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Update on the Critical Situation in Afar Region and Program Development Activities

June 16th 2008

In summary:

There is no relief from the situation reported on April 30th: while there have been a handful of storms in isolated districts, this has not brought sufficient relief to lead on to recovery and the vast remainder of the drought – stricken woredas are desperately thirsty as well as hungry. Overall, the pastoralist community of the central and northern Afar wait in daily anxiety for the onset of the main rains as expected in July.

The rainfall situation and thirst

As mentioned above, in the central and northern districts of the Region there have been a couple of storms in affected areas: one in a limited part of Sifra in late May as well as a couple of storms in Assayita and the Gammeri, the southern part of Eli Daar also in May. Zone 3 in the south of the region had a handful of storms in Awash, Ami Bara and Gawwaani that were localized. Therefore the southern part of the region is somewhat less affected.

APDA is transporting water in Kori Woreda (formerly northern Dubte Woreda) to 7 road – accessible sites. This contract will terminate on June 30th. If there is no rain in the targeted areas, these communities will revert to the immediate threat of thirst. Herdsmen have come from the Kori hinterland to the roadside to get drinking water as well as the trucked water assisting local communities.

Market and household commodity inflation and nutrition

By and large, the status of grain prices is unrelenting with prices as high as 150% above March prices in the far north and 100% in other areas. Brief and transitory relief was gained when distributed grain reached the market in early May and again early June. Far flung woredas such as Konnaba, Dallol and Barahale in the north – west and Afdeera continue to face household hunger as the community is unable to purchase with such a depleted and now again weakened goat herd.

APDA is continues to respond to under 2 year old malnutrition and malnutrition in child – baring women on a case basis with cerefam and lentils. Case numbers are beginning to spiral and are apparent in all 18 woredas the program has health workers and women extension workers in.

The herd status

Reports of animal disease outbreak continue. This is highly related to dried to depleted pasture. Again, the cattle herds on the west of the region are extremely affected: in the past week, the cattle herds of Uwwa began moving their herds to the Awash River Basin in Mille Woreda while Awra's remaining cattle herd is almost all in border areas between Afar and Amhara Region. In both herd migrations, the pastoralists are facing conflict: there is an ongoing battle between the Amharas adjoining Sifra, Uwwa and Awra over access to grazing land and in Mille Woreda, the Issa – Somali clan has again lashed out at the Afar. In the north-west, the remaining goat herd is fast – dying from hunger.

In Kori APDA is supplementary feeding the remaining goats of identified almost destitute households for 2 months. Aside from preventing these animals from dying, this will assure the household a milk supply.

Food – for – Work producing needed infrastructure as well as added food

APDA's project of food – for – work in Mille, 'Adda'ar, Sifra, Uwwa and Awra has caught the enthusiasm of the community as they battle on in the extreme heat and dry to construct roads, water ponds, cisterns and rehabilitate pasture land. Already an impressive road now cuts through from eastern Awra through Geega connecting with the main Awash Road. This community construction is already over 70 kilometers long and allows vehicle communication from east to west in the region by-passing the over-used and corrugated Sifra Road. Some 12 ponds are completed awaiting rain - filling.

Human health status

There have been several isolated but alarming outbreaks of severe diarrhea. While the recent outbreak in 'Adda'ar does not appear to be acute watery diarrhea, that in Talalak in northern Zone 5 may well be. Again, 2 deaths and over 100 cases of acute diarrhea and vomiting in eastern Sifra are related to contaminated traditional wells that are now 9 – people depth (9 people stand on each other to reach the level of the water). As far as possible, APDA is sending health workers to each reported outbreak to avert the feared acute watery diarrhea (AWD) but the situation is gravely concerning given the extreme vulnerability of the community. Soap and jerricans are being distributed in some of the most affected areas. As well, the program to pilot bio-sand water filters is going well. Expanded, this may well assist in protecting many permanent settlements from the danger of contaminated water.

Ongoing influx of refugees from Eritrea causing pressure to already vulnerable communities

Daily families are fleeing both hunger and military threat in Eritrea entering Afar Region in the extra-ordinarily dry north of Eli Daar Woreda where food is already scant and also into Barahale, Dallol and Eribte on the north - west where communities are facing devastating situations of herd-loss. None of the refugees come with herds or possessions. Several children come with oedematous malnutrition. Therefore the host communities need urgent assistance in coping.

Current urgent gaps in assistance

- Proper and adequate assessment of the situation
- Water trucking in Kori beyond June 30th until the rain falls.

- Animal medications to curb the outbreaks current in multiple districts of the center and north.
- Animal feed to assist households facing near –destitution keeping alive the remaining goats and producing milk for the family over a period of 2 months supplementary feeding.
- Human medications to curb any possible disease outbreak particularly that of acute watery diarrhea

News of the APDA development program

1. Annual teachers' training

Given that conditions in the community are thoroughly averse to daily learning, APDA is taking the advantage of this time to give annual refresher training to the program's teachers. Of the 237 teachers, 142 are currently in the organization training center completing their own educational standard to Grade 4 equivalent (the majority of APDA's community teachers have had no formal education) as well as preparing themselves to teach up to Level 3 in non-formal education. During the course of 2 months training, Bureau of Education will examine the teachers' levels giving them appropriate certification as part of APDA's strategy to hand – over program teachers to the respective woreda programs wherever possible.

2. Primary health

APDA is again anxious to re-commence its program of providing EPI coverage to 'hard – to – reach' pastoralist communities to lessen the dangers of measles and whooping cough outbreaks. Health workers and women extension workers are undertaking blanket nutrition rapid assessment (MUAC) as mentioned above.

A further 120 traditional birth attendants (TBAs) joined the primary health team (50 in Uwwa and 70 in Sifra) after being trained and networked to the health workers and women extension workers in their respective areas. These TBAs agree to give up practicing female genital mutilation along with 5 other practices harming the mother in child-birth. With these TBAs and the effort of the women extension workers, APDA is able to expand its coverage of antenatal checking, the fore-front strategy in reducing maternal death.

3. Afar Pastoralist Development Forum

APDF now has full legal status and will soon be calling its 19 – odd organizational membership to acknowledge this and plan a more pro-active future. The forum operates from an autonomous office in Logya and has all – but completed recruiting its human-power.

4. Training for community cooperative members and their support staff

The organization has just completed providing intensive training for selected members of 8 community cooperatives in bookkeeping, business management and finance planning. The Bureau of Cooperative Management provided the trainers and this has initiated an exemplary level of training for these people aimed at overcoming the challenges of difficulties faced by pastoralists in operating as modern income generating cooperatives. Again, with the placement of focal support staff in 11 woredas, it is hoped the community capacity in implementing cooperative income generation will improve.