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Community household food security and development activities

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The situation in summary:

The unseasonal rain that began late February continued through much of March and into April giving many districts pasture-revival. However, as now typifies the character of rain in Afar Region, storms were very localized leaving a dry, rainshadow area next to a rain-fed area. Animal diseases resulting from the herd being weakened by the long dry season from early September to February/ March went on to kill in notable numbers in many areas and it is now a vastly depleted herd that the Afar pastoralists have as assets that is the major cause for concern.

1. Rain distribution and pasture status

As mentioned above, periodic storms fell over a wide area of Afar Region from March into April, the short rainy season or '*suggum*.' The southern zones, 3 and 5 are now secure in pasture for the best part: Dullassa in the southern tip, parts of northern Gawwaani and Andiddo in Ami Bara are showing tentative recovery having been parched but this may well be limited being the season of extreme heat and dry up until July has started in full force. Another patch of weak recovery stretches through southern Mille, part of 'Adda'ar and on into northern Sifra and southern Uwwa. Here rain is distinctly less and herds remain scattered in other grazing districts. Geega in northern Dubte has become a hub for herds from all directions as repeated storms have revived this important grazing area. Dagaba to its north has less but at least some and Kori, the notorious dry district has quite some grazing in Musle but Ta'asuli and Teoh south of Afdeera remain dry. Teeru eventually had rain reaching as far as the highly parched Erebt Woreda in Zone 2. See below. Northern Eli Da'ar remains the district of greatest concern having only received a couple of brief showers and still having patchy thirst. Overall, the situation is that the pastoralists must still be selective in finding grazing and water but this short rainy season is more than it has been in a comparative short rainy season for the past 3 years.

In April, remarkably 4 kebeles of Mille Woreda were suddenly flooded as the waters of the Logya dam displaced them for 2 weeks. While they lost animals, there were no human fatalities as those trapped spent up to 10 nights sheltering above the flood waters in trees. These communities now have highly limited grazing land and thereby endangered livelihoods.

2. Malnutrition and human health

The most concerning and intense malnutrition remains among the refugee population from Eritrea living in northern Eli Da'ar, the camp in Assaita and Erbti as well as among the local community who are hosting them. This malnutrition is both in children and their mothers. In Geega, Dagaba, Kori and Teeru, the number affected by severe acute malnutrition (SAM) is diminishing as people regain a milk supply in the household. Currently APDA health workers are assisting around 650 SAM cases in collaboration with the Bureau of Health and UNICEF. This should lower further since the project to supplementary feed the remaining goats from almost destitute households continues. 2,000 households are benefiting and simultaneously getting treatment and vaccination for their animals. It is expected that a goat getting such feed will produce up to 1 ½ liters of extra milk per day and also gain strength to reproduce well.

With the past 3 years experience, the region is now going into the high alert season for acute watery diarrhea outbreak (AWD). To date, there has not been a re-occurrence of this deadly disease, the last cases having been seen in December but APDA's primary health team and the Bureau of Health is in full preparatory mode, particularly in the districts of previous notorious outbreak in Zone 3. While beginning EPI vaccination in Erbti, APDA found significant outbreak of whooping cough as well as identifying 120 SAM cases among under 5 year olds.

3. Erbti, a new relation for APDA

Erbti, adjoining Teeru, Afdeera, Barahale and 'Aba'ala in Zone 2 is under intense need, so APDA has discovered. A population of around 47,000, this once productive goat-herding district has been greatly reduced by 12 years of low rainfall and 3 years of almost no rain. Of its 13 kebeles, the herdsmen of Haytan and Alayta are the most severely affected, many of them living destitute on the periphery of the woreda administration town along with refugees from Eritrea. As mentioned above, while conducting the first of 3 rounds of EPI vaccination, health workers found 120 cases of severe acute malnutrition and herd –size through out the woreda is drastically low at a handful to 25 goats. The most urgent needs of the woreda include access to water (there is one well in the entire district and no other water development); a program combatting malnutrition as well as better distributed Afar education and health awareness. APDA found the community virtually unaware of hygiene basics but nevertheless very eager to learn. The woreda is now readily accessible along the newly – constructed Afdeera to Erebti road that will eventually link into 'Aba'ala and Tigray Region. Again, Magaale and 'Aba'ala on Erbti's south west are highly drought-stricken but due their proximity to the Tigray border, the food and market situation was not so critical.

4. APDA's current experience and perception into recovery

The following activities are perceived as working well to secure recovery:

- a) In the light of AWD vulnerability, APDA has just completed a project rehabilitating 11 hand-pumps and shallow wells; 2 boreholes; 2 springs and 3 rain-water harvesting cisterns. Some of these sources had been in disrepair for up to 4 years. All facilities were fenced and animal troughs installed where necessary. Strong sanitation committees associated with each water source were trained. Other water sources requiring rehabilitation have been identified.
- b) Through cash for work, communities in the most drought – affected districts of northern Dubte, northern Awra, Kori and Mabai in Teeru are constructing rain-water harvesting cisterns as well as planning to rehabilitate damaged pasture through re-seeding. Having tested water quality in cisterns or birikuts, it is now established that this water is indeed potable (bacteria free) since the cisterns is covered and cement-rendered. Too, the construction of 10 retention dams is planned increasing access to animal water and 10 shallow-wells where water can be accessed. In some parts, the project is challenged by poor road access but the communities are eagerly working to rectify that as in Geega and northern Awra. The Dagaba community is working to construct a new road linking their inland with Seekoyta on the periphery of the district.
- c) As mentioned above, a six – month project aiming to provide supplementary feed for milking goats in households with less than 15 remaining goats for 3 months along with veterinary service in pasture – parched districts such as Eli Daar where malnutrition is the highest. This will provide milk in the household: the project is assessing the milk increase as the project progresses. APDA health workers are supporting this project with ongoing nutrition and disease surveillance among the most vulnerable communities. In Logya, the urban hub of urban to rural disease transmission is gaining 6 exemplary latrine blocks that open defaecation in the town be reduced.

The above strategy has notable gaps as follows:

- a) Animal medications and vaccination need to be much more readily available to the pastoralist community at an affordable rate.
- b) Re-stocking in the most highly devastated communities such as northern Eli Da'ar, parts of Dagaba, Kori, Erbti and 'Adda'ar where the community has become highly engaged in charcoal production is vital to overall recovery as the traditional coping mechanism of re-distributing wealth is highly damaged in these areas.

- c) More water reservoirs are needed to make water more accessible.
- d) The vast grazing plains of Uwwa and Awra need rehabilitating

5. Using Afar literacy and human capacity as major strategies in stopping harmful practices

To further the already 5 – year effort in stopping FGM/ C in Zone 3, a project employing 30 literacy facilitators in each of 10 kebeles of Dullassa, Ami Bara and Buurimudayto is beginning. These facilitators will work in tandem with women extension workers supported by a strong community committee so that maximum community dialogue will be generated for deliberate action.

In Assaita and Afambo, APDA has reviewed the progress in stopping FGM/ C with the community leadership to find in Afambo (in the 5 accessible kebeles – there are still 2 kebeles that are very remote and as yet not accessed), the practice has stopped all together but in Assaita, the ‘lesser practice’ of clitorrectomy is mostly performed but the dialogue is now open to stopping all together.

6. Making progress with the Mille Emergency Obstetrics Center

After a lapse in construction activity, progress is being made to complete the main building in Mille to house 28 in-beds; hospital function and operating rooms as well as a learning room for the patients. The overseas doctors/ midwives’ facility is almost built and it remains to build local staff facilities as well as adequately fence the premises. The overseas network supporting this venture is preparing a voluntary obstetrician to begin with the project in January 2010 and is interested in gaining voluntary support from midwives. Establishing waiting areas in 8 outlying woredas for mothers at risk is major part of the project.

7. Annual training upgrade staff

As of early May, training began in earnest to give all APDA’s current 176 program teachers upgrading training. In the first 2 months, those teaching Afar literacy alone are being trained and will be tested to see their ability to go on a teach Level 1 of non-formal education. As of July, non-formal education teachers will be trained. Many of these are studying distance education to increase their grades as well. The Bureau of Education has placed a person in the training and APDA has improved and revised its curriculum with the help of a voluntary educationist.

Women extension workers are also beginning their annual upgrading training in 3 separate sessions to accommodate for them all. This year, the women will revise and learn data collection and improve reporting systems so that APDA can be more accurate regarding reporting on safe motherhood activities.

8. Preparing to listen to and incorporate the voice of youth

The organization is planning to hold a youth conference in mid-June bringing together youth representatives from around 19 woredas facilitating them to meet in dialogue on issues they perceive as important including response to the threat of HIV as well as living with AIDS; to celebrate and to enjoy together culturally as well as to gain impetus to be better organized within the framework of the region. The woredas incorporated are all those APDA has a program presence in as well as Yallo and Goolina who specifically raised their difficulties in dealing with growing HIV transmission to APDA.

9. Working to improve the household economy

An information center supporting the community in training, market information and networking is almost constructed in Logya. This center will utilize media as well as the internet and is expected to link community enterprises with such facilities as cross-border marketing to improve their market uptake as well as lead to a more consolidated market on handicrafts and so on.

10. Networking with our partners and Afar overseas

In April/ May, APDA enjoyed a very worthwhile exchange from visiting partners as well as having the opportunity to enter their discussion forum in Europe on completing and ongoing projects, climate change, progress with stopping FGM/ C and other issues including joining Germany’s Kirkentag. Also opportunity was taken to meet up with Afar communities in Europe hoping to consolidate the effort to work on the many issues undermining Afar pastoralist development in a practical way.