mainly because, the water nearby our house is not clean and is contaminated by waste from dogs and other wild animals. As a result, I need to walk long distances to get clean water. Even the water we get from faraway places is not protected; we dig out water from the dry river.

Drought is our other big concern. For the last nine months it didn’t rain at all. So the Ella (ponds for rain water harvest) have dried and as a result we face a shortage of water for ourselves and our animals. In addition, because of the drought, the camels don’t give us milk or the yield of milk has become very low, so that we can’t get enough for our children.

Before, we used to have many goats. Now we are left with only ten goats and five camels. Because of the long drought in the area we lost most of the animals. I am worried that, if the rain doesn’t fall soon, we could lose our animals again. If things continue to be like this the only option we have is to sell all our animals we have and feed our children, but this is something difficult to even think about.



This time, I am very happy to see my child doing better. I wish he can grow-up healthy. We are thankful to Save the Children for saving our child's life. We want this support to continue for the coming months, until we receive rain.

Interview conducted by Seifu Assegid during the recent communication assignment to Afar Region in June, 2013

Project background

The two main rainy seasons in Afar are Karma and Sugum. Early cessation of the regular Karma (long) rains in late 2012 and disruption of Sugum (short) rains in March/April 2013 resulted in critical water shortage, very poor pasture, low livestock and agricultural production and irregular migration, severely affecting the food security and livelihood status of the communities. The major affected areas are in Zones One and Two which are located in the northern and north-eastern parts of the region. Five woredas (Afdera, Erebti, Kori, Bidu and Elidaar) have been prioritised by the regional government as suffering from critical water shortage and food insecurity. Save the Children have on-going programmes in Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), livelihoods, Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), nutrition, health and education in Afar.

An emergency nutrition programme funded by HRF started in April, 2013 in six hotspot woredas. OTP is delivered in conjunction with government health workers and Supplementary Feeding Program (SFP) is delivered directly by Save the Children. So far 1,204 severely malnourished children have been admitted to OTP sites and 40 cases transferred to the stabilization centres and received treatment. A total of 4,325 moderately malnourished children and 4,428 PLWs have been admitted to the SFP.

Drought has become a frequent and persistent phenomenon in the Afar Region causing serious impairments in livestock production, the main source of livelihoods for pastoralists. In the past 10 years the region has been hit by three severe droughts — in 2002/03, in 2004/05, in 2007 and now this latest drought. Many fear that this will continue to further deteriorate the condition of the Afar people and worsen their abilities to recover from these continuous shocks. The situation requires a large-scale response within the next three months to overcome and prevent further immediate casualties in terms of both human and livestock lives. The Afar Region requires long-term investment to reduce the impact of further droughts and provide sustainable water resources to communities. Save the Children has responded to this crisis by providing water trucking to the affected regions over the last month, and aims to do so until August when it is hoped the rains will come. Save the Children is also working with partners such as UNICEF to support the sustainable development of water resources in this area, and reduce communities' dependence on trucked water.

Location Background

Afar Region, situated in the northeastern part of Ethiopia with a population of 1.4 million, is a drought-prone area which suffers from chronic water shortages. The majority of Afar people are pastoralists (90%) or agro-pastoralists (10%) who rely on livestock rearing and rain-fed agriculture for their diet and livelihoods.

Basic service provision in the pastoral areas of Ethiopia has historically been problematic, with less than one-fifth of pastoral communities in Ethiopia having access to basic social services such as health care and education; Afar is no exception. In Afar, there are shortages of trained health staff at all levels as well as a basic lack of infrastructure — the fact that there are only 39 health centres and 4 referral hospitals in the whole region (96,707 square kilometres) means families have to cover vast distances by foot to reach lifesaving care.