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Drought – the crisis deepens and development news

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**The deadly combination of drought and locust plague leading to acute lack of household food security is manifesting in a whole new AWD outbreak in wide areas of central Afar Region.** There are critical shortages in dealing with this mounting crisis. This bulletin is subsequent to the May 23<sup>rd</sup> update circulated. As mentioned, drought districts are as follows:

- Zone 1: Eli Daar, north west Dubte, Mille and Sifra
- Zone 2: Barahale, Aba'ala parts of Dallol and Eribti
- Zone 4: Awra, Uwwa and Teeru
- Zone 5: Dawwe, Talalak

Other woredas including Yallo and Goolina in Zone 4 and Daali Fagi in Zone 5 are described as moderately affected.

## **1. Massive household and herd migration severely weakens the Afar cattlemen**

Drought in much of central – western Afar Region has forced over 50% of the cattle herd in Awra, Uwwa, Sifra, western Mille, Aba'ala and Barahle to migrate either further west into Amhara Region and Tigray Region as for the latter 2 mentioned woredas or east to the banks of the Awash River. As never seen before, desperate Afar herdsman are selling what they can of the herd and renting Izuzu trucks to transport the remaining cattle to the Chefa Valley in Amhara Region.

Herders from the locust – stripped pastures of Dawwe in Zone 5, Geega and Dagaba of northwestern Dubte woreda have also joined the migration.

Where these tired and hungry drought migrants have congregated in the long stretches of grasslands in eastern Mille between the Awash River and Issa – occupied territory, they have fallen victim to acute watery diarrhea (AWD) as of the last 10 days.

## **2. Hunger in the household**

As of 1 week ago, mother/ child supplementary food as well as 'safety net' food began to be delivered into the woreda administration centers after a gap of almost 3 months. Most households have been without any significant milk since December. This food distribution came too late for many who took the ultimate coping strategy of long – distance migration as of early May. Throughout the most drought affected districts, child – bearing mothers and infants are clearly greatly compensated.

Again, food distributions do not reach into the far hinterland without road access where the remaining Afar herds and herdsman are trying to resist this extra-ordinary extended dry and

burning hot season in places like Mabay in eastern Teeru, adjoining Daaba, Dagaba, Kori in north – west Dubte Woreda.

These people are struggling to reach their animals to the market to sell in order to buy grain at drought – inflated prices. Having conducted vaccination among them in the last week, APDA witnessed a clear deterioration in nutrition among pregnant, breast – feeding and mothers and their infants among them as well as an alarming narrowing of their options in coping.

### **3. Deteriorating herd condition**

While there has been attempt to rid the goat and cattle herd of external parasites, other internal diseases due to nutritional compensation are spiraling in many districts. The landscape is beginning to become littered with carcasses.

### **4. From household hunger to AWD**

In early June, acute watery diarrhea was so alarming to the grossly – understaffed Daali Faagi Woreda medical team that they asked APDA to send a team of health workers. 27 health workers have taken all but 3 weeks to clear the woreda of the outbreak and are currently working to clear the outbreak in neighboring Dawwe woreda where 14 people died in 10 days. Meanwhile, a migrant from Daali Faagi apparently introduced the outbreak into communities on the banks of the Awash River in Eastern Mille where some 28 people have died in the past 8 days – of the deaths, 80% were from drought – migrants and again, 85% women and children. Using a further 25 health workers, APDA is trying to control the outbreak that extends some 85 kilometers from communities adjacent to Adayto to Burahumego only 8 kilometers before Logya. The Awash River, the chief source of their water, is apparently highly contaminated.

Again, in Afembo where migrating cattle herders have congregated on the last pastures of the Lower Awash Basin, the disease has affected some 12 people in the past 4 days. Other woredas such as Sifra, Uwwa and Awra are reporting scattered cases that are gradually increasing in number. The association here is the poor household food status.

### **5. Thirst**

Parts of Barahale in Zone 2 are under extreme thirst while the reported situation in north – west Dubte is partly relieved after a localized storm on June 4<sup>th</sup>. However, the daytime temperatures are extreme and what rain fell will fast evaporate.

### **6. Major gaps in response**

- a) Funds to support health workers and women extension workers' campaign response in curbing AWD is currently exhausted (intensive house to house health education to prevent and cope with the outbreak as well as first – line case treatment). Need for urgent logistics and medicines support in combating AWD.
- b) Animal supplementary feed to support a minimum of 9,000 milking cows in 3,000 highly affected households.
- c) Veterinary medicines and logistics support to mobilize paravets
- d) Protein food supplements for child – bearing mothers and infants in remote areas. While some assistance has been received, the need is widening.

## **Community development**

### **1. Refresher training for teachers**

Currently, some 150 community teachers from some of the most drought – affected parts of the program are using the interim period before the rains fall (expected main rainy season in mid-

July) to gain further knowledge in annual refresher training. The training is carefully reviewing strategies to prevent school drop-outs and to increase female education enrollment as well as grading the teachers up a further grade enabling them to teach grades 2 and 3 in the mobile, non-formal program. APDA is earnestly seeking school – feeding assistance for its non-formal education program.

Training is taking place in the recently – constructed community training center.

## **2. Intensifying the campaign against FGM**

Working through local religious leaders, APDA is increasing its coverage and intensity of discussion to stop FGM. A thorough discussion was recently held in Uwwa and Awra as well as parts of Mille. Using a strategy of establishing associations of literate women who are against FGM empowering them to income generate, whole communities of Afar are starting to move toward a new outlook on female health and rights. Women extension workers remain key to keeping the momentum of the campaign at the community base.

## **3. Extending EPI coverage in remote areas**

Using the strategy of setting up a generator – powered fridge under a tree, APDA has extended EPI coverage to include the otherwise inaccessible parts of north-west Dubte Woreda and Mabay in Teeru. Through health workers walking camels out from the refrigerator with the cold chain, communities are receiving their first – ever vaccinations.

## **4. Consolidating community cooperatives**

APDA has conducted a thorough community data collection on market involvement, the findings of which will be presented at a regional conference on July 5<sup>th</sup>. Meanwhile, existing community animal marketing cooperatives linked to APDA are undergoing intense training to overcome identified weaknesses. These community cooperatives are establishing a diverse market – base as well as fulfilling the original objective of providing improved local access to market in order to improve household economy.

## **5. Vocational training for Eritrean refugees and youth**

Some 80 youth, many of them refugees in the Logya/ Assayita/ Dubte environs are involving in a variety of trade – training courses including computer repair, electricity and wood-work, mechanics, making of clay – bricks, leather work and Thai-dying of clothes. This will increase the Afar involvement in artisan activities, areas almost solely dominated by non- Afar in the region.

## **6. Conflict resolution**

APDA is now part – way to securing a traditional resolution to conflict in Ami Bara (Zone 3) and Uwwa Woredas (Zone 4). Once the process is complete, APDA will facilitate the community in securing the traditionally decided compensation to assure such tension does not re-occur.

## **7. Afar Education Development Platform**

The May meeting decided that there should be a regional education conference including all the woredas and the government in order to reach the Millennium Development Goals that Ethiopia has set. Too, it was agreed that the region needs to develop its own guidelines for non-formal education.