

# AFAR PASTORALIST DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION QAFAR DACARSITTOH DADALIH EGLA

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**With thanks to you all for where we have reached and on into 2015**

**January 21<sup>st</sup> 2015**

Despite all the tussles internationally, there was progress for the people of Afar in 2014 – in reflecting this, we thank you all for the faithful and amazing partnership you displayed in continuing to struggle with us. Sometimes it seems like Afar is dwarfed under the angry threats internationally but the program is still very much intact, this is indeed our shared success. Millennium development goals are to be concluded this year: Afar Region has made some advancement but continues to lag behind the rest of Ethiopia on vital education, health and economic parameters – despite APDA having turned 20 years old, we are not ‘out of the water’ yet. There are strategies on the ground and some emerging to make social development more accessible to pastoralists but these needs more government ‘glue’ for consolidation. However, we sincerely do not forget where we came from to reach where we are: up until 2000/03 Afar pastoralists had negligible literacy or health service access. With your partnership, we have been able to climb somewhat – the Ethiopian government now describes Afar males as 27% literate and Afar females as 15% literate, for instance. This has brought the Afar pastoralists out of the dark to participate in their own development.

The planned 4<sup>th</sup> Afar Development Conference was postponed till February 28<sup>th</sup> hoping for a more solid government participation. The preparatory meeting that took place in August 2014 greatly assisted in delineating gaps in sectorial work as well as indicating working practices that can be built on. What we have discerned is that there are 4 major areas that need priority attention for the Afar to go forward in development

- An ongoing effort to see that the Afar language is properly utilized and available in print that encourages development
- Afar household economy is trembling: household destitution from herd loss as well as inflation on basic food commodities is preventing people from participating in education, health access – leaving them dependent and extremely vulnerable. The need is for alternative income as well as rebuilding the herd to a viable number.
- The environment that IS the livelihood of the people in terms of grazing and water source is being eroded away on the western border and becoming abject desert land in the eastern and northern districts due to drought, flash floods, wind erosion
- Local governance is in a vacuum – the Afar pastoralist is standing bewildered by the loss/ diminished power of his traditional system and his inability to reckon out the ‘modern’ or urban – linked governance.

These four issues are impinging on the Afar society jeopardizing identity, education, livelihood/ food security, utilization of the health system and it goes on. With this as a backdrop, APDA is currently formulating its 5 – year strategy plan to take the organization from 2015 to 2019.

The environment crisis:

This photo taken in Mille after rain in October of camels brought from Uwwa to graze looks idealistic of the pastoralist lifestyle but the bushes they graze have just recently put down roots into land already eroding. Next year, this erosion will be a gully.





A highly endangered riverside tree caught in the sudden downpour rainwater from the Ethiopian highlands on November 20<sup>th</sup>. Waterpower to erode is as never before: century – old forest trees are being lost as well as fertile soft – clay grazing plains turned into rutted gullies

However, one of the major hindrances of development is in the process of being mitigated through the Federal Government intervention: the 3 towns that Issa occupied on the Awash to Djibouti Highway have been put under Afar governance – Issa tribesmen in Afar Region are there as part of the community and the order to stop raiding and belligerence has gone out – communities around the Awash River have endured this for decades.

Again, there is much that has happened in 2014 that is cause for celebration:

- Our Barbara May Maternity Hospital advancing: it delivered twice the number of mothers endangered by the process of childbirth in the year – numbers are climbing and so is the variety of service offered by the hospital at the demand of mothers and girls: treating the emergency consequence of FGM, for example as well as many other pathologies that disfigure the reproductive life of the Afar female. From 20 beds, the hospital is in the process to expand to 35 beds to cope with the demand
- Local level government has recently taken over 49 education sites from APDA's program in various districts – this is showing the expansion of government services into the rural hinterland
- A total of 145 students are being facilitated in hostel living to continue education in government schools in towns having graduated from APDA's alternative basic education program in a remote site – of these, 38 are female – this is an increase of 18 girls since the previous year – from the targeted communities, the momentum is now in place for girls to be able to benefit from further education. This was a gigantic struggle for each girl. Moreover, the current academic performance of these girls is a credit to this struggle.
- For the environment, APDA has learnt the technique of developing water spreading weirs that spread out the rainwater – shed that rushes down a river bed putting water in the soil layer reached by plant-life and bringing up the ground water for ready access. Five such schemes were constructed and it is being used as part of watershed management in another 6 new schemes. In all, APDA has facilitated the community to construct watershed management schemes each rehabilitating up to 300 hectares of grazing land in 16 sites.
- APDA has targeted destitute households throughout the region and has established hubs of micro-finance households who are passing on the benefit to yet another household within 1 year of receiving the loan. A project assisting 500 households will go on to assist 500 more.
- Water storage was constructed (either an underground cistern with a capacity of 200 m<sup>3</sup> or dams holding from 5,000 to 10,000 m<sup>3</sup> of water) in 35 sites.
- Awareness on the vital issues to rescue Afar from hurting themselves continued with more exacting strategies to include both identifying the girl is circumcised and facilitating treatment for the bad effects of FGM.
- Youth were well mobilized to partner in the awareness struggle as well as to be exemplary in their own community – their recent conference well illustrated their innovative ways of reaching the community and the community elders – they are struggling too to preserve the culture of the society.
- Vaccination utilizing all 9 child antigens as well as tetanus toxoid for reproductive females was carried out through a series of 4 campaigns in each of six districts where the government service does not reach due to the geographic remoteness of these areas.

All of the above are vital to assure Afar become more resilient to the threats to their livelihood that are ever – present. In fact, in 2015, our effort on each point needs to greatly increase as we walk into a year again threatened by drought with current prices on food commodities such as sugar and grain beyond the drought – vulnerable household.

## **Situation Update and News**

### **1. Rain situation and community vulnerability**

As of writing we are coming up to the end of our 'winter' – nights are cold with the 'Gillal' wind and the rain of 'Daddah' is expected. As is now usual, the rain is evasive. Skies have turned cloudy on in the first week of January and in the last days with pockets of 'London – style' showers on the central western border – drizzly, damping rain that has no wind or lightening attached. Otherwise, the region is missing the season and the dry has now been present in most districts since Mid October. This then is spurring on community concern for the herd and people are beginning to scatter. In Kori, the community has been urgently requesting water trucking to quench thirst since mid December.

Malnutrition continues in the previously affected areas – conditions in Afdeera's most northern 2 kebeles where APDA is in process to give 4 months food ration to households without are telling – mother of 4 with a total household of 7 members told how they fell to the level of 4 remaining goats over 18 months and, due to lack of accessible food assistance had drastically reduced eating in the home when the organization distribution 'rescued her' late November. While actual numbers requiring treatment for severe acute malnutrition fluctuate, the problem NEVER goes away as the community is so close to destitution.

Under similar circumstance, a killing outbreak of measles occurred in Eli Daar in December – 8 mainly older children and adults are dead. APDA has just spent 15 days searching out cases and found new cases – mostly as a result of people moving in from Eritrea as well as from unvaccinated pockets near towns. Measles as well as whooping cough is currently menacing a number of pocket – communities calling for broader vaccination and overall awareness on disease prevention.

Next rains are due March/ April and there is a general fear of reverting from the hope brought by the good rains of July – October 2014.

### **2. Development progress in brief**

#### **a) Progress in the Barbara May Maternity Hospital – APDA's emergency obstetrics unit**

The long-awaited ambulance got through the customs and is about to be put into motion – a back-up for the now over-worked ambulance in picking up rural emergency cases. Too, the new block to house outpatients, laboratory and pharmacy is in process – this will free up the main hospital block to take another 15 inpatient beds. While complicated deliveries have doubled over the past year, so have the demands for other gynecological emergency services. The hospital is increasingly becoming well – known in the region.

#### **b) Spreading the net to rescue destitute households**

The program's micro-finance is now reaching out gradually to more and more – assisting mostly through the female household head to get the family on their feet by a small business. This is remarkably successful – both in the creativeness and energy of making the income and also in the repayment so another family can get the opportunity. APDA has almost assisted 500 households in the last 12 months – that is rolling on.

#### **c) Getting the message out to treat those with FGM and in so doing, demonstrate that the practice must stop**

APDA has taken a deliberate strategy of exposing those who are still doing FGM by checking baby girls and also campaigning to get those suffering treated. In the latter, the 15 youth groups connected to APDA have been instrumental as well as the community health team. The aim is to lift the stigma and get people aware that this bodily distortion will necessarily lead to bodily dysfunction.

#### **d) Advances in Afar education**

The hostels are very much part of the growing effort to lift Afar out of the misery of illiteracy. APDA is now looking for those who would like to sponsor a student at 45 USD a month until they graduate – this is a secure contribution to the development of the Afar society.

#### **e) Greening up Afar**

Work continues on each of the watershed management schemes constructed and the efforts are showing fruit – indigenous trees and grasses are re-appearing; the community is able to dig for water in the sand

where rivers had dried up and small-scale crop plantation for fodder and food is increasingly happening. Work to get the 2 major irrigation sites operational is almost there and two rivers diverted leading to a devastated ecology and environment are being re-diverted.

### **3. Events happening!!**

On January 25<sup>th</sup> Ethiopia celebrates the 15<sup>th</sup> Pastoralist Day – this year's celebration is in Afar Region!! – this is THE day when the nation focuses on pastoralists: their livelihood, culture and need for development. In fact, APDA has a stake in this as the organization was part of the initiative to activate such an annual event

In late February, Afar Region will recognize the role of the language in a week – long event displaying the Afar language uses.

On February 28<sup>th</sup>, APDA will host the Afar Development Conference planning to involve the regional government, district officials, Djibouti colleagues, if possible IGAD and others from the Afar Diaspora.

Meanwhile, APDA is putting together a 5 - year plan leading the organization on into 2019.

For all this, and any planned meeting, APDA welcomes you and is hoping that we will have the honor of your visit this year, 2015!!



Dr Andrew, one of the founders of the Barbara May Maternity Hospital spends 3 days in January to repair 2 fistula cases (one of the cases had lingered in suffering for 8 years) and help out. His operating assistant is a women extension worker. She has quietly educated herself up to grade 10 and now wants to train as a midwife. Indeed, she is part of the sustainability of our hospital.