

January 25th, 2005 – Teeru and general drought update

Realizing that assistance takes time to collect and organize and knowing how critical the problem is, APDA set out ahead of receiving funds to assist on January 20th taking 5 health workers, a couple of cartons of human medicine, 100 liters of kerosene, 100 pieces of soap and some animal medicines. Unbeknown to our reckoning, a storm of rain starting in the Amhara/ Tigray highlands went the bordering woredas partly affecting Sifra (Zone 1), Uwa, Awra and Goolina and falling well in Yallo Woreda. The edge of the storm reached the southern parts of Teeru and also caused a considerable ground flood to come in to the woreda from the Goolina/ Awra Rivers. With the good, there's the bad: this was evidenced in Awra where on the roadside we found 41 sheep and goat carcasses – died overnight from wet/ cold having diseases and being nutritionally very weak. Another man spoke of waking up to find his entire herd of 135 sheep and goats dead.

Battling on through the recently sand – strewn hills of northern Awra now the vehicle sliding through mud, we reach a very anxious woreda telling us that over 75% of the most affected are now trapped behind the overnight flood. Wading up to our thighs in mud and water, we reach where we had been some 8 days ago to face the latest development:

- Overnight death of huge numbers of weak cattle and sheep due to the flood and mud
- The traditional wells are now covered by flood water and the people are drinking rain – water – most likely contaminated by the carcasses.

We break into 3 teams using the health workers and with the community leaders begin to go settlement to settlement to activate:

- a) Carcass – burning
- b) Boiling water for drinking
- c) Promoting the use of soap.

Firewood is available since a great section of the woreda forest died when the Awra/ Goolina River changed course 8 years ago. We had brought kerosene to assist the carcass burning but it was clear no one had spare cash to buy soap.

Again, we re-activated the 15 woreda paravets who had been trained in early 2004, equipping them to give immediate treatment and assist in the carcass – burning effort. Meanwhile, I was brought to the local level of reality by one man and his cow. The story goes like this:

On the first day, as we were wading through the mud to reach the settlements, a voice from inside a forested area calls out, 'come and help me'. Reluctant to risk missing a foot, we respond to find Ahaw and his wife bending over a cow. He says he slept out with the cow overnight and this is the fourth day he and his wife have hand- fed their last cow with seed pods, tree – branches and snippets of grass they managed to scrounge. They are smoking the cow to fight off biting

flies and the tick infestation. He begs our help to try once more to stand the cow up. We try but she cannot stand. Trying to grasp his own reality, he jokes saying the cow's name is Yallo since he and his father bought her as a calf in Yallo market and she alone remains of his and his father's 100 cows. Realizing who we are, he suggests fencing off Yallo with thorn branches and taking us on to his house for the night. Next morning, we set out with him to see if his cow survived the night. To his extreme joy, she was still there. Almost skipping, he motioned to his wife to keep up the vigil of feeding Yallo while he rushed on with us to bring back a paravet with our medicine to treat her. The situation is hard to grasp: one year ago, Teeru was probably the best - off grazing land in Afar Region. This man, along with perhaps 20,600 people (50%) of the woreda is immanently threatened with destitution.

People are suffering from diarrhea, chronic malaria with anaemia and respiratory infection. The overwhelming fear is an outbreak of cholera – type diarrhea. APDA reminds those assisting the urgency of medical support: the organization immediately needs 208,100 ETB (\$US 25,331) to purchase medicines, supplies and support health workers to avert/ contain disease outbreak.

Signed:

Valerie Browning