

# AFAR PASTORALIST DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION QAFAR DACARSITTOH DADALIH EGLA

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## Much to be thankful for in 2017 and moving on

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It is with thanks APDA looks back on 2017 – the organization has met new people; enjoyed the visits of very faithful old friends and generally walked through the issues that Afar people as pastoralists are facing with a great number of very talented people. Excitingly, new ideas are rising up for recovery and the way forward despite the odds. New thinking is coming through for a number of issues including how to tackle the monster weed-shrub *prosopisjuliaefora*; the first steam well is under construction for thirsty Bidu where ordinary boreholes cannot be dug; the means to recover livelihood in the hand of women is now developing in 2 new water spreading weir sites in Sifra and Uwwa providing a replicable, composite learning process for both APDA and the respective communities.

On pastoralist social service delivery, APDA is working full on to battle for improved education in the organization's alternative basic education; working toward being more exacting in getting pregnant mothers in rural sites into 'modern medical service' rather than them being fully reliant on traditional birthing systems and the efforts to stop harmful practices have certainly gained energy over the year with more innovation on monitoring as well as deliberately harnessing the power of the youth toward change. Our emergency obstetrics and gynecology hospital, despite some staffing challenges, is improving services and getting more and more desperately needy cases coming from the rural locations. These and many more are the project gains mentored and facilitated through our many and generous partners.

### ➤ **Activities current to combat the effects of drought through APDA**

- Water trucking continues to December 31<sup>st</sup> for communities that did not receive the 2017 main rains in Buure district of northern Eli Daar and in Datt' Ale in Bidu
- Nutrition support through community – managed acute malnutrition (CMAM) strategy until December 31<sup>st</sup> in Bidu and Eli Daar where herd – destitution is very high. APDA hopes to extend this support until March 2018 realizing now we are passing through a very hungry, dry period for these districts.
- A further 2 dams of 14,000 m<sup>3</sup> have been constructed in Eli Daar and the organization is planning to put in a further 2 realizing that in such a district, every drop of rainwater should be harvested for animals and humans
- One new cistern is going in for a very thirsty community in Awra; a steam well is under construction in Bidu where water trucking IS the only alternative since the highly ancient volcanic lava structures of the land do not permit borehole construction – steam vents where

steam from sub-surface streams passing through molten lava are relatively common – place in the district.

- 650 households who have no shelter having been drought- displaced into Bidu’s hinterland are now being distributed with 12 traditional mats and a household utility kit to start an Afar traditional, mobile house again
- Having just completed 3 cisterns rehabilitation in Awra, a further 4 will be rehabilitated in Kori (3) and one more in Awra – all for communities that spend up to 7 months of the year at high risk of thirst
- Veterinary treatment is beginning in Awra, Dagaba and Geega among herdsmen who have both depleted herds and herds that have been stressed through long migration. This emergency project will last 6 months and APDA will work intensively with the communities using the community disaster risk reduction strategy (CDRR) whereby they come to grips with what they can do to safeguard their herds in the future and develop a more community – directed system of mitigating the shocks of droughts. Three rounds of animal treatment have just completed in Eli Daar.
- Household – operated water filters are to be distributed to 1,000 households in Teeru to combat the extra-ordinary rate of diarrhea in the district leading to malnutrition. People are scooping water from the receding flood-waters as well as drinking any possible water they can find.

➤ **Current immediate threats:**

**Thirst in Kori, Bidu and Eli Daar:** rainwater is now totally drying in Kori. While there has been a borehole struck in Musle, there will be a considerable period to getting that well up into service with pipeline extensions for all those who depend on water trucking since the water needs a plant to remove the high mineral content from the water. With a partner, APDA has similarly applied that the 500 meter (deepest yet in the Region) borehole that was successfully struck in Buure, northern Eli Daar gets installation – this has its challenges of a particular pump and generator due to the depth of the well and that the water comes out at 70 degrees centigrade. Till then, these communities are going to require ongoing water trucking. As mentioned above, one steam well is being constructed in Bidu but for the population of both drought- displaced people from the Eritrean border and the local community, around 5 steam wells will be needed to stop their perpetual thirst.

While December is the month of winter rains, to date, there has been one storm that reached Konnaba, Barahale and Aba’ala on the Region’s north-western border with Tigray. Otherwise, nights are cold and the skies are blue. The next – expected rain is March/ April, the annual short rainy season.

**Deepening malnutrition and diseases:** This is the looming prospect for the most vulnerable woredas of Bidu; Eli Daar; Teeru where the region’s highest malnutrition currently exists mainly due to a high diarrhea rate and in Gala’alu where rain in 2018 was scant. Kutubla in Assaitaworeda, as elaborated below is a special case of extreme nutrition and health vulnerability. As with malnutrition, the infant, elderly and child-baring population are extremely prone to pneumonia in this current Afar winter as well as other disease outbreaks such as measles, whooping cough and diarrhea since milk in these households is way to low to provide protein/ vitamin substance.

**Animal diseases:** There is a constant need to keep the herd free of internal and external parasites that are perpetual in the grazing environment and quickly reduce the condition of the animal. While grazing pasture is drying but present in much of the region, the districts that are thirsty are without and these communities live under the threat of their animals dying of contagious diseases that are stimulated by insufficient and weak pasture such as pasteurellosis; infectious pneumonias and black leg.

➤ **Kutubla, a case of urgency**

Kutubla is a community of Afar agro pastoralists and pastoralists living on the terminal bends of the

Awash River just as the river goes underground to reach the Indian Ocean in Djibouti. It is a designated kebele of Assaita Woreda (district) stretching to the Djibouti border and also within 30 kilometers of Assaita town. Having known this community for the past 18 years, APDA is Kutubla's constant 'brother' having established community mobile health, education and women's development program enabling the 25,000 odd people to lift out of what was considered the most illiterate culture in Afar Region. Until very recently, Kutubla was made up of 13 permanent settlements where the community were relatively well – off living in a pristine ecological environment of water/ forest and wild-life both grazing mainly cattle and growing maize on small plots – the latter has developed over the past 15 years. In a period just on 3 years since their tributary of the Awash River dried out, the forest dried and the community learnt for the first time historically what is thirst and lack of grazing, they have totally left farming and are now herding their animals in distant, scattered locations such as the Gammerie Plateau adjacent to the Djibouti Border and into DattaBahri where water exists but this is the encroachment of the sugarcane plantation. A recent visit found them highly scattered, with acute malnutrition and a beginning pocket of measles. While APDA always thought of them as better off in terms of livelihood and food security, the community has taken a critical dip requiring the organization's full assessment to help them find water and grazing – like the communities in other parts of Afar do, Kutubla people have just begun digging their own open wells to find sub-surface water.

#### ➤ **Discussions on change and moving forward**

Having undertaken a preliminary survey in Eli Daar, Bidu and Kori as to achievements; challenges and the way forward that particularly vulnerable pastoralists may move from ever – increasing drought shocks to recovery, APDA held a ½ - day discussion with 7 of the organization's partner organizations in Addis on November 3<sup>rd</sup>. The gathering was characterized by the three 'Fs' – friendly, frank and fruitful. As a loose consortium, the group has agreed to meet again on March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2018, APDA meanwhile searching through the recommendations and how the organization wants to step out further into the arena of Afar pastoralist development.

The discussion was cognizant of the fact that APDA has modelled and driven community development within the Afar pastoralist lifestyle for the past 24 years starting then from an almost clean slate of no development. While the organization has worked holistically and with diligence to support communities that the government does not reach with institutional services, there are growing and increasingly vicious challenges that are actually reducing the pastoralist household wellbeing and food security. To tackle this, it was agreed that APDA needs to be more focused and technology – strong. As far as it is possible, the organization needs to de-centralize from managing all from a single field office to having district- project management and projects on livelihood recovery need to be upwards of 10 years to guide and monitor the result. The organization needs to seriously see the pastoralist livelihood as including benefit from the resources of the region such as salt, minerals, infrastructure and not exclusively the household herd.

Given APDA has the now legally – registered social enterprise, it has the opportunity to raise funding from the various resources and infra-structure development of the region in order to directly fund community development.

The challenge for APDA does remain that it serves communities so remote and so illiterate, they themselves need hands-on mentoring to be free of the pain and the suffering that the now perpetuating shocks of the region incur. This then means a strategy to maintain rural health, education and social improvement services needs to evolve – an example of this is the need to sustain and further develop hostel service for the continuation of children's education from distant under-developed places to the town-based government school learning.

#### ➤ **Ethiopian National and Nationality Day**

On December 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> 2,000 guests from across Ethiopia as well as the leaders and representatives

of Djibouti; Sudan; Somalia along with around 30 Afar from the Diaspora enjoyed 2 days of celebration as led by Ethiopia's Prime Minister. The celebration, a 2<sup>nd</sup> yearly event in Ethiopia passed peacefully after involving some months of preparation

➤ **Not being able to take the figure off the pulse...**

As APDA goes forward with its partners into 2018, there are issues that are changing but changing slowly that the organization simply cannot give up on

- Stopping FGM and early marriage IS happening but indeed, the momentum to eventually achieve must be sustained. Each time the organization's team meets with the community on these matters (APDA tries to get each community it works with to dialogue with their respective leaders included at a minimum once yearly), exposure inches the community toward stopping – the actual revealing of the misnomer is always stark and cutting but gets results; the detailed hammering out of how these practices against female reproductive health are opposed in Islam is in the end, heart-rendering for communities who are sole – believers in the religion. The women extension workers living among them are going deeper and deeper into the reality of the female pain as well as the community paternal hold on the female. Afar FM radio; APDA – produced films; music and drama group; literacy education – these are all tools of change.
- Continuing to forge within the community the actual meaning/ necessity of education that it becomes part of Afar culture and the reality that development will not occur without it is just as essential.
- Alongside that, APDA continually struggles to get the community health – service seeking. So many of the emergencies APDA's Barbara May Maternity Hospital sees and those seen in the community are actually preventable if health services reach and are sort after in a timely fashion. While maternal death has been dramatically reduced through APDA's strategy of having the community health team within and from the community, there are still a volume of preventable deaths, even more so of newborn and under 1-year-old infants.
- Mobile health through vaccination and nutrition surveillance campaigns remains essential if remote under – 5 year olds and child-baring mothers are to be protected from the risks they now face in vaccine preventable illness and malnutrition – these communities are otherwise not reached. Right now, Teeru and Afdeera are desperately needing campaign vaccination.

While many organizations have discussed with us when and how Afar pastoralists will take up family planning, the organization is currently of the thinking that first the community must see itself well in the mirror of its capability and realize that under the current situation, unplanned child-birth in any family is adding to the vulnerability and the possibility of disaster.

Finally, as we close 2017 and journey on into 2018 together, APDA takes this chance to appreciate the magnificent role your partnership plays in supporting the organization mandate in Afar pastoralist development and **wishes each and every person celebration, relaxation and joy in being together over this Christmas/ New Year period**. Please continue to check us out – the website that is about to complete an overhaul from months of inaction – first hacked then insufficient internet connection to get it up again. Also, Austrian architect friends of APDA have put a film on You-Tube as follows: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S8sAWBljqM&feature=share> showing how they voluntary assisted in teaching Afar to use Adobe bricks in construction and their interaction with the community.