



Fatuma Mussa– Afar Region

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

Child Mohammed Issey [male, seven months], Wuha Limat Village in Elidaar District, Emergency Nutrition, WASH

Summary Fatuma Mussa is living on the side of the highway connecting Djibouti to Semera town in Afar region lives with her husband and her son Mohammed Issey in their dome-shaped hut. The village where Fatuma lives is severely affected by shortage of water which has forced them to entirely depend on water trucking that is provided by government and non-government organizations like Save the Children. She is also forced to travel long distances to access a local river, Hayu which is two hours both ways. This source of water is highly unclean and dependent on the rain received in the area. The commute usually forces her to leave her son at home to fetch water for her family. Due to the subsequent failed Karma (long) and Sugum (short) rains the river is not a reliable source of water. Mohammed was brought to the OTP centre where he has been diagnosed for Pneumonia and found to be severely malnourished and was given treatment.

In April Save the Children supported the regional government to conduct a mass screening of children under five 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 Mohammed.

Fatuma's story in her own words

I'm Fatuma Mussa. 20 years old, married and have one son that is 7 months old. His name is Mohammed Issey. He recently felt sick and developed what seems like a cold with a cough. He throws up when this happens. He also stops breastfeeding when he's sick. As it's the only thing I feed him, he started getting weak. I was given medical care for my son's cold from the OTP centre that is walking distance from my home.

We make wheat bread that is traditionally made here in the Afar region and we eat shiro (stew made from split peas). We have animals that we've sent off to better pasture with my father and only have a handful left here with us. They are goats that sometimes produce a little bit of milk.

It's only when it rains that we go to Hayu river to fetch water. The commute is almost 2 hours both ways. I usually leave Ahmed with neighbours and other family members when I leave to get water.

In the future, I hope for a better life. I wish for a wider home, better food to eat, cleaner water to drink and lots of changes for my family and my children. I am hopeful also because I want all the best for my son. Ahmed will go to school when he's of that age. I am also hopeful because of the support we are getting from organizations with regards to medical needs as well as other necessities.

Interview conducted by Amerti Lemma 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, Erebt, 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 North Eastern part of Ethiopia with a population of 1.4m, 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.