

Stopping Female Genital Mutilation in Teeru and Goolina

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- A joint project of Afar Friends in Sweden
and Afar Pastoralist Development Association (APDA),
Ethiopia

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Activity Report number 1

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Executive summary

This project began in a flurry of great excitement and expectancy as the chosen project districts of Goolina and Teeru are known to be as yet unconquered frontiers for stopping female genital mutilation (FGM) and other traditional practices harming women. Therefore APDA found that the local authorities very much welcomed the project at the project orientation meetings. So did the APDA health workers of Teeru who had long been asking for a sister – support project to address the issues of stopping harmful practices and addressing safe motherhood through traditional birth attendants (TBAs).

To date, the project has discovered that FGM is continuing as it always has done in Goolina and is somewhat curtailed by the efforts of health workers in Teeru. Issues of forcing young girls to marry are very strong in both woredas but particularly Goolina. See below. It is therefore clear the project has a huge challenge to bring about change. The training of women extension workers in itself was a huge challenge since 30 women were trained and most of them had never had the opportunity to learn. In the process of the training, these women were taught to read and write so that they can be effective as women extension workers, reporting to APDA and the project. This then highlights that the underlying difficulty and challenge in these two woredas is the illiteracy that binds the community to traditions that are clearly harmful simply because the tradition identifies them as Afar people. Since APDA has been so far successful in facilitating the awareness to change in other woredas of the region, the project remains confident that the project objectives will be achieved in time.

Actual project agreement signing was undertaken on April 30th 2010. However due to a delay in obtaining the funding, activities did not start until August. Project women extension workers did not come into training until October since the intervening month was the Holy Month of Ramadan. APDA notified Afar Friends of this late start.

To date the project has implemented the following:

- The orientation workshops were undertaken
- Women extension workers selected and trained
- 30 women extension workers now working in their respective communities
- Youth training in Goolina

1. Project Background

The project was requested by the community and the organization against the backdrop of the overall difficulties that Afar women suffer as partners in marriage and mothers. As recently as 10 years ago, the most severe form of FGM was practiced by almost all Afar society since it has been their traditional practice for some thousands of years. With event of literacy, awareness raising and now increasing support from the government and media, FGM is stopping in communities where the dialogue has been developed and the community is deciding to stop. APDA found the most effective way of stopping FGM and empowering women was to train literate community women as agents of change for their own community. These women then became very strong advocates for change and keep a continual dialogue going in the community. Along side of this, the organization brings a group of awareness – raisers who first train the community leadership in the fact that FGM is against Islam and then with these leaders, open up discussion in the community to stop. Having gained success from this over time, APDA based this project on the same methodology.

Therefore the project objectives are as follows:

Short – term objective:

- a) Establish awareness in the project districts that FGM and forced marriage is not accepted and currently forbidden by law through activities of youth, local leadership and women extension workers
- b) During the project cycle, 50% of women actively support stopping FGM
- c) 50% of the project households improve hygiene, nutrition and birthing practices

Long -term objective:

- d) Contribute to the means whereby FGM and forced marriage will stop in Goolina and Teeru

Previous to this project, although they have heard by radio and government direction that FGM should stop, they have not had the opportunity to discuss it. Therefore this is opening opportunity for the first time in woredas where harmful tradition is almost unchanged over time.

2. Activities achieved in the reporting period

During the reporting period, the following activities were carried out:

- a) Project orientation meeting

In August 2010, APDA program management, the organization gender officer and a person from the harmful practices awareness raising team held meetings with both project woredas explaining the project objectives and discussing how to plan together to reach those objectives. Each meeting gathered 2 people from each kebele as well as the Women's Affairs Desk Head in the woreda, the Head of Islam, Health and education Desk Heads, Woreda Information officer from each of the woredas. Both meetings concluded that this project was vital to the social development of their respective communities.

- b) Selection and training of women extension workers

Following agreement with the woredas on selection criteria as gained during the August meetings, APDA representatives then visited each community selecting women for training. Of the 32 women eventually selected (2 to become coordinators/ team leaders of their respective woredas), only 40% had some small ability to read and write. Since the Holy Month of Ramadan was beginning in the last week of August, it was decided to start the training after the end of fasting in early October.

The 32 women then came to APDA's training facility in Logya and began training for a total of 2 months. During the training, the women were tasked with mastering Afar reading and writing, basic calculation as well as the APDA training course material for women extension workers.

The training modules as per the women extension training manual were as follows:

- a) Objective and job description of a women extension worker
- b) Hygiene and environmental sanitation
- c) Good nutrition
- d) Disease transmission prevention
- e) Safe motherhood and care of the young infant
- f) Community response to HIV & AIDS
- g) Response to traditional practices harming women including FGM and enforced traditions in marriage

Trainers included senior APDA women extension coordinators as well as Afar literacy teacher, numeracy teacher. The entire training was overseen by the program gender officer.

For each woman, this training was revolutionary to her life in that she had never been under such intensive learning for a purpose in her life and she was then taught the whole culture of learning as well as the culture of working for a salary. While the 2 months were punctuated by the fright the women had to enter such a different life, the training was completed with all 30 women reading and writing as well as being utterly determined to go to their community and make a change.

From the training, the best 2 women were selected to be team leaders and to coordinate the field work with APDA's field office in Logya.

c) Women extension workers daily activities

As of early December, the women began working in their respective communities having been equipped with field kits and working books. From January to March, the 2 project districts presented reports of having assisted a total of 10,830 women teaching them and demonstrating to them as follows:

District	# of WEW	Total assisted	Message breakdown						
			A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Goolina	12	6,547	576	1,643	2,619	1,135	665	57	428
Teeru	18	4,283	329	1,331	989	558	221	290	121
Total	30	10,830	905	2,974	3,608	1,693	886	347	549

Coding of messages:

A – Awareness and counseling on the affects of harmful practices particularly FGM/ C as well as no rights in marriage

B – Home treatment for diarrhea and fever and the dangers of taking medication not prescribed

C – Basic hygiene, sanitation and the use of soap

D – Nutrition and the use of lentils to treat anaemia

E- HIV prevention

F- Use of mosquito nets in preventing malaria

D – Assisting pregnant and delivering mothers

Since they have been in the field working, APDA management has sent two teams to them to monitor their activities and to see that they are relating well with the community and the community leadership.

In the most recent monitoring visit, APDA showed them how to work in groups to be more effective in running meetings and community discussions on harmful practices. The overall impression is that the women are working with great enthusiasm to transform their communities despite the enormity of the challenge they face.

d) Training of Islamic leaders

In Goolina, religious leaders and clan elders from each of the 8 kebeles were gathered in Kalwaan administration town with the woreda women's affairs head, the Head *Khadi* in the district, the Head of HIV prevention and the Head of education. A total of 68 people attended training discussing traditional practice in the district compared to the teaching in the Koran. The woreda Islamic leader was very outspoken and expressed that they were well aware that what was happening was unacceptable but they had failed to stop it and that FGM/ C I being done in all kebeles with 5 of them much stronger in terms of traditional practice. The training watched APDA awareness raising films and there was a general consensus that the reality was that the practice was horrific as being against Islam. Therefore they as leaders will now monitor this and see that the community does not practice it.

e) Harmful practices workshops

After the Islamic training, 3 community workshops were held gathering a total of 467 people discussing on stopping FGM/ C and giving girls rights in marriage. The community were highly shocked when they watched the film on FGM/ C and all agreed that it is highly brutal and must stop. The recent issue of girls killing themselves through lack of rights in marriage was discussed and this then led to a high discussion that was directed by the team Islamic Shiek stating that girls/ women in Islam cannot be forced to marry. In each site, a committee to monitor decisions to stop the practices was set up.

f) FGM practitioners conference

A total of 56 women who practice FGM/ C were gathered and they agreed to stop it realizing they are powerless against their belief, Islam.

g) Youth training

In March, 2 youth (one boy and one girl) was selected from each of the 8 kebeles in Goolina after explaining the purpose to the woreda officials. These people were then trained for 5 days on the dangers of and mobilizing against FGM as well as no choice for the female in marriage, need for education especially female education, transmission of HIV and how to prevent it; dangers of chewing *kaat* and gender in development in general. Each subject of teaching led to discussion. On FGM, the youth said that they are largely still practicing it and the community leaders said they had tried to stop it but the TBAs were very opposed to stopping and needed a thorough training.

On the discussion of female rights in marriage, the youth as well as the woreda officials said there were extremely serious situation in 5 of the 8 kebeles. Those leading the training reported as different from other parts of Afar: girls are forced to marry their '*absuma*' (cousin through their mother's side) without question. Often this is an older man and since education and if the girl is in education, she rarely gets past grade 3 without being dragged out to marry.

They are married at the age of 15 years, 16 or 17 years. In the past 3 months, 4 girls killed themselves by drinking poison because of this. The other problem is if the girl goes and marries someone she chooses, then the one she was supposed to marry then goes to the house of the girl and kills her parents. APDA will be taking very serious consideration to stop this extreme culture.

On the subject of HIV, they said they had heard of the danger but they had no idea of the situation and never think of being tested.

After being trained, this group of 16 people asked to be formed into an association to support one another and to work together. They are now back in their own communities to raise awareness and to monitor the situation of harmful practices.

Again, it was decided that the 16 rural youth should also gain support for a group of 20 youth from the surroundings of the woreda town that APDA also trained in the quarter. Together, these youth groups will be able to make a difference in their communities.

Following the youth training and because they were so thrilled that the youth had been trained, the woreda officials put on a celebration of food and organized the youth to dance. They underlined that APDA should come frequently to work with them on these critical issues.

3. Project beneficiaries

Project beneficiaries to date are:

Activity	Total beneficiaries	Male	Female
Orientation meeting	30	22	8
Women extension training	32		32
Youth training	16	8	8
Women extension awareness raising	10,830		10,830
Islamic leaders training	68	68	
Harmful practices workshops	467	286	181
FGM practitioners conference	56		56
Total	11,501	484	11,017

4. Analysis of impact

Already this project is making a deep mark on the society since the depth of the problems is being revealed and discussed. From the leadership, there is a very strong willingness to change as is clear by the spontaneous celebration put on by the leadership at the conclusion of the youth training. This stems from their readiness to state the problems they face.

The youth are extremely eager to see change and are looking for a better approach to life.

5. The way forward

This project requires very close follow – up. In the next quarter, as well as working in Teeru, all the activities in Goolina need strong monitoring and the community needs the opportunity to discuss.