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NEW YEAR'S GREETINGS TO ALL!!! - THE AFAR PASTORALISTS INTO 2012

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1. Greetings and thanks

We have literally run into a New Year without giving a hand to you, our partners for making all that is happening with the Afar pastoralists possible!! For this we are sorry but the news is good!! – Here in Logya we have just completed a quarterly meeting to close the year, looking back and looking forward to how we can protect and advance the lives of pastoralists in this ever-complex world. As each of the seven program sector heads presented what they were able to achieve in the year and what they had learnt in the process to carry forward into a New Year, we were very mindful of the extra-ordinary support and friendship the organization has enjoyed through 2011 from you all. Your visits; your patience in working through seemingly insurmountable difficulties leading to new and innovative work as well as your generosity in assisting in actually volunteering to work with us in training and improving what is happening here is all part of this new era of history in which pastoralists are getting access to development on their terms. This is all the more amazing in a world where international economic crisis has become daily news. We look forward to working on with you through the plans of 2012, proving the seeming impossible that a people as neglected as the Afar can share in the opportunities of development in line with their livelihood.

2. A glimpse of your partnership on the ground in 2011

In 2011, APDA was able to achieve more than ever before:

- An emergency maternity hospital was opened and is now fully functional with the help of volunteer gynecologists and midwives
- 67 non-functional water sites were rehabilitated and 49 new sites were constructed
- A new system known as water shed management to rehabilitate erosion and drought degraded environment as well as increasing access to water was ventured into proving highly suitable to the Afar environment
- Saving and credit system suiting a pastoralist Moslem society was begun with growing take-off from the community
- Twenty previously not accessed communities were reached with Afar literacy with plans to include a health worker and women extension worker making their respective community development holistic
- Twenty non-formal education sites teaching primary level now have two to 3 teachers per site rather than the single teacher multitasking improving the quality of education
- Hostel support for remote community students facilitating them to continue education into the intermediary phase was started for 3 districts
- A vocational training center with 3 huge training workshops was constructed in Logya. To date, it is equipped to train in leather production such as shoes, belts and the like.
- Stopping harmful practices has gone into new areas as well as deepening the discussion involving the religious leadership and the clan leadership. Stopping FGM is accepted to the point of not infibulating the girl. The Regional leadership is strongly supporting stopping FGM all together. Rights in marriage for females are coming to the communities for the first time including right to inheritance.

- Five new youth groups are flourishing in some of the most HIV vulnerable districts and they are increasingly networked together and are proving catalyst to many vital changes.
- New strategies are being used that communities can embrace safe motherhood involving holistic development as well as deliberately tracking pregnant women in the community
- APDA took on community sanitation and constructed 10 public latrines in the year and assisted the community to construct at the household level in communities that have permanent settlements
- Regional conferences included the annual youth conference and a regional cooperative meeting

2011 was not an easy year: it began with several communities in serious food insecurity due to an extremely long dry season from September 2010 up to May of 2011, the affected communities having already incurred herd – losses from previous droughts. Rising food inflation has exacerbated households in getting basic food commodities. In June, an erupting volcano devastated the livelihoods for around 25,000 people in Bidu on the Eritrean border. In the year, the organization through the most excellent and timely support of partners was able to respond to these disasters and continue to do so as follows:

- 5 months food supply as well as supplementary food distributed for the displaced of the volcano eruption in Bidu
- Improved access to water as mentioned above included 16 new hand-dug wells, 41 new rainwater cisterns and 10 new ponds as well as water shed management scheme in Uwwa. Current activities are constructing a further 20 cisterns; 9 ponds; sinking up to 15 shallow and deep wells and digging 5 hand-dug wells.
- Construction of 120 kilometers of feeder-road
- Rehabilitation of 500 hectares of grass-seed depleted pasture land
- Supplementary feeding of 20,000 goats in 2,500 close to destitute households along with animal treatment
- Re-stocking in 2,400 destitute households with a further 200 households about to benefit
- Treatment of children with severe acute malnutrition in 12 districts

This work has gone to some of the most remote and previously unassisted communities in Bidu, Erebti, Magaale, Teeru and Afdeera along with the previously drought-assisted districts of Eli Daar and Kori. Indeed, through this assistance, a major catastrophe of famine and death was averted in 2011 and the communities pointed toward rehabilitation. The latter is enforced through training communities on disaster risk reduction and facilitating them in establishing plans. This is happening in 5 of the above districts.

Within APDA, the organization was strengthened by gaining young, degree-qualified staff in the education, health, relief and land-use sectors as well as to lead the new monitoring and evaluation sector. This new sector is re-vitalizing the way APDA looks at itself by analyzing baseline data and progress assessments as well as vitalizing the community development committees in each of the organization sites into pro-active development guides.

- Current looming crisis spots

The 'cold' winds of winter set in mid-December (temperatures falling below 20 at night and around 25 to 30° in the daytime). The winds are drying and most of the herds have moved into highland grazing on the western border. The districts that got well below average rains in July to September are now becoming extremely thirsty – this includes northern Eli Daar, Bidu and pockets in other districts such as Teeru where the flood-plain river diverted drying up the traditional wells to a dangerous depth of down to 15 to 20 meters. The winter '*Daddah*' rain is still expected but it is the least unreliable of the 3 annual seasons. Community teachers in Datta Bahari, a once lush farming/ grazing community in Dubte District report critical thirst and growing hunger as commercial farming has diverted community access to the Awash River in the past 12 months. Having had scant rain in that area these agro-pastoralists now have sparse grazing pasture and little land left to farm. APDA plans to survey the nutrition status in that area.

APDA is currently working closely with the Bureau of Health and other NGOs to improve nutrition surveillance and access to malnutrition treatment through new and revised strategies. For the pastoralists,

malnutrition is inextricably linked to their animals: poor animal health and nutrition results in limited household milk leading on to animals dying. APDA is trying to look at each part of this complex web aiming at household recovery and self-sufficiency. All aspects link in including availability to water.

- **Current development issues**

2. Afar language the underdeveloped corner-stone of Afar development

One of the greatest challenges facing the Afar is to mobilize the use of their language both in administration and education. APDA has struggled since its inception to introduce literacy in the rural areas bringing the first-ever written use of the Afar language in the 1990's. The government having introduced Afar – medium teaching at the primary level in 2008, in 2011, they agreed that Afar should be the medium of communication for internal administration. To date, 4 woredas (districts) have converted their daily communications into written Afar. Through inaction, year after year, the situation becomes more critical as town Afar are fast losing both language and culture leaving themselves in a critical limbo in their own land. Now clearly, the effort must be launched in the major towns. In partnership with the government Afar language development institute, the last week in February is now reserved as recognition of the Mother Tongue. There are many plans afoot including mobilization through the youth associations; writing all sign boards in Logya and Samara in Afar; mobilizing through radio and television and ongoing demonstrations of the culture.

To truly accelerate education access in the region and to move the region to the level of language maturity enjoyed by most other Ethiopians, the region needs

- A printing press dedicated to mass production of papers, journals, books and commercial printing
- Full-time writers and translators given to producing books for all tastes and needs
- Ongoing and consolidated training for Afar teachers
- An Afar language research place in the regional Samara University

Cultural development through youth centers of training and recreation are vital in all district and regional administration centers.

Meanwhile, to help us celebrate and demonstrate the language from February 22nd to 28th, APDA invites Afar and all interested people wherever they are to participate through the internet or by sending written material.

3. Progress at Mille hospital – from the first baby in early October to the first life-saving operation in early January

Afar women are beginning to really taste the benefit of our emergency obstetrics hospital in Mille, now a very busy institution. From the cry of first little baby 'Barbara' in September, the hospital is now giving the full service with operation-room facility thanks to our volunteers led by Dr Margaret, the gynecologist who has made Afar Region her second home!! Short-term midwife and anaesthetist have to date been invaluable in putting systems in place. Again, the local staff are on a fast-learning curve and are doing very well – we can certainly dream that Afar people will manage this hospital into the future!! Achievements include normal and assisted births since opening; repair of ruptured uterus and repair of prolapsed uterus cases. Twice weekly clinics are very busy seeing a high range of cases from antenatal checks to birth injuries and reproductive problems.

4. Access to intermediary learning for Afar children

Having achieved level 3 learning or the primary school phase through non-formal education in the rural communities, the region's pastoralist children are now looking for the opportunity to continue education into the intermediary phase (grades 5 to 8). The region has produced Afar textbooks for this purpose but the reality is that well over 75% of children who did complete primary level will not go into higher learning since they live far from the closest school offering intermediary learning and their family livelihood means that they will move with the herd several times in the year. Town living is unaffordable to these families and considered by the parents as not safe for their children unless there is a relative living in the town. This is particularly so for girls and in fact, they are normally extremely reluctant at this stage that their girls continue

learning in a far away environment. APDA has begun a new strategy of supporting children under 'hostel – living' conditions in the towns of Awra and Logya – students in Logya brought from Geega and Dagaba and will start this same system in Uwwa with the new school year. To date, this is an extremely well-received strategy that has excited the community immensely. The far away community can truly dream that one of their children will graduate as a doctor, engineer and the rest. In the coming year, APDA wants to strengthen and widen this strategy. After all, it is the lack of human capacity in the region that stands out as the most inhibiting issue in advancing community development.

5. Vaccinating again!!!

After a lapse due to lack of resources in 2010, APDA has begun to meet remote community need of routine vaccination again. APDA's unique strategy of taking out a generator – powered refrigerator packed with ice to maintain the cold-chain under the extreme challenges of distance on foot as well as the heat of the region allows the organization health workers to bring child vaccination and tetanus toxoid into the most inaccessible areas. Currently, APDA is working on three rounds of vaccination in Uwwa and Teeru and plans to also start in Afambo, Afdeera, Magaale and Erebti. In this activity, the now newly available pneumo-coccus vaccine (PVC 10) is included.

6. Vocational training

With now an excellent training facility available to train people in various marketable trades, APDA is anxious to see that many training courses happen over this year. This will benefit unemployed people in the town of Logya as well as those who have drifted out of herding due to the fact they lost all their animals. Therefore this center can greatly impact on poverty as well as on the local economy. The equipment to train leatherwork as mentioned above is available – the trainees will be able to produce highly saleable shoes, belts and bags. APDA would like to work on Afar traditional handicraft such as Afar jewelry, baskets and the like made in quantity for the tourist market as well that women learn the hospitality trade including cooking and hotel function. There are other ideas to establish the means of making local furniture, for people to learn the electricity trade and others. APDA is looking for partnership in this work.