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## Emergency Situations and Development News

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The region has recently faced/ is facing the following 3 emergencies:

- a) Repeated small outbreaks of AWD menacing mostly urban areas
- b) Volcanic eruption in a remote area of Teeru Woreda between Digdiga and Namma 'Ara kebeles on August 12<sup>th</sup>
- c) Severe flooding in the Middle Awash.

As per previous reports, it is to be recalled that tens of thousands of cattle owners from western Afar Region suffered extreme herd-loss from late June to July due to current and recurrent drought conditions.

### **1. Volcanic eruption**

Along the earth crack created by the 2006 earthquake, a new volcanic eruption has appeared as of August 12<sup>th</sup>. The location is a very remote area between Digdiga and Namma 'Ara kebeles in Teeru. A government team that went to the area gathering information from those displaced states that 2,160 people fled the area, 5 people died and some 153 camels and 1,216 goats were also killed. While the volcano glowed for some days, it has died down now having destroyed as wide area of the environment.

### **2. The main rains and flooding**

The main rainy season, 'Karma' continues in Afar Region and by and large, the season is proving very productive. Now in most areas previously reported with little or no rain, storms have occurred: Eli Daar Woreda has had fairly good coverage with small dry pockets remaining and Teeru Woreda has had rain uniformly. However, in many areas, storms have been accompanied by extremely heavy winds causing devastation in many towns particularly in Eli Daar Woreda. Almost 30% of the houses including the clinic in Galaafi were destroyed in early August, telephone communications to the woreda totally disrupted, many buildings are de-roofed in Eli Daar, Manda and Buure.

All the rain-water harvesting reservoirs constructed by APDA are now full of water – remarkably those in the notoriously dry areas of Eli Daar and north – west Dubte Woredas.

All river systems are currently full. As happens annually, the Awash River has flooded in both its middle and lower basin. The most severe flooding has occurred in Buramudayto where on 22<sup>nd</sup> August the river burst its banks engulfing the main village of Dabal in water. Again on September 5, new flood waters penetrated the village, this time drowning 3 people and several animals. The 2 most affect kebeles are Gafaram and Dabal. The government is estimating around 4,500 people are displaced having lost household property and livestock.

In the Lower Awash, the problem is less severe but nevertheless, people in Rumayto Gaali Fagi and Bayahele are surrounded by water – some evacuated but the remainder live in an 'ocean' of shallow

flood waters. Necessarily, as flood water recede and stagnate, the concern for diarrheal outbreaks is acute, in particular, the fast – killing acute watery diarrhea.

### **3. Pastures**

Now the Region looks its 'green' best. However, there are remarkable areas where grass has not regenerated and one assumes the grass seeds are lost to high winds and dust storms of the previous and persistent droughts. Under the PLI Project, APDA has established small plots of grass –seeded pasture. These now stand out as brilliant examples. Therefore it is clear much needs to be done in environmental protection, grass re- seeding and assisting the Afar to re-establish lands protected as drought – grazing pasture.

Again, the menace of locusts has far from left the region although with heavy rains in many areas, the locust population is reduced.

### **4. Ongoing efforts to assist western cattle herders (Mille, Sifra, Uwwa, Awra)**

An NGO team in which APDA is leading the field work are continuing to treat animals, burn carcasses and feed remaining herds of families identified as close to destitution. Some hundreds of carcasses are burnt and thousands of animals treated. Animal diseases in the west are now reduced but spread to other parts of the region, particularly in the north – west districts of Dubte Woreda affecting both camels and goats.

Animal supplementary feeding while late in terms of the drought scenario is proving a great boost in milk supply and the beneficiaries are getting hands – on learning of the benefit of fodder, again, a great lesson for one and all in dealing with drought affected herds.

### **5. AWD (acute watery diarrhea) causing sporadic, constant trouble**

The outbreak in eastern Mille woreda spread to western Mille and troubled the district for almost 6 weeks. APDA health team in the area worked constantly to halt the spread. As of the past 10 days, there have been no cases in the area but the market town of Eli Waha and its surrounds was greatly affected. Throughout August, many of the major market - towns have had sporadic cases and some 8 deaths: Assaiyta, Dubte, Logya and in the last 4 days, 30 cases were reported in Yallo the market village close to Alamatta in southern Tigray.

Again, in the past 2 days, 4 cases were reported in rural locations in Awra Woreda, Zone 4. Uwwa, the neighboring woreda has also reported suspect cases.

APDA is anxious to re-group its health awareness teams and push the sanitation messages deeper and wider into the community. Soap production is now in full swing and the organization is about to set up outlets to sell soap cheaply in the rural settings.

## **Community development**

### **1. Community development workers' annual refresher training**

The program's community development workers depend on annual refresher training to increase their capabilities and likewise, the organization uses the training sessions to strengthen the various workers' resolve to make development changes in their respective communities. Currently, APDA is training the remaining 84 community teachers from the 239 teachers in the entire program and women extension workers from Uwwa and Awra. The women extension workers are taking their second training having joined the organization as community workers in 2006. It is energizing to see how these women have

developed as responsible community women over the year with a fired commitment to inspire more changes in their communities.

## **2. Intensifying the campaign against FGM and supporting women's rights in marriage**

APDA is increasing its team of harmful practices awareness coordinators by adding a Shiek to the group. Twenty eight women practicing female genital mutilation (FGM) in Dullassa, 15 in Ami Bara 20 in Mille have recently resolved, with the aid of their local religious leaders to stop performing the practice. The film APDA made of FGM practice and the dispute depicted in the film between a mother who wants to protect her daughter from it and the local FGM practitioner had a deciding effect on these women.

During Romadam, a team of awareness – raisers will take the film to a community remote in north – western Dubte Woreda where FGM is still practiced and where women/ girls are suffering immensely from unwanted and unsuitable marriages.

## **3. Extending EPI coverage in remote areas**

APDA primary health team assisted the Regional bureau of Health to gain a coverage in the remote communities in the recently – completed region - wide measles vaccination team health workers vaccinated in Talalak, Dawwe, the northern Dubte Woreda districts, Eli Daar, Kutubla, Afdeera and other districts. In these hard to reach areas, APDA was vaccinating communities that had not been vaccinated before. In addition, the organization has given the first round of regular vaccination (polio, measles, diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, hepatitis and influenza) to all the kebeles in Eli Daar reaching as far as areas near the Eritrean border with questionable security such as Alob and Garbo, Wahan and Daabu. In all cases, this was achieved by using up to 3 refrigerators operated with generators making ice as close as possible to the area and vaccines and ice going out in large cold boxes on camels.

## **4. Establishing community response to HIV and AIDS in Western Mille and Sifra**

APDA has launched a project facilitating the community to make a response to HIV and AIDS in these districts, particularly in the hamlets along the roadside and the market town of Sifra. The project involves the community fia'ama system in working out how to protect the family and the youth in particular from HIV and how to assist those affected by AIDS. In so doing, the project will open two activity centers for youth, one in Sifra and one in Darsa Gita. One of the major strategies the project will use is to develop a ground – swell of interest against the chewing of kaat, the amphetamine leaf that leads to unsafe social practices and fritters away the time and opportunity of the youth.

## **5. Rain water harvesting**

The organization is currently constructing a number of rain-water harvesting reservoirs (valley – closure dams, earth dams, cisterns and roof - harvesting) in Uwwa and Awra Woredas, Zone 4 aiming to strategically assist community education – there are a total of 45 community teachers in these 2 woredas and some these teaching sites are chronically drought – prone. Already 2 of these dams are constructed and work to establish roof – harvesting on a government school has begun. Similarly, APDA is preparing to begin construction in Mille and Sifra Woredas to harvest rain water through retention dams and birikuts (underground, roofed and cement – rendered cisterns). In all construction sites, the community involvement is vital and all beneficiaries are being facilitated to consider the aspects of drought cycle management applying them through community risk management. Therefore, APDA expects the community to use the water source for re-forestation, small – scale market gardening and so on. As the community is involved in cash – for – work in the construction, they will also take time to review there own response to HIV & AIDS as well as balancing gender in development.