

## FEATURE STORY

### Japanese Donation of \$7.4 Million Saves Lives in Drought Affected Areas of Ethiopia



**Fedis District, 3 August 2011** – Zara Ahmed is worried. The youngest of her seven children, ten-month-old Nayle Kelifa, has not been eating well and has lost a lot of weight. Drought in eastern Ethiopia has delayed the harvest of corn, peanuts, cabbage, potatoes and other vegetables which Zara relies on to feed her children. The family is surviving on what they can buy at the market, but this has not been adequate as the cost of food keeps going up. A visit to her local health post has confirmed that Nayle is severely malnourished.

The Government of Ethiopia estimates that more than 300,000 children will require treatment for severe acute malnutrition in 2011, a condition that can be deadly if not treated.

Nayle is the most recent entrant to the Belina Arba Outpatient Therapeutic Feeding Programme, which now has 41 severely malnourished children, up from 13 at the same time last year.

“The situation is different this year,” said Lemlem Worku, health extension worker assigned to Belina Arba Health Post. “The rains came late. At this time there should be harvests. We wouldn’t have so many

children. They would have food to eat. This year it started to rain late, and none of their crops that they would have used to eat are ready.”

As the number of children with severe acute malnutrition increases in Fedis and neighboring districts of East Harerghe Zone in eastern Ethiopia, the zonal health office dispatches boxes of ready-to-use therapeutic foods purchased by UNICEF with the support of the Government of Japan for the Outpatient Therapeutic Feeding Programmes that are implemented at the village level.

UNICEF’s support for the Outpatient Therapeutic Feeding Programme in Fedis and other drought affected and food insecure districts in Ethiopia has been made possible by a US\$ 7.4 million donation from Japan for the management of acute malnutrition through improved access to lifesaving services including water, sanitation and hygiene in Afar, Amhara, Oromia, Somali, Benishangul Gumuz, Gambella and Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples’ (SNNP) Regions of Ethiopia.

Nayle weighed 4.8 kgs on her first visit to the health post which means that she will only be discharged when she reaches 5.5 kgs. She has a good appetite hence her chances of recovering are excellent. Before leaving the health post Lemlem gives Zara a bottle of amoxicillin antibiotics and a week’s supply of ready-to-use therapeutic foods RUTF from supplies provided by UNICEF bought with the assistance of the Government of Japan.

“I brought my daughter here because I want her to be healthy,” said Zara. “I was very worried about her. Today Lemlem has given me medicine for Nayle and these packets of nutritious food to feed her. I believe these will save my baby.”

UNICEF has supported Ethiopia to increase national capacity to treat severe acute malnutrition in drought and food insecure districts like Fedis from almost nothing in 2004 to more than 8800 sites today. UNICEF has



supported the Ministry and Regional Bureaus of Health to train health extension workers like Lemlem in outpatient therapeutic feeding. UNICEF also provides the RUTFs, nutritional supplements, medicines and other inputs such as weighing scales and measuring tapes that are required for the programme.

Child survival rates in Ethiopia have improved significantly over recent years with improvements in child nutrition playing a major role. In 1990, more than 20 per cent of children would not survive to reach their fifth birthday, with malnutrition being an underlying factor in more than half of all under-five child deaths. By 2010 this number had been cut by half.

The on-going drought emergency is, however, threatening these gains in child-survival. Systems that have been put in place to save children's lives are now stretched as a result of the drought, however with continuing support from donors like the Government of Japan, health extension workers like Lemlem can save the lives of severely malnourished children and ensure the continuation of positive trends in improving child survival in Ethiopia.

The support from the Government of Japan is ensuring that up to 54,000 severely malnourished children will benefit from the timely procurement, distribution and administration of therapeutic food. The inclusion of early stimulation and learning in nutrition interventions through parental education, so that young children do not only survive the first years of life but also grow to succeed in their education and become contributing members of the society, will maximize nutritional inputs.

“We have been receiving adequate supplies of the ready-to-use-therapeutic food and so we are able to treat all the malnourished children that we admit to the programme,” said Lemlem. “It is very rewarding work for me. When I see a starving child get better and come back to life, I feel blessed, as though the children themselves have said a prayer for me. I also pray for these children. They will achieve something in the future, and so I would like to thank those who have made it possible for us to save these children's lives.”

Zara is informed that the boxes of RUTF and supplies being used to treat her daughter were donated by the Government of Japan. Though she has not seen the media coverage of the recent earthquake and tsunami that devastated Japan, she is moved when hearing about it.

“May the Creator do great things for them,” said Zara. “If they have given these things to save our children's lives, may God give them more blessings so that they will be in a better situation than they are now. We will pray for them.

It has started to rain again in Fedis bringing with it hope for a harvest in a few months time. Meanwhile community-based therapeutic feeding programmes are ensuring that children survive the crisis. UNICEF is appealing for 10 million to respond to emergency humanitarian needs in Ethiopia.

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**High resolution photos available upon request**