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Update on drought situation and development activities:

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Drought and emergency

1. Update on the current main rainy season, July to September

While rains in July were late and erratic, August rains have been more widespread and consistent. In fact, most of the region, barring the far north - west has had average rains for the month including Eli Daar in the north – east, the previously reported dry and thirsty Woreda. In the north – west, Barahale and eastern Konnaba eventually got the first rain of the season in September while western Konnaba and Dallol on the Eritrean border remain dry and drought - bound.

Indeed, the Awash River system has flooded causing disaster in 4 southern woredas: in Dulacha, 1,800 people are displaced; in each of Ami Bara, and Gaawane respectively, 6,000 people are displaced and in Buramudayto 10,000 people fled from rising floods as per Afar Regional DPP & FS Bureau assessment figures.

2. Current condition of the herd

Condition of animals is currently optimal aside from those from districts where dry conditions persisted until early August and into September: Eli Daar and Musle on the north – easterly side and the above mentioned districts in the north – west of the region. In August, APDA completed an extremely timely project supplementary feeding 20,000 goats in Eli Daar woreda for 2 months. This succeeded in keeping alive the remaining milking goats in all – but destitute households in the district until the rain did fall.

3. Human disease and nutrition

With the advent of rain in much of the region, milk is returning to the household thereby securing improved health in children and child – baring mothers in particular. As is expected, malaria has sharply increased in most districts with a fresh outbreak of falciparum malaria in several districts causing alarm.

4. Flood emergency response appeal

While the government is able to bring emergency food and medical supplies for displaced people, APDA is looking to assist some 5,000 families whose homes including household possessions were swept away by floodwaters in the Middle Awash. Assistance is required as follows:

- a) Household kit of essentials for 2,500 families to include cooking pot, eating tray, bucket, cups, knives and so on
- b) Traditionally made mats to reconstruct homes for 2,500 families – 6 mats per family.

Following a joint visit to the flood areas that involved consultation with concerned regional government officials, Ethiopian Pastoral Forum has provided APDA with 20,100 ETB for the purchase and distribution of mosquito nets and anti-malarial drugs.

5. Boosting the region's vaccination coverage

APDA has succeeded in establishing full vaccination coverage in Teeru and Awra Woredas in Zone 4, 2 woredas that had no rural primary health service. From June to early September, the organization took teams of health workers in walking to the extremes of land giving under 12 months old 3 rounds of polio and DPT (diphtheria, tetanus and whooping cough) as well as BCG against tuberculosis and measles for all children under 5 years. The teams also gave tetanus vaccine to child bearing girls and women in 3 rounds. This was an enormous feat of cold – chain logistics with refrigerators and generators placed strategically in rural sites as well as the massive logistics to supply teams of 55 health workers and recorders for 15 days walking. In fact, the health workers discovered that around 90% of the populations in these districts had never had any form of vaccination before. As of September, APDA is seeking to repeat this effort in Uwa and Yallo, another 2 woredas that have not previously had any primary health access.

Since the beneficiaries have not previously known health care, APDA is supporting this activity with massive awareness – raising using local leadership pressure, the organization musical band and drama group and Afar language radio programs to de-mystify vaccines. Afar women believe that the tetanus vaccine will render them sterile and that child vaccine accelerates disease. Both the above-mentioned projects in all 4 woredas are part of drought – response projects aiming to improve the health of mothers and infants.

6. Afar Pastoral Development Forum News

After the official launching of the forum on April 2006, the taskforce is now preparing the ground that will make the forum play its role. The roles and responsibilities of the coordinator are defined and now a program coordinator is recruited with the financial support from Development Fund Norway and assigned as secretariat for the forum. With the support of Strategic Alliance Partners, office equipments and furniture are fulfilled and APDA has provided an office in Logya. The forum is now based in Afar and the secretariat will commence its full function soon. Up until now, ten organizations have signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and expressed their commitment to work with the forum.

7. The newly – formed forum on non-formal education in Afar Region

Non-Governmental organizations working in Afar region with particular focus on alternative basic education (ABE) came together with the Regional Education Bureau and created a forum on July 10th 2006. This first consultative meeting has identified key issues of concern towards addressing the “Education for All” motto and that of MDG II in the region. Towards this end, a taskforce composed of the following organizations was formed.

1. Afar Region Education Bureau
2. Afar Language Development Institute
3. Afar Capacity Building Bureau
4. UNICEF
5. APDA
6. Kelem
7. EMERDA

The taskforce has conducted series of meetings and developed MoU. The second consultative meeting is tentatively planned for October 26 – 27/2006. UNICEF is in support of this initiative.

Priority issues identified for future intervention were

- a) Government related: Guideline, manual, standard, certifications (accreditation), and curriculum;
- b) Facilitators related: educational background, qualification, turnover and training;
- c) Information exchange: with focus on M&E and reporting, planning and implementation;
- d) Community mobilization: public involvement, awareness and students participation;
- e) Integration of ABE with formal schooling program.

8. APDA's highest literacy/ non-formal education coverage yet

APDA is in the last lap of giving 2 months refresher training to all organization community teachers. The second session of 2 months training is near completion. All up, there are currently 226 community teachers in 14 of the region's 29 woredas. With the opening of a new project supporting 10 teachers in Sifra, the total will reach 236 once that project district has completed the project launching 4 months literacy campaign and the initial 2 months teacher training for the newly selected 10 teachers.

9. Increasing the number of women extension workers in the program

A further 35 women extension workers (a particular role given to literate community women to mobilize and teach women and children life skills that include stopping harmful practices) completed their initial training in August: 18 for Uwa woreda; 12 for Awra and 5 for kebeles in eastern Mille Woreda. APDA now has 133 women equipped and active facilitating household changes to improved health and well – being.

10. International Afar Development Conference – Ottawa

Along with Afar from Djibouti, USA and Canada, the regional President and Afar Minister in Federal Parliament, APDA participated in a highly invigorating internet – staged conference on August 3rd arranged by the Afar community in Ottawa and Toronto. Prominent Canadian human rights activists contributed to the lively discussion, along with an Afar activist in France. Having focused on deteriorating situation endured by Afar in Eritrea, the conference throws open the arena to seek protection if not a halt to atrocities metered out to civilians there. In fact, discussion brought attention to the plight of youth fleeing militarization to become refugees in Ethiopia. Conference delegates having signed a petition abhorring atrocities committed against civilians in Eritrea, the conference called on the international authorities to urgently address the matter. Similarly, the conference concluded by establishing a commission to follow up the matter.

11. Current status of newly arrived Eritrean refugees in Afar Region

Offices of the regional government have completed registering people fleeing forced army conscription in Eritrea arriving in Barahale and Dallol in the north and the towns of Logya, Semara and Dubti in the center of the region. Around 12,000 people have been registered of whom the greater numbers are young males. APDA plans to publish more detailed information in the near future.