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Update on relief and development activities:

April 4th, 2007

1. The status of the Acute Watery Diarrhea outbreak in Afar Region

1. Current situation in the region

As of early April, AWD is now greatly reduced in the region with sporadic cases in Gawwaani, Buramudayto and Ami Bara, all in Zone 3 where the disease was particularly severe in February. In these woredas, the health authorities have not dismantled treatment centers as the odd few cases still require perfusion and isolation. During March, repeated outbreak occurred in Data Bahari/ Magenta/ Tangay Koma districts of Dubte Woreda – some 20 to 50 kilometers south east from Dubte town and in Mamole, Geherto and Gaali Faagi kebeles of Assayita Woreda. In Afembo, occasional cases were treated.

2. Measures taken

Barring Ami Bara Woreda, APDA has sent teams of health workers to all outbreak sites and currently a team is working in Data Bahari district, Dubte Woreda. These mobile health workers seek out cases in the rural settlements, refer for perfusion treatment as needed to treatment centers and raise awareness on hygiene, water and area sanitation distributing soap, water treatment material and teaching re-hydration. This has resulted in the community taking action to slow down the spread of disease and lessen death. Some 5 health workers fought to halt AWD in Gawwaani and Buramudayto, treating 1,684 cases and home educating some 20,000 people in just on 8 days at the height of the epidemic. The organization's musical band has and continues to play a vital role in raising mass – awareness in rural sites of all outbreak districts.

In addition, APDA has all but completed constructing 5 community latrines and rehabilitated 10 water sources. The organization has acquired a soap making machine and is about to begin producing soap aiming that each of the organization's 574 community development workers (community teachers, health workers and women extension workers) will sell cost - price soap to their respective communities from their homes.

It remains to keep up the level of awareness to truly affect change in hygiene and sanitation practices in order to stamp out the disease fearing it could be established as endemic.

2. Awaiting the short rains (March to April)

While there have been a few specific storms in March and seemingly threatening storm – clouds, this important rainy season remains to be established in the vast part of the region barring the southern parts of Awash/ Fantale. Thus herding families are now highly scattered and in the foothills of the Ethiopian Highlands along the western regional border as well as consuming the

remaining stubble of the few cotton plantations (much of the cotton areas in the Lower Awash are now taken over by sugar planting). The vast grazing lands in the hinterland are dry awaiting the rain. In short, many areas in Zone 1, 4 and 5 report **fear of pending drought** if rain does not fall in the coming weeks. Temperatures are already well into the mid 40's in much of the region.

3. Grazing, water and nutrition situation

The vast areas of Zone 1: north – west Dubte Woreda, central Mille Woreda and Eli Daar Woreda report **alarming thirst**. In north – west Dubte Woreda (Kori District), people are now left with only 2 water sources and are walking up to 18 hours to reach them. In the Eli Daar border area with Eritrea, the water source in Daabu is now dry – the first time in 5 years. Water is extremely scarce in much of Awra, Zone 4 and parts of Uwwa.

Since the pasture is tinder – dry, communities are now highly scattered and education for APDA's mobile teachers is a massive challenge. Four government schools in Sifra, zone 1 are deserted as the community has moved on. Generally, household milk is extremely low. Camel disease is killing camels in the Yeldi grazing area of Mille woreda. This is considered to be linked to poor pasture.

The situation reported of malnutrition in Gawwaani in the February update has received some reprieve: the government has sent faffa to the woreda and an NGO contribution of NIDO milk powder and baby food has been distributed. This will suffice for a short while only.

4. Intensifying the effort to establish a culture of community marketing

A Swedish specialist in community development is currently assisting APDA to get a grip on how to secure marketing activities in the pastoral society that marketing cooperatives do not become exploitive. This is an exciting challenge in the face of the resounding need that the Afar society does become active in the market and yet remains a strong community force. Baseline research is being collected and the idea is that eventually, the community will have the maximum benefit of cross-border marketing.

5. Female education conference

95 people from regional and woreda offices of Education, Islamic Council, Afar Language Development, Women's Affairs and Capacity Building as well as clan elders, kebele leaders and APDA rural site development committee representatives met for 4 days in February discussing why there is such a low female participation in the Afar pastoral society. Having defined that parental and social attitude, total lack of awareness raising and follow-up in the region as well as early marriage and the household working expectancy on Afar females are the main contributing factors, the following recommendations were made:

- a) High level of awareness – raising should be carried out by APDA, government and more than anyone, the Islamic leadership and those girls/ women who have learnt. The latter should serve as an example.
- b) Government should create a law that all children must learn including girls
- c) Female Afar teachers must be increased whether from the government or from APDA
- d) There must be a family law for Afar Region that states the states the female should not marry under 18 years and she should marry according to her choice.
- e) When the government constructs a school, they should do so where there is a water supply
- f) The radio station that is constructed in the region should be operational as fast as possible to make awareness on education and female participation.
- g) The thinking that education a female child is of no value since she marries and goes to her husband and the value of her education does not stay with her parents must be changed.

h) There should be incentive created for female education.

APDA was particularly requested to select the woreda with the lowest female education participation and run an awareness campaign there leading to a local government/ community meeting in which the government should instruct local leadership they will be punished if females do not attend school. From learning in one woreda, the organization should then take this to another woreda.

6. The campaign against FGM and other harmful practices

APDA is now widening and strengthening its campaign, aiming to stop FGM in all program areas within 3 years with the help of a second project just launched. Both projects maximize the participation of the local Islamic leaders and work directly with FGM practitioners leading them to stop the practice. Register of all practitioners is being kept in order to systematically obliterate the practice. While many communities prefer to stop FGM (female genital mutilation) and continue with a 'lesser' practice of removing the clitoris, there are some communities who have chosen to stop it altogether. While discussing this, the program also discusses the need for women to have rights in traditional marriage. There is some progress on this and a far greater awareness of the great range of socio-economic problems this causes. Again, religious leaders are in the forefront of this discussion.

7. Consolidating efforts to resolve conflict

APDA is currently assembling a team and carrying out baseline data collection in order to begin a new project centered around conflict resolution within the Afar society and in partnership with similar teams in Amhara Region since there are ongoing raids from the Amhara side that result in conflict. This project will mainstream awareness – raising to control/ stop 4 practices that lead to conflict: revenge killing, 'absuma' or cross –cousin marriage that views the girl as a form of property, chewing kaat and charcoal production. These issues are also taken up in other parts of APDA's program and part of ongoing community teaching. In the coming 6 months, the project will facilitate the community to find resolution to traditional conflict in 2 chronically troubled districts.

8. Assisting the refugee community

APDA is beginning vocational training in carpentry, electricity, mechanics and the like in the town of Logya for selected youth from some 300 Eritrean Afar living in the area. The organization is also encouraging the 3 youth associations in the town to mobilize the refugee youth.

9. More people captured and held in Eritrea

The fate of the 8 Ethiopians captured with the tourists in Barahale, north – west of the region who were subsequently released in Eritrea remains unknown. In late February, Eritrean military captured 2 brothers living in Daabu, northern Eli Daar, taking them into Eritrea. Daabu is 30 kilometers into Ethiopia from the border. As we know of refugees now in Afar Region who have suffered the extra-ordinary torture of underground imprisonment excluding any light or sound where the prisoner is kept in the sitting position without movement, APDA is extremely concerned for the well-being of all these people and also hundreds of other Eritrean citizens reported missing.

10. APDA's own website

APDA is in the process of establishing a homepage at www.apdaethiopia.org that will link with sister sites in Sweden, Australia and Canada that also deal with development issues.

The full document of the January 29th Afar Development Conference will be published in English and Afar and available in the next 2 months. The organization is also producing a documentary film of its best practices in mobile health and education.

11. Development forum news

The Afar Pastoral Development Forum (APDF) meeting in February decided to strengthen NGO membership participation by holding exchange visits hosted by each member organization starting with EMERDA in Dulassa Woreda, Zone 3 – date to be fixed. Again, a directory of all pastoralist development actors will be established containing organization profile, contacts, activities in Afar Region according to type, duration and site. APDF along with Ethiopian Pastoral Forum and APDA will host a meeting on April 3rd of all NGOs discussing the possible future of an European Union – funded joint grant for pastoral development.

The Afar non-formal education forum also met in late February agreeing on terms of reference and an action plan for the forum.

Both forums plan to meet on dates to be fixed in May.