

## HUMANITARIAN SITUATION IN AFAR REGION

Reports from NGOs and some UN agencies indicate a worsening humanitarian situation in Afar Region due to serious drought conditions. According to Ethiopian Television the Regional Government declared an emergency in the region as of 12 January. The head of the DPPB said that the beneficiary numbers have increased from 500,000 to 600,000. The report said the Federal DPPC acknowledges the situation and is providing assistance with partners. The DPPC says the number of immediate beneficiaries is 352,000 according to its assessment.

As part of the development of a response the Regional authorities have convened a Regional Crisis Management Committee to examine needs. **The next regional coordination meeting in Afar is scheduled for the 25<sup>th</sup> January 05.** Development of an action plan by the DPPB and partners began 20 December 2004, but is not yet completed.

The major needs which we believe currently exist are as follows:

- Water shortages in Zones 2 and 4 and parts of Zone 1 have resulted in stress migration of pastoralists into the highlands from Afar bordering into Amhara and into the Awash River valley. While this is considered normal at this time of the year concerns have been raised because the migrants are staying for longer in the new areas as conditions are not conducive for return, creating possible tensions with local communities.
  - Food and blankets are needed by the stress migrants in Amhara and the DPPB is reportedly making sufficient available for 5,000 persons in the first instance. The allocation may be increased to 10,000 later if funds permit. Data on actual numbers of migrants are not clear.
- Pasture and water are the major needs for livestock as well as veterinary interventions. Water shortages have also resulted in water tankering by the DPPB for people.
  - 9 water tankers are operating but a further 15 tankers are reportedly needed immediately and until the Sugum rains commence, expected to be in March 2005.
  - The Region reported on 20 December that six tankers are deployed in Berehle, Teru, Erebt, Megale and Elidar areas.
- According to WFP, 6.000 MT of food has been allocated to cover emergency needs for January and 800 MT has already been dispatched.
- Different reports indicate that a number of woredas are affected, with some consensus that the most affected woreda is Teru in Zone 4 where above normal livestock mortality is noted. In addition livestock in this woreda are reported in no fit state to move to pasture if it were available in other locations. According to Afar Pastoralist Development Association (APDA, a local NGO) as many as 20,610 people in Teru

require food, water and health assistance, as well as fodder and water for their livestock.

- Gaining a comprehensive picture of needs and beneficiary numbers has been difficult and is currently awaiting the finalisation of the Action Plan, which is currently being finalised by the Regional authorities.

### **Actions Taken**

OCHA has been active in working with the Regional Government to convene Crisis Management Committee meetings and to develop the plan of action to respond to immediate needs. Capacity weaknesses at the regional level have hampered progress but it is being made nevertheless. Other UN agencies have participated in some of the Crisis Management Meetings.

Representations have also been made to the Federal DPPC by NGOs (ACF and Oxfam US) and OCHA to convene a special meeting on Afar emergency needs, which is expected to happen early next week (17 to 18 January).

OCHA has also prepared a draft matrix of NGOs active in the region and circulated this for comment. The matrix will prove crucial in determining which NGOs may be able to respond to needs once these have been agreed by the Regional Government.

The Regional Government has requested assistance from UNICEF for about 50,000 people displaced from zones 1,4 & 5. Some have gone to Cheffa area and others to Gewane in search of water and pasture. According to the regional DPP/FSB the number beneficiaries receiving food aid is about 200,000 while the actual figure requiring relief food assistance is 560,030, which means that about 300,000 people are still looking for relief food and non-food assistance. The regional DPP/FSB has sent to UNICEF a letter indicating the problems it faces with the additional requirements or gaps to meet the immediate needs. It has requested UNICEF to assist with supplementary foods and clothing.

### **Next Steps**

The Regional Government has told OCHA that they expect to formally present the Federal DPPC with a Plan of Action by Monday 17<sup>th</sup>, January. Receipt of the Action Plan should clarify expected beneficiary numbers and enumerate their needs which will assist Government, UN agencies and NGOs to determine the response needed in the context of gaps in assistance, should they arise, from the Government side. An emergency coordination meeting should be convened as quickly as possible to clarify actions that need to be taken.

UNOCHA

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