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

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In summary:

The main rainy season brought rain to almost all the entire region barring the far north: most of the drought – affected people have been able to return to their land and milk supply is resuming to the household. However, due to herd – loss in these areas, the region is left to manage 6 districts that have significant malnutrition.

These include the 4 previously reported districts with the addition of 2 more woredas: 6 kebeles in northern Eli Da'ar; Teeru woreda; Kori and Biru Woredas that are situated between northern Dubte and Afdeera and Mabay – Mabay gets a separate mention although it is a kebele of Teeru but it is not accessible through Teeru but through Kori. In addition, Goolina bordering on the south to Teeru and Erebti north of Teeru are also affected. Each of these 'hot- spots' now has between 86 up to 200 – odd people receiving severe acute malnutrition management, mainly through outpost method. Of those being assisted, the majority are difficult to access and therefore are being screened and assisted on weekly to second weekly basis.

a) Main rainy season to date

This year's 'Karma', main rainy season began around July 10th and finished around September 8th – indeed a relatively shortened season. The districts that had not received rain eventually got 1 to 3 storms in the first week of September. Pasture rejuvenation till now is patchy and even in some areas where the storms stopped earlier the pasture is again drying since temperatures remain high – well above 40 degrees with drying winds. In some areas, where the shrubs did 'green' up, the actual foliage on the shrub is very poorly developed with no sign of the shrub flowering.

The districts of concern that have had lesser rain and significant herd loss remain as follows:

Zone 1: Northern Eli Daar and the border with Djibouti (Hiilu and Tikibo); Biru – all 11 kebeles; Kori – all 15 kebeles and parts of Dagaba in northern Dubte Woreda. Southern Mille had little rain and people are still dispersed from the river-side kebeles for want of pasture.

Zone 2: Konnaba; Barahale; Dallol; Erebti; much of Afdeera – the 4 hilly kebeles as well as the Doddom basin due to significant herd loss there

Zone 3: From Mille through Adayto to Ambole is now dry.

Zone 4: Teeru – all kebeles; northern Goolina and northern Awra

b) Human displacement due to drought

In Teeru administration center, there are still some 150 destitute families displaced from the kebeles of Mabay and Dabbaaho living surrounding the village. They have received assistance including malnutrition screening and treatment, shelter and household supplies. Again, in Erebti around 300 people have gathered from 2 severely drought affected kebeles. These people still require assistance including water support but are gaining medical support from the government.

c) Hunger

As mentioned above, the six 'hot spots' are under a relatively new and growing program of severe acute malnutrition management through the joint effort of the Bureau of Health, MSF Greece and APDA and the facilitation of the Bureau and UNICEF. APDA's role continues to be screening and treating in places distant for vehicle reach.

d) Animal loss

Again, the most critical issue now is that the most seriously - hit districts have lost almost all pack – animals making it all but impossible for the household to survive let alone recover. APDA health workers have found people physically trying to carry 50 kilograms of grain to their house over up to 4 days walk between them.

Current urgent gaps in assistance

- Need for adequate supplementary food for moderately malnourished people to prevent deterioration
- Need to secure water for up to 150 displaced households in Erebti
- Need for household shelter for displaced in Erebti and parts of Mabay
- Need for pack animals – APDA is now collecting funds to purchase 15 camels but another 15 to 30 are urgently needed for Mabay, parts of Kori and parts of Biru
- Human medications for the most vulnerable
- Plan toward recovery

News of the APDA development program

1. Rehabilitation of grazing land and filled water reservoirs

The community food for work activities of the past 4 months are paying dividends now as all constructed dams and birikuts are full of water in Mille, 'Adda'ar, Sifra, Uwwa and Awra. Again, the community had prepared and seeded wide areas in Uwwa and Awra with grass- seed – grass is now growing well, particularly in Uwwa.

2. A new year in pastoralist education

The organization's 237 community teachers are now launching into a new school year having completed their refresher training and the community now largely having returned from drought displacement. With their respective community development committees and local government officials, they are undertaking a strong mobilization of the community to increase participation. From its side, APDA is sending messages on Afar radio to support the effort.

Of the teachers, 51 will now undertake long – distance learning taking their personal learning beyond Grade 5.

3. Fighting harmful practices

The campaign to stop FGM has further developed in the community through preparing 500 booklets quoting the Islamic Haddis on the prevention of harm to women. This is distributed among

the local Sheiks that are trained. In all, APDA has trained local Islamic leaders from 11 woredas amounting to around 500 Sheiks – these people are not just given one training session but followed up with a second training and then they are given opportunity to review the progress they have made. From the woreda Islamic leadership, there is now very strong pronouncement of the fact that FGM opposes Islam and that women should have rights in marriage.

In stopping FGM, the other strategy that is assisting is that FGM practitioners are being sort out and they are then brought before the Islamic leader who facilitates them to declare they are stopping the practice. These women are then monitored to see that they actually stop. Some hundreds of FGM practitioners have stopped and are now advocating in the community against the practice. Again, APDA has trained and networks over 600 traditional birth attendants that are driven by the fact they agree to stop 6 practices harming women during the birthing process including FGM.

4. A growing number of community cooperatives and associations

Probably sparked by the overall difficult household economic situation, there are a growing number of new associations that are trying to beat the situation of rising prices and assist each other jointly. These associations are very much looking for training, guidance and start-up capital. APDA has been able to assist 5 women's groups recently – 4 groups that formed with the overriding objective of stopping traditional harmful practices. Again, the cooperatives that the organization formed have now been given a further capital grant to make them more mobile in the market and more diverse in their activities.