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

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In summary:

As of 10 days ago, the Afar Regional government has declared a state of emergency in Teeru woreda and, in accordance with their recent assessment findings, increased the number of needy in the region from 472,229 to 533,436. The assessment showed from 30 up to 50% reduction in the pastoralist herd size compared to three years ago.

The situation as was evident with scant to failed short rains In April has now spiraled into a situation of graphic hunger in a distinct dry –belt across the northern/ central districts of the region as described below:

Despite the fact that the main rains of July to September started in many districts as of July 19th, **there is a critical belt of animal deaths and household hunger remains totally dry and thirsty as of the date of writing.** The belt includes the northern 8 kebeles of Eli Daar as far south as Su'ula; the newly defined woreda of Biru (former north – west Eli Daar and southern Afdeera; Kori or former northern Dubte; northern Dubte including Geega and Dagaba; Teeru and Eribte. Of this belt, there are three 'hot-spots' where hunger deaths have happened: Teeru Woreda and especially Mabay, Dabaaho and Boyna kebeles; Kori and Biru and northern Eli Daar – especially Daabu and Wahan kebeles. Daali Fagi in Zone 5 is also reported as affected. The characteristics of all the worst – affected areas are that they are relatively remote from the rest of the region without any or limited good road access; transport animals (camels and donkeys) by and large have died or are too weak to move people out or move food in and the overriding extreme costs of household grain has fired the final blow in the community effort to avert this tragedy. Fifty kilograms of grain reached as high as 600.00 ETB a bag compared to 90 to 120.00 ETB 8 months ago. Weak goats in Teeru are fetching 40 to 50.00 ETB. Fifty kilograms can feed a family of 7 members for up to 12 days.

Critically, this situation must be viewed through the lenses of the following possible scenario:

- A) That rain picks up in August through to September giving a relatively average main season fall leading to some pasture recovery. In this case, there must be serious effort made to work toward household recovery involving re-stocking to already destitute and near – destitute families.
- B) That rain fails to fall in the till now dry belt. This will then require discerned community and government decision as to how and where these people can continue. Again, wherever, recovery will be a vital element of the plan.
- C) A mix of A and B – a less than fair rain production that will require the carry on of the most vital life-sustaining activities as well as a plan to recovery.

a) Main rainy season to date

Aside from the affected districts mentioned above, most other woredas have begun to receive rain and have started to gain pasture rejuvenation. In the affected areas, flood water of the Awra/ Goolina Rivers has come into Teeru basin flooding Ibiidi, parts of 'Assa Bara and Yewe Dullul while there is no actual rain in the area aside from the southern peripheral kebeles of Dirma kee Dabayra, Namma 'Ara and some of Digdiga.

- Flooding in farmlands of the Lower Awash

Increased volume in the Awash River system that is now passing through newly engineered canals as part of the sugarcane farming scheme flooded into maize, vegetable and cotton farming submerging 300 to 400 hectares under water in Henele, Kurrabuda, Gaali Fagi and Berga kebeles. Not only is this a drastic crop – loss, there is now a substantial health risk of disease such as acute watery diarrhea. Again, there is frantic cattle migration since vast grasslands are under water as of the past 8 days.

b) Thirst

APDA is currently transporting water in Kori/ Biru districts to 6 sites and in Eli Da'ar Woreda to the communities surrounding Buure and Manda. These project contracts will expire in 6 days. APDA has notified the government and other government partners are searching out a contingency plan. In Kori, the government has successfully sunk a borehole – hopefully this can be used as the source of transported water in the near future.

c) Human displacement

As far as possible, people from the most remote areas are trying to reach food supplies in Teeru: 1 total of 106 households – 860 persons had reached Teeru administration center from Mabay and Dabaaho 10 days ago – that number is increasing daily. These people are by and large living sheltering under bushes and have no property with them. Again, there is an ongoing trickle of refugees coming across the Eritrean border into the critically thirsty and hungry area of northern Eli Da'ar. Most of these people are themselves malnourished and totally destitute. Some of the refugees that were able to get the opportunity, traveled south to the refugee camp now established in Assayita, others are living in the north within Afar households that are themselves in a critical position of vulnerability.

d) Hunger

As mentioned above, so far there are 3 districts identified with considerable acute malnutrition: Teeru woreda, Kori and adjoining Biru Woreda and northern Eli Da'ar. Children and women are markedly affected. While much of this to date is marasmus, there are signs that kwashiorkor is on the rise. To date, APDA has tried to cope on a case by case basis in response to rapid MUAC assessments carried out by the organization health workers by treating 6 months to 2 year cases with cerefam (baby cereal) and lentils for malnourished mothers and older children.

As of August 2nd, a team of NGOs with UNICEF left to establish a therapeutic feeding center in Teeru planning to use the 20 odd APDA health workers in the woreda for outreach work into the remote kebeles. **As of August 4th that team reported they had found 20% severe malnutrition having screened 350 children.** The plan now is

- To conduct an official nutrition survey in the worst – affected areas
- Accordingly, establish therapeutic feeding in those districts as well as in 16 centers.

In addition to the mentioned critical areas, there are others of chronic malnutrition such as Gawwaane and Buramudayto in Zone 3 where grazing land has been drastically reduced by the Issa/ Afar conflict, the invasive weed –shrub, prosopis julante and also by the fact investors have taken riverside land for large – scale farming. Again, APDA has found that Konnaba in the north - west has a significant number of malnourished children due to ongoing herd – loss as well as being badly affected by the food price rise.

e) Animal diseases and deaths

Animal disease and death is a consistent feature of the crisis areas: pasture is so poor that animals are falling to stress- related illnesses. Currently, parts of Teeru, northern Eli Daar, Kori are highly unsanitary with carcasses rotting. Most concerning is the weakness and death of the transport animals in these areas.

Again, in the grazing area of Halidabe'e in Ami Bara, Zone 3, due to drought – damaged pasture, several hundred cattle have died. A killing camel disease is also gripping Goolina in Zone 4 and Dagaba in northern Dubte Woreda.

Animal feed is a critical issue in this: APDA is currently feeding 20,000 milking goats of 1,500 households in Kori and Biru to prevent them falling into destitution. Animals fed have picked up from near – death weakness to producing around ½ liter of milk per day.

Current urgent gaps in assistance

- Immediate support to mobilize health workers in Kori, Biru and northern Eli Da'ar to treat malnourished people.
- To secure water transporting for Kori/ Biru and northern Eli Da'ar until it rains
- Mobilization of paravets.
- Supplementary animal feed for targeted milking animals to prevent households sinking into destitution
- Human medications for the most vulnerable
- Plan toward recovery

News of the APDA development program

1. APDA teachers accredited with Grade 5

In the recently completed 2 months annual refresher training of 181 of APDA's program teachers, government examiners accredited 56 of them as having the level of grade 5. APDA is now repeating this same procedure of having the Bureau of Education – appointed examiners test the second training course teachers. It is expected that of all APDA's 241 community teachers, over 80 will receive accreditation. For those who gain accreditation, APDA is offering them long – distance learning to advance their grades as far as completion.

2. Primary health

APDA health workers are fully engaged in the effort to monitor, treat and control malnutrition through ongoing rapid assessment using the MUAC (middle upper arm circumference measurement) as well as giving supplementary food as mentioned above to those identified as requiring it. In order to scale up the response and utilize supplies from wider sources, the technical team that has come to deal with the malnutrition crisis are about to be given an immediate training to orientate them to Federal standards of acute malnutrition treatment.

A second group of 15 health workers is taking rapid learning to upgrade them to Grade 5 standard. This then puts the health workers into the same academic standard as government employees.

3. Afar Pastoralist Development Forum

APDF met in Awash in late July, the first General Assembly of the Forum. A total of 26 member – organizations attended and elected a Board of Directors. APDA, Kalem, IDPAC, Dadal and Ruhe Waddi were elected to this board. APDF now is opening its information extension center from its Logya office aiming to link all members.

4. Cooperative activities

APDA is directly assisting some 8 pastoralist women's associations who are involved in income generating activities. Of these 8, 6 are associations who have the primary objective to stop female genital mutilation (FGM) and are thereby working cooperatively to gain an income from other means other than practicing FGM. The other 2 women's groups are formed of women from destitute households (lost goats in drought) who are selling household goods in their own community in order to gain an income.

Beyond that, the community cooperative facilitators as established in 11 woredas are now busy mapping out the situation with all cooperatives in their respective area in order to facilitate training, information – flow and exchange of information

5. Feeder roads, ponds and birikuts

In Mille, 'Adda'ar, Sifra, Uwwa and Awra APDA continues to implement food – for – work activities among the most drought - vulnerable of the community. These people have now constructed exemplary ponds, some 200 kilometers of roads, several water cisterns and are currently re-seeding over 100 hectares of land with grass – seed to regenerate grazing lands. Since rain has fallen in these woredas and to the joy of the people, all of their constructions are full of water. Again, feeder roads have joined the west of the region to the center by – passing the now badly damaged Mille – to – Sifra road. Therefore from eastern Awra (Finto), the road is now readily passable through Geega coming out on the Assab road at Bakar le Da'ar, just north of Mille. Again, a second road joining Awra to northern Dubte is being completed making travel to Teeru as short as 4 hours from Logya compared to the previous 8 hours.