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The Region in 'Alert' for Major Drought Emergency

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In summary:

Thirst, increasingly widespread animal diseases and significant, accompanying **herd loss**, pockets of infant and maternal **malnutrition** are being reported against the back-drop of universal community fear of hunger due to the **extreme hike of grain and general food prices**: all a prelude to actual widespread emergency. Aside from the 2 days of storms in western Afar Region affecting 'Adda'ar (former western Mille), Sifra, Uwwa, part of Awra, part of Teeru and pockets in Zone 3, the rest of the region has had no rain since late September.

1. Thirst

There is now extreme thirst in Eli Da'ar (north-east of the region) extending to adjoining communities in Kori (former north-western Dubte). Communities are sending desperate messages of their need for transported water. Communities of central eastern Eli Da'ar have moved their remaining animals some 50 kilometers west into the Immino valley where there is sub-surface water at the depth of only 2 meters. Their remaining women, children and elderly are in crying need of immediate water assistance. They must go up to a full day's walk for water and those supplies are on the verge of drying up. In Guluble Af, the community is again increasing with families coming to the roadside from the hinterland since their water – sources have dried up.

2. Animal diseases

All dry areas are reporting animal diseases: clearly related to the extremely poor condition of the pasture and therefore 'stress' related diseases. In northern Eli Daar, mange has broken out in goats. In Teeru, APDA sent immediate medicines and assisted in the treatment of ticks and lice and various infectious diseases including CCPP, CBPP, black leg, and pasteurelosis. Again, in Afdeera, particularly Aytu Ra'a and Yalle Bahe kebele cattle and sheep are dying at an accelerating rate due to extreme dry condition of pasture, now great distances to water. The disease outbreak apparently started in animals that had been brought into Afdeera from Teeru.

3. Human diseases and nutritional situation

Several areas in Awra and Digidiga and Dabayro in Teeru and in Galaaha, Diiyele and Geraaro in Mille Woreda have reported outbreak of whooping cough. Health workers undertaking vaccination identified acutely malnourished under – five year olds in Me'e Dolo and Hiilu kebeles in Eli Da'ar, areas close to the Djibouti border and again in 'Adda'ar Kebele in Sifra that borders onto Gur'Ale.

In Afdeera, 3 fast transmitted diseases are particularly troubling small children and the most weak in the community: chicken pox, mumps and influenza. People are highly weakened by the

fact that grain in their woreda is extremely expensive and also poorly available. Again, households are going up to 6 hours for water and temperatures are already in the 40's. On March 17th, APDA found several households clearly hungry. Children who had been or were sick with the above – mentioned outbreak were found to have acute malnutrition. Two trucks of relief grain arrived in the woreda administration center on March 15th.

There is grave concern that acute watery diarrhea will break out under such conditions of household vulnerability. There are unconfirmed reports of 2 child – deaths from an AWD – like sickness in Diyyele in Mille in early March and 3 cases from one household in Ayro Laf were treated in Dubte Hospital in the same period.

4. Acute crisis in the market

The entire pastoralist community is now in turmoil: grain prices have doubled and in some areas trebled while the pastoralists have no strong animals to present for purchase. Fifty kilograms of wheat has sold for a steady price of 110 to 120:00 ETB for some time. In early March, the price in Konnaba jumped up to 250:00 ETB in one week; in Afdeera to 400:00 ETB in Teeru to 300:00 ETB with 220:00 the lowest price offered in the region. It is clear, people are going to the market expecting one price and then unable to purchase and going home empty – handed. This requires immediate action in the most severely affected districts.

5. APDA's response plan and need for funding

Firstly, APDA will involve with the planned DPP & FSB – led assessment in the coming week. However, meanwhile the organization wishes to carry out the following activities in response to the reality so far seen on the ground:

- a) Begin tankering water at the earliest possible time to a total of 8,463 people in 7 sites in Eli Daar. All sites have birikuts (underground cisterns)
- b) To keep strict and constant surveillance in the community for evidence of AWD, malnutrition and other diseases responding, controlling and treating as necessary.
- c) Continue to keep make maximum effort to improve EPI (child vaccination) coverage in remote areas
- d) To give 'cerfam' (baby cereal) to identified malnourished children under 2 years and lentils to identified malnourished child-baring mothers
- e) Continue distributing animal medicines to local paravets to treat outbreaks to slow down the death of animals.

APDA is now launching a 6 – months food – for – work project wherein the community will construct ponds, birikuts, feeder – roads, rehabilitate pasture and plant grass seed and remove the weed 'democracy'. These activities will take place in the most affected kebeles of Awra, Uwwa, Sifra, 'Adda'ar and Mille Woreda.

6. Increasing numbers of refugees coming from Eritrea

Reports of new influx of refugees in Erebt, Afdeera, Soddonta and Buure. APDA is planning to send a truck to pick up refugees stranded in Afdeera where living conditions are particularly extreme and cost of food is now astronomical (50 kilograms of grain for 400:00).