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Update on relief and development activities:

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1. The status of the Acute Watery Diarrhea outbreak in Afar Region

1. Assisted woredas

During January, APDA health workers worked in 5 woredas: Sifra, Uwwa and Awra on the region's western boundary and Assayita and Afembo. By mid month, situation in the west was arrested in all but one remaining kebele in Sifra (Wa'ama) where a fresh disease outbreak happened on 29th January. APDA health workers then switched their attention to Assayita and Afembo, fighting the disease in kebeles bordering Djibouti and close to the river – enclosed grazing area of Kutubla on the terminal bends of the Awash River. After 13 intensive days of struggle, the outbreak died down. Currently, health workers remain in the distant rural community to secure their efforts for some days.

Health workers' effort is most affective as they work deep in the community, raising awareness and teaching the essential messages to prevent the sickness as well as how to treat a person in the home as soon as he/ she is affected. This has greatly stilled the enormous fear this fast – killing disease has generated in the community.

2. Fresh outbreaks

As of January 30th AWD began to rage in Gawwaane and Buramudayto, Zone 3, two of the most impoverished woredas in the region. See below. Both the Bureau of Health and APDA greatly fear the consequences as people in these 2 woredas live in close, fixed settlements under extremely poor sanitation due to the daily fear of attack from the invading Issa Somali clan. Homes are surrounded by mounds of animal manure since it is not possible to follow the normal Afar culture and move the settlement elsewhere as land is both overrun with the weed – shrub, prosopis and Issa raiders totally restrict movement. Again, the community is drinking highly contaminated water from the Awash River. As the Bureau of health expressed, they greatly fear this outbreak will reach strength enough to pass to neighboring communities in Dowwe, Zone 5.

Therefore, again, APDA is gathering its primary health forces to send into the rural outreaches of these woredas where reportedly 10 people have died in 3 days.

3. Activities toward improved sanitation

Aside from immediate rescue, APDA is currently constructing 3 latrines in Afdeera where the regional outbreak begun and another 2 in Logya and Sifra respectively. Again, with the regional

Bureau of Water and Natural Resources, APDA is rehabilitating 10 water wells in affected districts so that people can get clean water. Alongside the emergency treatment and awareness – raising effort, APDA is distributing chlorine to clean drinking water and soap. Too, the organization will soon obtain a soap – making machine with the objective of producing sufficient soap cheaply that, through the community development workers in the organization, soap outlets will be established in all affected kebeles selling soap cheaply to the community that the pastoral Afar adopt the culture of frequent hand – washing with soap.

While 5 latrine constructions are part of the present project activity, it is abundantly clear that more latrines need to be constructed in woreda administration towns that are currently highly unsanitary.

2. Grazing and nutrition status in the region

Sporadic rain storms have continued to fall in scattered districts beyond the normal season of winter rains. There are now areas of good pasture. However, the tree – locust has consumed on mass grazing shrub forage over a vast area in the center of the region extending from Geega in Dubte Woreda, through Uwwa and north – east Awra, parts of Mille and Zone 5. These areas, despite rain look as grim as drought. People from the Geega grazing areas have migrated on mass to the surrounds of Dubte town. In these areas, household milk is very low and people are back to the grain – only diet.

In the Woredas of Gawwaane and Burmudayto (Zone 3), under 2 years and delivering mothers are particularly malnourished. Again, rains have fallen well in these areas but the community is not grazing its herd and, according to local account, the households have been without a satisfactory milk supply for 2 years. As mentioned above, the reason is the status of the Issa/ Afar conflict in the district restricting normal and necessary herding movement. Where the Afar are settled close to the banks of the Awash, most of the land is densely covered by the thorn – needle weed shrub, 'proposis' or the land is being used by 'investor' farmers. The condition in these communities is not short of miserable.

3. Intensifying the effort to establish a culture of community marketing

APDA is currently giving additional training to the community animal marketing associations it recently formed and translating them training manuals. This is vital since this cooperative work is still very new to the pastoralist community and needs extensive consolidation. Again, in an effort to secure a strong base in the community and APDA, the organization is about to launch into market and cooperative research, aiming to establish a bank of information that the community can source. The organization is looking at how the formed cooperatives can learn from one another as well as other market examples in pastoralist societies other than Afar, wanting to explore the way for community cooperatives to collaborate for a common goal.

4. Afar Development Conference's strong words

The 2nd Afar Development Conference, held from January 29th to February 2nd, carried the discussion from the 2004 conference to form stronger and more applicable recommendations than the first such conference held in December 2004.

Over 200 Afar from Ethiopia, Djibouti, Sweden, Canada and Germany representing government, community, youth, cultural associations, religious and clan leaders, local women, development workers and journalists came together enjoying both vigorous discussion on development issues as well as a rich display of cultural music, dancing and poetry. Contributions from international

NGOs along with highly generous community contribution in cash and kind from 5 zones in Ethiopia, Netherlands, Canada, Djibouti and Sweden made the conference possible – Afar leaders walked gifts of camels and cattle for as much as 3 days to reach the meeting venue.

The conference chose to discuss the issues hindering Afar pastoral development including

- a) The bitter Afar / Issa conflict that is bleeding the society in Zones 3 and 1
- b) The human rights and future of Afar refugees coming into the region from Eritrea
- c) The status of Afar language development and education in the pastoralist society
- d) The destruction of Afar riverside forest and a growing culture of forest destruction in other parts
- e) Issues hindering pastoral women from attaining development and well – being
- f) The dichotomy between traditional law and modern law fracturing good governance
- g) Afar attitude to work leading to irresponsibility
- h) Community use of the amphetamine leaf, kaat in undermining all development
- i) Afar society response to HIV & AIDS

While the organization will produce a publication of the conference proceedings and recommendations, highlights are as follows:

a) On the issue of conflict

While the conference as a civil body was not able to suggest termination of the Issa/ Afar conflict (a 50 – year old conflict that is stripping prime – grazing land from the Afar, the invading Issa killing and raiding animals a daily basis.) since the conflict is clearly of political motivation, the participants called on Afar Regional Council to persist in demanding an urgent end through fair border demarcation from the Federal Government.

Again, the conference condemned the appalling human rights abuse that is driving Afar out of Eritrea asking the government to urgently address the needs of the refugees in the Afar Region. An International Declaration on the matter

b) On Afar language development and education

APDA, the Bureau of Education and other involved NGOs should urgently extend Afar literacy and education access to all pastoral societies. The aim should be to cover the remaining uncovered areas in 2 years using education method appropriate to the lifestyle of the pastoralists. Afar language and culture should be developed and secured in all areas of the region, both in the rural and the urban society. The poor status of Afar language use in urban centers was seen as highly detrimental to Afar social development along with poor attitude to work. This, the conference concluded is vital to the entire process of development.

The conference also agreed that APDA should organize a 2nd yearly cultural conference in which the community competes in a display of dance, music, dress and dramas as well as sport.

c) The struggle to reverse forest destruction

Realizing that traditionally Afar are great ecologists, the conference called on APDA and the government to double their effort to stop the recent trend to make charcoal. The government should back this through law

d) Mobilizing pastoral women in development

While there is progress in stopping the practice of female genital mutilation, this needs strengthening and it was discussed that, without an improved relation between religious leaders and local government, there could be little advancement for women in securing their rights in

marriage. Woreda officials complain they have no deliberate mandate to secure the offending person.

e) The Dichotomy between traditional and modern administration/ law

On this, the conference declared that since the traditional law is unknown in the wide sense, it must be collect, written and presented to the regional government. Once the government appreciates traditional law, the two laws should be brought together so that law enforcement can be effective.

Meanwhile, clan leaders must be brought to appreciate certain traditions harming the society must stop such as revenge – killing, FGM, marriage without choice and so on.

f) Improving attitude to work

With employment a 'recent' culture in Afar society, understanding work – ethic is a major challenge. This links to bad urban practices such as chewing kaat and nepotism in the workforce. The conference strongly recommended effort at all levels to improve this: government, NGO, religious leaders, the education system and the like.

g) Increasing use of the amphetamine leaf 'kaat'

This urban – linked social practice now reaches as deep as camels and bicycle can take the leaf into the rural communities despoiling the household through senselessly using money and disrupting relationships; creating a world of aimlessness and playing havoc on the mental and physical health. While this has not been attempted before, the conference called on all parts of the society to intervene to lessen the use of it and alert people to the dangers. APDA will particularly review how it can contribute to this effort through all activities of the program. The government is asked to raise taxes making the menace more expensive and restrict places that it is sold.

h) The Afar society response to HIV & AIDS

Here the main issue was to discuss how the effort could be linked to the traditional association leaders (Fiimat abba) that they can regulate their community enforcing changes in social behavior. The government reported the incidence of AIDS in the region had greatly increased reflecting those infected when the awareness level was low.

5. Coming meetings and conference

The Afar non-formal education forum intends to meet in the coming month aiming to endorse the memorandum of understanding binding the membership. Please contact APDA for the date.

Again, the Afar Development Forum will hold its next meeting on February 22 and 23 in order to collate information on all 17-forum members' activities in the region as a baseline document for collaboration.

Finally, in early March, APDA will hold a conference on the status of female education in the region. The Bureau of Education and the Islamic Council will jointly chair the meeting aiming to bring local traditional leaders and religious leaders into discussion. This conference is expected to discuss motives for female education; domestic and family role of the young female and what level of participation the community agrees to.

6. Three new woredas decided in Afar Region

As of February 4th, the regional cabinet endorsed the division of

- a) Mile Woreda so that the western section forms a Woreda with administration in Adda Da'ar (where the bones of Lucy were found)-center to be constructed.
- b) Dubti Woreda so that the northern sector forms a Woreda centered on Kori with administration in Guluble Af on the road to Afdeera.
- c) Eli Da'ar Woreda so that the north –west section on the Eritrean border and joining to Afdeera forms a Woreda centered on Biru.

APDA has immediate interest to assist the first 2 mentioned new woredas in strategic planning since three areas are under the organization program.