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Special, urgent update of the current food security status in Afar Region: October 19th, 2004

1. Further information on rain distribution and what can be expected.

Having recently revisited the far north west of the Region, the northern kebeles of Eli Daar, districts in Zone 4 and Gowaneh/ Buramudayto in Zone 3, the organization feels compelled to share the disturbing following information as a pre-warning to a deteriorating situation:

- a) As of October 10th, storm activity in the Region has ceased giving way to blue skies and drying winds. Temperatures remain in the high 30's in the day but dropping below 20° overnight, a foreshadowing of the coming cold winds of 'Gilaal'.
- b) The dry belt spoken of in the recent October 9th update remains unresolved. Driving through Zone 4 and Konnaba, Barahale and Aba'ala of Zone 2, cattle – grazing pasture in particular has failed to rejuvenate. Cattle from these districts are extremely scattered for this time of the year: many clan groups choosing to graze in the adjoining highlands, most a long way from the family home.
- c) The border areas in Eli Daar Woreda are also totally without rain. This includes the kebeles of Daabo, Makarasu, Akuule, Alob kee Garbo and Lamassen. While there are some cattle in these kebeles, goats are the main livelihood and shrub grazing is reported as dry.
- d) Animal disease outbreak is higher than normally expected in Dubte and Eli Daar Woredas where APDA is implementing animal husbandry activities. This is reportedly due to poor quality pasture.
- e) Afar animals from the east of the region normally graze in Sifra Woreda, Zone 1 and the adjoining areas in Zone 4 in communal grazing lands annually after the main rainy season and as a means of rescue in a poor season. This year, the only district where sufficient grass regenerated for cattle was in Sifra Woreda. The migrating herds cleaned out this grazing in a matter of days.

Thus, APDA raises warning alarm in view of the fact that

- a) The next expected winter rain of December (Dadda'a) is normally a very short, unreliable and light – rainfall season
- b) The rainy season beyond that of March/ April (Suggum) is again the short rains and in the past 3 years, rain has not begun before mid-April.
- c) Available grazing, particularly for cattle is now very limited. APDA fears that the much - depleted Afar cattle herd will again face disease and death on a wide scale.

2. Vulnerability as a result of current household food status

As stated above

- a) Pasture generally is poor and not properly rejuvenated from the annual, long dry season of May to July.
- b) The herdsman are taking the option of scattering the herd further than they would normally do at this time of the year, leaving the household with minimal milk. Normally, at this time of the year, the Afar household has surplus milk and there is a lot of butter production. Currently, Afar butter on the market is extremely expensive and sparsely available.
- c) Market prices are currently very diverse. Where the demand exists (close to military camps and the like), prices are as high as 120 for a good quality goat. On regular town markets, the price is as low as 40 to 60 ETB.

APDA's concern is that this should be the season when the household, especially children and other vulnerable members eat well on milk and milk products. This is not the case this year.

3. The special case in Gowaneh/ Buramudayto, Zone 3

The drastic situation current in Gowaneh and Buramudayto Woredas has a different source. In fact, the main rainy season did occur in the two woredas. However, the community has a drastically depleted herd as a result of the 2002/03 drought and now reportedly face daily danger of Issa Clan incursions raiding their remaining herds. This restricts them to not moving beyond the asphalt road. Too, as has happened with greater devastation since the August 2002 flood, the land is currently under water, cutting herds from what grazing is available. The forth and final problem is the insidious 'prosopis' weed – shrub that has taken over riverside grazing, causing an impenetrable wall of thorn spikes.

APDA found a very disturbing situation on a brief visit to pick up patients of the Addis Ababa Fistular Hospital raising suspicion of significant child malnutrition in Gowaneh. Five homes visited to find the patients all had moderately malnourished children under one years.

4. The way forward

APDA believes the following measures should be taken on a collaborative basis:

- a) Close monitoring of 'hot – spots' and networking for information sharing among partners currently working in Afar Region
- b) The particularly impoverished society in Gowaneh/ Buramudayto should receive immediate socio/ economic and nutrition surveying. Options such as re-stocking, animal feed and strategically placed nutrition centers should be considered. A most urgent government – led effort to securely stop conflict between Afar and Issa must be undertaken.
- c) In establishing child supplementary treatment, APDA has health workers who could be used as a team to do it cost-effectively and efficiently
- d) Ongoing pockets of destitute households need goat re-stocking now such as Barahale
- e) High alert on animal disease outbreak and consistent use of vaccinations
- f) Should a wide-scale emergency evolve, the use of animal feeding should be considered.