

# AFAR PASTORALIST DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION QAFAR DACARSITTOH DADALIH EGLA

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## **Reflecting over the year and forward to 2014**

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2014 slid in without us noticing: nevertheless, trust you will not find it too late to say how much we have appreciated the journey we have shared together in 2013... With only 2 years remaining to assess the achievements of the world - set Millillion development goals (MDGs), the Afar pastoralist community could feel increasingly bewildered and beleaguered if it was not for your practical partnership that is bringing the Afar people from absence of social development in 2000 to what fits to their lifestyle in 2015. Thank you. Again in 1013 we enjoyed meeting and dialoguing with you and were particularly thrilled when you came to see the situation for yourself. In this message, we would like to briefly pen what we have achieved together in 2013 and how we see 2014: our fears, constraints and dreams.

2014 is indeed a landmark year for APDA: the organization has en implementing relief and development activities in the pastoralist community for 20 years this year; the current 5 year implementing strategy completes in December 2014 and it is high – time to meet to discuss the development issues we face. The plan would be to hold an Afar Development Conference in July after the Eid of Ramadan that will lay ground-work to produce a 4<sup>th</sup> program strategic plan covering from 2015 to 2019 and give space to celebrate 20 years of partnership together. For this, APDA hopes to gather all concerned Afar from the Diaspora, Djibouti and Ethiopia to undertake the discussion and then open their recommendations up to all of you that we can plan together. As with the other strategic plans, the issues of the coming five years are around the focal needs of the Afar society: the language and education; remote health service but especially maternal health; liberating women from the harm of traditions affecting their reproductive life; the household economy and livelihood; protecting/ rehabilitating the drought - damaged environment; building the society's human capacity. APDA will communicate dates for this conference as soon as possible.

The greatest event in 2013 for APDA and the community was the regional government's announcement as of July 8<sup>th</sup> that Afar language would be the medium of regional administration through the bureaus and the woredas. This historic breakthrough comes on the back of over a decade of local-level lobbying that the region can utilize its own language thus mobilizing culture, local human capacity and giving ownership to the development process. The tasks involved to get this new policy into reality are many: actual teaching of those illiterate in Afar who work in the government offices; establishing the literature – base to support this; mentoring woredas/ districts on the borders that are particularly peripheral to the use of Afar language. The Afar Language Research and Development Center has completed all formats and documents in Afar. APDA needs to back this by written material production; providing literacy teachers when necessary and so on.

In 2013 our most affecting achievements have been

- a) In securing water for the thirsty: new rainwater harvesting cisterns; sub-surface dams; hand-dug wells; shallow and deep wells; ponds where people have to walk over 6 hours to fetch water
- b) Saving over 4,000 households from absolute destitution by providing supplementary animal feed to the remaining goats in parallel with animal treatment and vaccination during the long dry season
- c) In lifting some people out of abject poverty through micro finance saving and credit schemes as well as cooperative earning – particularly in the hand of the female head in the family

- d) Establishing a further 3 watershed management schemes – the organization has now a total of 11 such schemes that are slowly charging with ground and soil water to change the environment from degraded to green and productive for food and fodder
- e) Establishing 450 hectares of riverside irrigation for household/ community production toward improved food security and local economy
- f) Improving the life for refugees from Eritrea through shelter provision; education, vocational training and income earning in the Assaita and Barahale camps
- g) Providing food and disease prevention for the most vulnerable in Dallol (in the far north west of the region) in a time of sheer desperation
- h) Continuing on with the strategy of facilitating remote school students in town hostels to continue their education and, through massive awareness and mobilization, increasing female participation in this opportunity
- i) Holding student drop-out to a minimal in the most difficult dry season by providing a nutritious meal for students twice daily
- j) Witnessing a growth in the number of alternative basic education sites as community teachers gain the capacity to teach beyond basic Afar literacy
- k) In seeing maternal death reduced for mothers in remote settings in areas APDA has recently begun working with and keeping it down in other areas
- l) In modeling and molding the system to refer mothers at risk from the rural community through the government health centers to the emergency hospital in Mille (Barbara May Maternity Hospital) where they had life-saving surgery as well as seeing women with desperate gynecological conditions treated
- m) Bringing routine vaccination to remote communities through the innovation of a mobile cold-chain. In November 2013, APDA reached a community deep in the hills between Dubte and Eli Daar who had never seen such an opportunity before
- n) Working with communities through the leadership, youth and women to see that harmful practices affecting female reproductive health do stop.
- o) Seeing the strengthening of community development committees that they be the innovators and activists in their community – APDA has hundreds of such communities overseeing the daily work of the organization
- p) Seeing the enormous energy of the youth as expressed in the 14 rural youth associations mentored by APDA working on Afar language development; stopping harmful practices and working on re-forestation

Our challenges remain that

- a) Community illiteracy stagnates the community...

This remains the overall and most painful challenge. While over its 20 years, APDA has taught almost 130,000 people to read and write, while there is one illiterate person pursuing harmful traditional practices out of knowledge – blindness, this is not enough. This dangerous illiteracy is as much with the community who wants to retain its traditional identity and name as with the religious leader who SHOULD through Islam know better and support the rights of females. Again, as the modern urban world meets the traditional rural world in the town, illiteracy is all the more dangerous: whether market illiteracy, aimlessly using the amphetamine leaf called 'kaat' or falling victim to unprotected sex. While part of APDA's objective is to rid the society of illiteracy, the effort remains in the realm of struggling as even more communities who are yet to get the chance of literacy are unturned. The greatest challenge to literacy sustainability is the dire lack of Afar literature.

- b) Transporting water for thirsty communities to avoid death remains necessary

While APDA has a now 12 – month old drilling rig, drilling water in Afar Region is extremely difficult given the volcanic nature of the geology. APDA's drilling rig has now succeeded in 4 of 6 sites and in the process, the organization team has learnt tremendously. Again, sub-surface dams as well as watershed management schemes hold out some hope to get sustainable water but there still remain certain communities for whom this is not possible

c) The ever-increasing threat of more pastoralist destitution due to herd loss

The land is severely eroded and pasture depleted – natural grasses are lost and particular trees that protect in the dry season are now rare. With increasingly irregular rains and when they come, dangerously severe rains, the herd is always vulnerable. Coupled with at best irregular access to veterinary medicines, vaccines and services, the family asset, the herd has diminished to less than 40% its size 10 years ago.

d) As a result of loss of herd livelihood through drought, meeting the need of severely malnourished people in remote areas remains onerous to APDA.

These people are scattered in 9 woredas and need constant nutrition screening and treatment as well as strong hygiene and sanitation mobilization. Most can only be reached on foot and since they live in remote areas, they are even more vulnerable to loss and shocks. Currently, almost 900 such children are under treatment. Most Afar rural mothers deliver their children with some degree of malnutrition. This is strongly contributing to the still high newborn mortality as well as maternal mortality.

e) While APDA can develop education in a remote community to teach as far as Level 3 (first primary cycle), most children will then return to herding and never reach their full potential

In September 2011, APDA began the new strategy of offering hostel accommodation to such children from remote communities to continue education in town-based government schools. In the first year, of 122 students the community allowed to take this opportunity, only 14 were female. This has somewhat improved in this, the 2<sup>nd</sup> year to a total of 28 female students out of 142 students. To give real meaning to education, APDA needs to devise the means to meet this dire need for the hundreds of remote children.

f) The dangers to rural health of unsanitary urban living

No rubbish disposal system; inadequate latrines; defective and aged urban sewerage and drainage; inconsistent water and electricity – all make for contagious disease outbreak such as typhoid, bacillary dysentery and acute watery diarrhea. More often than not this is the way the rural community gets infected.

With all this in mind, the dream for 2014 that we share with you is

- a) To develop and produce so much literature that having book-shops in the rural setting will become part of the landscape – this requires a printing press, a bevy of writers with equipment and more
- b) To work even harder to secure water for thirst – threatened communities – whether through rain-water harvesting or digging/ drilling for ground water
- c) Work more with the community on drought – damage rehabilitation and replacement of the indigenous grasses and shrubs in the landscape. Again, with the community indigenous knowledge, continue to work out the fine balance between land – usage and protection that the land produce more fodder and food and remain secure for the next generations.
- d) To increase household income generation in the hands of women as well as saving and credit so that the most vulnerable can be rescued. Cost around 184 USD to kick - start a household in a small business and, on pay - back the fund goes on to another food insecure household.
- e) To continue to work with households with less than 8 goats preventing them from absolute destitution through supplementary animal feed if needed; restocking; stimulating alternative livelihoods
- f) Increase the possibility of destitute refugees and urban Afar to gain income through vocational training: tailoring; cooking; handicraft making; woodwork; metal work
- g) Build up the market skills of the Afar in general through increased opportunity; better management and legal ability (training); access to transport; networking and linkage
- h) Develop the potential of the youth through following their dreams
- i) Increase the resources for supporting hostel students through encouraging overseas sponsorship of students – this would roughly cost 45 USD per month per student
- j) Work with the society to facilitate the marriage between traditional and modern knowledge and law that the society continue a strong stake in the development process
- k) See that the process to establish referral for the mother at risk from the rural to the district to the hospital is as secure as is possible in terms of professional capability; logistics; community/ local government involvement and community willingness and appreciation of the system

l) See that there ARE communities who have abandoned both FGM/ C and early marriage through their mutual interaction on the matter and that those who suffer the consequences are actually identified and treated: those with retained urine; severe dysmenorrhea and those girls in danger of poisoning themselves through the desperation of unwanted marriage.

m) Have Mille emergency maternal hospital fully equipped with an outpatients and administrative block. This 'wish list' brings us to our partnership: APDA wants to assure each and everyone of you in the immense task ahead, we do welcome and appreciate your interaction. We cannot determine the above alone!!