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Update on the Emergency Situation in Afar Region and Development News

September 11th, 2009

In summary:

The '*karma*' rainy season has continued and, as is constant, rains were considerably heavier in August and are now tailing off. For much of the region, the rain was up to 1 month late and localized therefore there are many pocket districts that have not had a fall. In particular, border and eastern kebeles of Eli Daar, Soddonta in Biru bordering Afdeera has no rain but got water from the flooding river passing through the land. Again, much of Teeru had very limited rain but the river system entering the basin brought flood water. Much of Zone 2 including Barahale, Erebti, parts of Aba'ala and northern Afdeera till now has had only scant rainfall. Overall however, the season performance is around average in most woredas.

a) The status of pasture and the animal herd

Populations that migrated from the dry hinterland have now returned to their home grazing lands since thirst has been relieved for animals and humans and by and large, there is grazing that they can utilize. Alternatively, herds from the Lower Awash Basin have moved west into the hinterland such as the Geega and Musle grazing plains in northern Dubte and parts of Sifra.

b) A major outbreak of acute watery diarrhea (AWD) continues but showing signs of receding

The AWD outbreak that started in June continues having abated in the original outbreak woredas of Gawwaani, Buurimudayto and Ami Bara where daily laborers in cotton plantations of Zone 3 infected the local population and the salt farm in Doobi, southern Eli Daar also started a community outbreak. Having spread into the two main woredas on the terminal banks of the Awash (Dubte and Assayita) it has now spread deep into the hinterland as herdsman returned from grazing in these woredas to their home grazing away from the riverside.

An outbreak that occurred in mid August in Teeru, Zone 4 is now limited to 2 of the 6 originally affected kebeles, Uwwa is affected in two kebeles and Sifra is quite strongly affected. In Sifra the market connections with Bati and the Wari Babu people of Amhara region are making it difficult to blot out the outbreak. APDA is also very concerned for the vast grazing area of Geega in northern Dubte where herdsman from Datta Bahari, Kutubla and other areas that were infected have gone in recent days for grazing. Cases have already been seen and 2 people died affected by AWD in walking into Geega.

Urban areas of Assayita and Logya have persistent cases in a human to human transmission outbreak due to the connection with other areas as well as the extremely low level of sanitation in both towns making it very resistant to a total halt of the disease.

In all, APDA has treated over 4,175 since the outset of campaign activities in early July and raised awareness among a total of 156,063 in 12 woredas. The organization has distributed soap, water guard and water PUR in affected households and is now producing cheap soap in the organization soap plant for emergency use as well as sale in remote communities.

c) Malnutrition

Cases of severe acute malnutrition (SAM) are now lower in the 6 districts of the drought – belt APDA has been working in for now just on 1 year. The appearance of milk in the household has greatly assisted this but the actual destitute households awaiting asset – recovery remain totally dependant and with SAM cases.

This improvement is considered highly tenuous since AWD precipitates both moderate and severe malnutrition. There is a general lack of supplementary food in most rural kebeles.

d) Urgent needs to abate further human tragedy

- Restocking of animals/ household asset recovery

This is the ideal time with rains and with pasture rejuvenated. Without re-stocking, there is no way out for the destitute households than food assistance/ malnutrition treatment once they succumb.

- Sanitation and hygiene interventions

Here the essential issue is to maintain intensive awareness in the community of AWD; provide strategic construction of latrines; assure clean water supply where possible and access to soap, water treatment material for all in the community. APDA is now very eager to move on the project suggested in the strategic plan to make Logya an exemplary clean town.

Refugee news

In the past 2 months, the flow of families coming into Afar Region from Eritrea has noticeably slowed down but individuals still are coming fleeing actual or feared terror.

Development News

1. APDA's new strategic plan endorsed

Having met with those partner organizations who have offices in Addis, APDA now has a strategic plan to guide it over the coming 5 years: 2010 to 2014. Given the current situation of persistently ongoing AWD, there is some urgency to act on the sanitation recommendations. The final document will appear on www.apdaethiopia.org.

2. Progress in community economic development

The community economic development facilitation team has been very busy in the last 2 months training 4 new AGA groups among women who have the objective to mobilize their own community to stop FGM/ C. These new groups have now been trained in association formation and management and all members are busy learning Afar literacy and numeracy. In one district where FGM/ C is performed at the age of 7 to 9 years, the IGA group have started the strategy of 'adopting' all girls of this age group who are to be circumcised into their membership until their families and the community can agree that they will not be circumcised. Women's groups are eagerly involving in petty trade in small groups of 3 to 7 women or in general trading as a

whole group of 30 members. In 'Adda'ar, a newly formed group has opted to become grain – sellers.

Another two new marketing cooperatives that were formed as break – away from the original 8 have recently benefited from 45 days training in bookkeeping given to their cooperative accountant.

All in all, there is a greater movement in the market comparative to last year and new cooperatives and groups are springing up in various woredas assisted by APDA facilitators. There is a now a far greater sense that economic diversity is needed within the pastoralist community.

3. New project in teaching women IGA groups literacy

In Assayita, APDA is contributing to an IGA project targeting 800 community women by teaching them to read and write Afar as well as grasp basic numeracy. Its strongly APDA's experience that committed learning of the member makes for sustainable IGA work in a group.

4. Activity hand over to the woredas

APDA has all but completed handing over 25 health workers to 'Adda'ar and 13 health workers to Afdeera woredas respectively. In both woredas, education activities of non-formal education were handed over to the woreda. It now remains to monitor these activities assuring their continuation. In Afdeera, there remains 4 remote kebeles that have had little education coverage: Daboore and Harsuma in the north toward Barahale and 'Adeela and Alganda in the south of the woreda on the shores of the lake.

5. Working toward utilizing traditional knowledge/ laws/ experience in the development process

On this score, there are currently two processes going on: with the issue of environment protection, APDA commissioned a study that tells us the changes in 4 districts over 20 years as seen by traditional leadership and how they think the process can be rescued. This we hope will lead to traditional implmeneting of environment protecting and recovery. The second process is that the government through the Afar language development and enrichment center have studied Afar traditional law and documented it over most of the Djibouti and Ethiopia. It remains to present this to a forum of traditional leaders and to produce the document. APDA is hoping to facilitate this vital work that the region gain a proper balance of traditional/ Islamic and modern law. Currently, the traditional law is not appreciated and as a consequence, vital issues such as environment protection, family law and women's rights, reconciliation of dispute are not with lawas that can be applied in the community.