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Update on the Critical Situation in Afar Region and Program Development Activities

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In summary:

Unexpected rain over a 5 – day period in the last week of October brought added relief to most of the highly drought – affected districts rain falling in almost all areas relieving the renewed threat of thirst and assisting shrub-growth. These districts had had a below – average rain from July to September and animal loss was extreme.

The region is now in ‘winter’ with temperatures up to the high 30’s in the day and falling to low 20’s at night. Winter rains of December have become notoriously unreliable being an almost total failure for the past 4 years. Therefore, there is concern that the beginning of pasture recovery now felt may be overtaken by a long dry season until expected rain of late March/ April.

Refugee influx/ internal displacement in northern Eli Daar is constant and the pressure on the local communities now high. In the last 2 months, over 150 families have fled from expected Eritrean army reprisals in border districts and are now settled on the outskirts of the Assab Road village of Su’ula, 55 kilometers south of Buure. Of 300 children screened by the government 1 week ago, 120 had severe malnutrition.

Measles has menaced several woredas in the past 6 weeks killing some. Of these cases, up to 60% in any affected community are teenagers and young adults as well as unvaccinated children. ‘Adda’ar, Mille, Dubte, Kori, Awra, Teeru and Sifra have been affected. In most incidence, the situation is now subsided.

a) Displacement and refugee influx in northern Eli Daar

Displaced people are coming from Daabu and Wahan, two kebeles on the border. They report while they are in Ethiopia, they had been coerced into giving asset – tax to the Eritrean government. Following the incident where their clan elder had been tortured and brutally murdered, his brother having escaped, they in fear had come south into Buure and on into the area of Su’ula where the community has welcomed them and there is space. Those coming from far distance came totally empty handed reporting that most of their livestock had died in drought or been confiscated by the Eritrean government. APDA along with their local leaders is trying to manage this large settlement with education, primary health and women extension assistance. The primary problem is nutrition but then the long terms issues recovery also need consideration.

The following is a summary of the overall picture of assistance in the ‘hot-spots’ of Afar Region:

District/ woreda	Coverage of Oct rain	Current situation	Activities in district: current and planned	Gaps in assistance
Eli Da'ar	None in Aba'a Less coverage north of Su'ula	Pasture poor north of Su'ula Aba'a community in Galablu/ Immino > 150 HHs displaced in Su'ula Total of 218 receiving SAM (severe acute malnutrition) treatment HH milk in few communities	Construction 4 ponds Animal feeding, treatment Sand dams Sanitation and hygiene support	Re-stocking/ recovery for around 120 HHs in Su'ula Shelter for around 90 HHs More water construction Reforestation Ongoing monitoring
Kori	All kebeles covered	Pasture patchy SAM treatment being given to 130 Measles affected 50 – 2 died Almost no HH milk	4 cisterns (cash for work) 2 ponds Supplementary animal feeding and treatment Sanitation and hygiene support Around 120 kilometers feeder road (cash for work) Sand dams Sanitation and hygiene support Restocking of 350 HHs including Mabay	Restocking/ recovery of estimated 700 HHs More water construction, road construction Reforestation
Biru	Teoh/ Hakkara no rain	Teoh/ Hakkara displaced to roadside Measles affected Soddonta and Teoh Some 80 requiring SAM treatment Grazing in most areas	Water tankering to displaced 2 cisterns (cash for work) Supplementary animal feed, treatment Sanitation and hygiene support	Restocking/ recovery of estimated 150 HHs More water construction Road construction Reforestation
Teeru	All kebeles Woreda basin flooded by Awra/ Goolina River	550 children receiving SAM treatment Woreda under productive safety net	Animal treatment/ animal feeding Sanitation and hygiene support Human vaccination	Recovery of destitute HHs
Mabay, Teeru	Rained	78 children receiving SAM treatment Affected by Measles Dirty water Almost no animals	Animal treatment/ animal feeding Restocking of 45 camels Restocking of 350 HHs along with Kori Road construction	Further need for restocking Wells Dams Reforestation
Northern Awra	Rain fell	Pasture fair 2 kebeles affected by measles	Animal treatment and feeding Human vaccination	More water construction Reforestation
Geega/ Dagaba – northern Dubte	Rain fell	Pasture recovered	Animal treatment and feeding Sanitation and hygiene support	More water construction, roads Restocking
Goolina	Rained	Pasture recovered Around 80 receiving SAM treatment	Human vaccination	Animal treatment
Eribte	Rained	Pasture patchy Drought – displaced community in admin center	Human vaccination in 2009	Water construction, road, reforestation

News of the APDA development program

1. Training health workers

A total of 40 health workers are now taking their second 3 months training course completing initial training: 20 from Uwwa and 20 from Sifra. Again, a further 45 new health workers are in training for the first 3 months: 10 from Gawwaani Woreda, 15 from Buramudayto, 3 from Mabay, 7 from Dagaba, 10 from Kori. In Kori and Mabay, this will strengthen existing work and in the other sites, this is APDA's first intervention in primary health. In Gawwaani and Buramudayto, health workers are intervening with the particular objective of supporting stopping FGM and providing treatment for those affected.

2. Women extension refresher training

65 of APDA's 161 women extension workers took refresher training for 1 month. These women are the backbone of the program effort to bring change in the household in favor of women. These amazing women are first and foremost making changes in their own households and leading the effort to stop female genital mutilation as well as promoting the rights of females in marriage.

3. Fighting harmful practices

The campaign to stop FGM has gone to several remote communities recently including Geega, Daaba and has been further repeated in Sifra. More religious leaders have been trained and the community, through discussion and watching APDA's films, has made decisions to stop harmful practices and formed community committees led by the religious leaders to monitor the decisions made. Again, the organization is in the process of producing a new film to promote gender – balance in the household.

4. Vaccination coverage

APDA is currently vaccinating in Goolina and Awra Woredas to support the effort to assure coverage against the 'childhood illnesses' and tetanus in reproductive women since they are the ones who must be cut by a local blade in the birthing process. Mille and 'Adda'ar woredas were similarly vaccinated in October. These activities represent the first of 3 rounds of vaccination given on 3 monthly intervals. APDA takes out refrigerators powered by generators assuring the cold chain and in the process of the campaign the health workers undertake health and nutrition surveillance as well as giving health messages.

5. Cooperative activities

Training continues to strengthen the community cooperatives and the cooperative facilitators in 11 woredas are offering a needed service in advising, sharing information and monitoring activities. Women income generating groups are increasing. The need to work harder on the development of a community – based economy that suits the pastoralists is clear.

6. Responding to HIV & AIDS

APDA's members have now had the opportunity to discuss in their respective workplace regarding how they will respond to HIV & AIDS. There is now an overriding agreement to HIV testing in the understanding that APDA will support the result with care for those found positive. Again, in the communities of 'Adda'ar, Sifra and Eli Da'ar youth and women in particular are making exemplary response led by their community leaders. Youth associations are now interacting on the issue through exchange visits and training each other in traditional dance and poetry creation.