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Drought Relief and AWD Response and Development News

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As of July 2nd, the main rainy season of July to September began in much of the region bringing the fresh green of new pasture growth. However, hundreds of cattle in the highly drought – affected western belt of the region succumbed to the cold of the rain leaving the land with the latest crisis: in parts, a carpet of carcasses.

Having spent the past 2 months grazing the remaining herd along the Awash Basin in the east or west in the Amhara Region, pastoralist families have now mostly returned to their land in the west of Mille, Sifra, Uwwa and Awra. It is clear, the herd in many households is now critically small. Recovery is going to be a long, hard road.

1. Rain pattern to date

Consistent rain began in early July in much of the region. However, there are still where drought conditions are far from breaking. In Teeru, the north – eastern woreda of Zone 4 has rain as far as Allaalu including Digidiga and Namma 'Ari but further on to the Teeru Basin, the landscape is totally dry and still subject to the burning winds of 'Hagay'. The actual basin on the western side has the flood –waters of the Goolina and the Awra Rivers' watershed. Communities have fed from that but had to go vast distances to find grazing since the surrounding districts remain under drought. Amid this, AWD has broken out in the woreda. See below.

Again, in Eli Daar in the north east of the region, rain is extremely patchy and most areas remain under drought.

2. Herd loss and efforts to assist the remaining herds

Herd loss has been particularly severe in Zone 4 and the western parts of Zone 1. A recent household assessment in Koffaburun kebele of Uwwa found that in 63 households a total of 131 cattle remain and 388 goats giving a household average of 2 cows per household and 6.1 goats. Cattle losses are 90% of the original herd. The mighty task now is burning carcasses as well as halting disease – spread in the remaining herd. APDA is mobilizing local paravets treat and the community to burn carcasses in the worst – hit areas. Already some hundreds of cattle carcasses are burnt and disease ranges from cattle pneumonia, pastoralosis, foot and mouth disease and internal parasites. This campaign as started some 10 days ago is operating along side a second effort to supplementary feed the remaining breeding animals of devastated households.

3. Human disease and hunger

While goats will begin to produce more milk now with available pasture, cattle will need a considerable recovery phase. Therefore household milk is now at best scant. Wheat grain

distribution has begun in earnest in all woredas distributing 3 months rations at one time. Grain prices are now plummeting. There are lists of severely affected child – bearing mothers and infants. APDA is assisting those identified through health workers and women extension workers. Where AWD is now reducing, bacterial dysentery is on the rise drinking water now contaminated with carcasses.

4. AWD (acute watery diarrhea) peaked and is now falling

Due to the movement of cattle herders away from the Awash River basin and that the river began to carry flood – waters, AWD along the banks dissipated in late June but arose further west in western Mille, Sifra, Uwwa and Awra as drought migrants returned to their homelands and finally lodging its appearance in Teeru by mid – July. In July, APDA has had health workers campaigning to halt the spread in Western Mille, Uwwa, Awra and finally in Teeru. Some 61 deaths were seen in the first few days diminishing to a sporadic outbreak as of July end. In the east, the disease greatly affected the community isolated between the terminal bends of the Awash, the Kutubla people killing 25 people in mid July. This was sparked by the extremely low level of the Awash during June leaving the community to drink from stagnated pools.

In tackling this now 8 months outbreak (the disease first appeared in Afdeera in November 2006), the issue of both rural and urban sanitation is confronting. The overriding need for potable water is clear. The Awash and the Mille were flowing poison for the months of May and June causing the massive surge of the disease in June/ July. APDA has now constructed 6 exemplary public latrines and wants to consolidate their management with the view to repeating these constructions in other needy urban areas. Too, the organization has begun making soap using an electric machine and aims to sell soap through all the APDA field development workers. Again, the organization has rehabilitated 13 damaged wells.

Aside from continuing the level of awareness in the rural community and increasing latrine construction and securing potable water, then the great challenge in the region is urban sanitation. The situation of mixed cultures living together, a highly commercial – driven community as well as a strong culture of ‘kaat’ chewing describes a people who are very difficult to mobilize and the build awareness into. All the major towns of the region have AWD.

5. Floods

With the Awash and its tributaries now running at flood level, people who are annually affected by flood and others are again affected/ under threat. Buramudayto woreda is highly affected with at least 6 kebeles flood – bound and parts of Gawwaane under threat. Again, households from 2 kebeles of Dubte Woreda just south of the newly – constructed dam on the top of the town of Logya were isolated by flood – waters as the dam tunnel was unable to take the excessive water of the Awash. APDA and other organizations assisted these households with food and cooking utensils.

Community development

1. Refresher training for teachers

With such a large education program, APDA continues to give refresher training to the community teachers, now in a second training session. These second session teachers are those from the less drought – affected areas along the Awash River Basin, a further group of 84 teachers, 150 teachers having been trained in the first 2 months.

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. Another challenge the education program is thinking through is that of establishing community – based and run boarding schools so that herding children can continue beyond grade 5.

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

2. Intensifying the campaign against FGM

APDA is now planning to train a further 36 literate Afar women as women extension workers: 18 from Sifra and from Teeru. This will bring up the number of such women in the APDA community development team from 139 to 175. All women are salaried and like their health worker and community teacher colleagues, receive annual refresher training. These women are frontline in the campaign against FGM and for pastoralist women to get rights in traditional marriage. They work with the community committees against harmful practices, advocate for the stopping of harm to women and counsel women/ girls affected by the harming traditions. Their work is a broad job of mobilization, intervention to assist women in need and advocacy.

Organization – trained traditional birth attendants (TBAs) are the other big asset in this struggle. APDA again trains and then gives refresher training to TBAs, choosing the ones that deliver the largest number of babies in the community. In the process of the training, the women identify and agree to stop 6 traditions that harm the mother in the birthing process, one of which is FGM. APDA now has around 450 TBAs it has registered as trained that are re-supplied for each delivery and from whom APDA takes reports. Again, there are 60 FGM ex-practitioners that now monitor the stopping of FGM and report to APDA.

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. This campaign is up to round 3.

4. Strengthening the economic base in the pastoralist household

4.1 Regional conference on cooperatives – results and recommendations of assessment

From July 5th to 7th, APDA hosted some 220 people representing all woredas and the regional Bureau of Cooperative Management in a conference regarding the status of cooperatives in the region. The findings of a recent assessment were presented revealing in general that cooperatives are poorly trained and facilitated an consequently management is extremely poor and function left to question. The regional bureau state that of 160 cooperatives formed in the region, only 16 were functioning at any acceptable level.

Recommendations that the conference agreed upon in brief were:

- a) Need for laws and regulations appropriate to the pastoralist lifestyle
- b) Need to establish long – term loans rather than the present culture of short –term ‘help’ type measures. This includes the need fr appropriate pastoralist banking and micro-financing institutions
- c) Need to stabilize and develop animal markets in the region to the pastoralist’s favor.
- d) Rural – based cooperatives need strengthening through greater cooperation between the government and NGOs using either the facility of a focal person or forum.

- e) Rural people need to first access simple family – level income generating activities teaching them diversity and the use of the market
- f) There is a lack of professional people within the pastoralist society to implement cooperative activities. There is a need for an annual regional conference overcoming organizational and financial problems of cooperatives
- g) All cooperatives need to benefit from at least one member getting a solid accounting training
- h) Need to lobby and advocate for rural cooperatives that they gain a link to the profitable exporters.

APDA believes this conference and the findings of the assessment reconfirm the organization's request to establish a body that will a) serve the community through advocacy and lobbying, information dispersion, developing a shared interest between like-minded cooperatives and training and b) seek out with the government a more appropriate system for cooperatives in the Afar Region.

4.2 Facilitating revolving fund with pastoral women

APDA is currently handling a basic fund for a group of 20 women who are from the Geega society (Dubte woreda) that they undertake individual income generating activities on a revolving basis. This should assist these families to gain drought – recovery as well as teaching the women to be more economically mobile.

4.3 Strengthening animal marketing cooperatives

The six marketing cooperatives that APDA has so far established are now gaining strength through training as well as the services of audit and management direction.

4.4 Completing a survey on the viability of cross – border marketing

APDA has recruited consultants to undertake a survey on the viability of cross-border marketing aiming to assist the community to gain a wider market. This should be concluded soon and be further information to that already collected of the market and cooperative status in the region.

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. These activities are going well.

6. Conflict resolution

APDA is continuing the process to secure 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. In Uwwa also, the organization is party to a process to establish settlement between the neighboring Amharas and the Afar.

7. Afar Pastoralist Development Forum

The Forum is creating a directory of all its members. Many profiles are collected but further cooperation to collect the remainder is requested. The Forum Secretariat will visit 4 member organizations in the coming month in order to get a wider field picture.