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A New Year Dawns ON afar pastoralist development!!!!

1. Many greetings to one and all!!

APDA's end – of year meeting just concluded, all of us here send our warmest greetings to each and every person who has partnered us through 2008!! Below we share with you the achievements we found most exciting in the year totally mindful that this was a joint – effort: you lot out there and us here on the field – thank you for contributing time, resources, encouragement, ideas and for being an ambassador for the Afar people in the world beyond!!!! As we look on to 2009, we honestly do not expect an easier road but feel encouraged that there is the light of committed support and together with you we intend to build on past gains toward a safer life for these highly vulnerable Afar pastoralists. The issues remain our shared objective are halting illiteracy and developing education opportunity, raising up the Afar language to be the guiding tool, lowering maternal death and securing safety in infancy, stopping harmful practices, establishing a viable pastoralist household economy and bringing about an appropriate response to HIV & AIDS.

2. Challenges of 2008

The greatest challenge that the community faced in 2008 was hunger. This hunger was primarily sparked by recurrent drought progressively decimating the herd – in the most recent drought of September 07 to August 08, there was no single rain in the worst affected communities. Secondary to drought, food inflation played a great role in robbing the community of any chance to gain survival. The third great issue was a steep increase in displacement from the Eritrean border districts into Su'ula in northern Eli Daar – currently there are over 560 displaced households – all arriving malnourished, weak and sick. With Bureau of Health and UNICEF, APDA as battled severe malnutrition since early July. This is now highly associated with a raging measles outbreak that is claiming lives among the most malnourished.

3. Looming prospects of drought and in – hand plan

Since the unexpected 3 to 4 days rain in late October, there has not been a single shower – the winter rainy season is passing without any sign. The next expected rains are mid March. The rainwater that collected in October in the drought – struck, dry – belt (Eli Daar, Kori, Biru, Teeru, Erebt) is now dry. Pastures are fast – drying and the extraordinarily small remaining herd is in critical danger. Again, a continual trickle of displaced families moving down from the Eritrean border districts into Eli Daar (specifically Su'ula) has now reached almost 600 households in one place, adding to this burden. These people are essentially hungry and in poor health. They live with scant shelter, no sanitation in critical danger of disease outbreak.

- Thirsty communities in northern Eli Daar who were being assisted are again crying out for assistance (Manda, Buure, Andabba, Muusa Qale). Kori communities are dependant on trucked water in Lubak Daa, Kori, Guluble Af, Guyah and Teoh
- APDA is currently feeding milking goats in almost destitute households. This assistance will stop in 15 days in Kori and Biru. It is vital it continues that these households keep their

breeding animals and also that milk remains in the house. This is the most appropriate way to rehabilitate a household with severely malnourished members now treated with 'plumpy nut' – high caloric, nutritional food with minerals and vitamins.

There are several hundred absolutely destitute households, many in extremely remote areas. APDA has given 15 camels as pack animals to such families and plans to give a further 30 camels. Again, funds are secured to re-stock some 550 households in total with goats. Around 400 families remain in need.

Measles has been menacing drought – affected districts for 3 months but took a particularly strong hold along with influenza – type outbreak in November/ December. In December, some 25 died in Kori/ Biru alone. Deaths are among unvaccinated children as well as a remarkable number of adults. APDA health workers are responding with awareness – raising and treatment. Basic medicines are now in short supply particularly antibiotics, eye ointment and vitamin A.

4. Progress made in 2008

The program's end - of – year meeting, attended by some 66 field coordinators (health, education, women extension) as well as project leaders has endorsed the following progress/ achievements that energize APDA:

4.1 Developing Afar pastoralist education further along with the government

APDA's teachers are now teaching as far as Level 3 (grade 4) where the community has reached that level. Government – appointed examiners have tested the APDA teachers in the annual training to identify their standard. Through an Addis Ababa – based company, fifty one program teachers have commenced long – distance learning to take their grades beyond Grade 5.

4.2 Afar language in use in the woreda administration and the community

Afar language is being used in the woreda administration in almost all woredas as the medium of communication. Government – produced periodicals and APDA's *Meqem-Faxe* are reaching the local government and community level. Afar books are now being deliberately sold in the community and more books written.

4.3 Afar education is gaining momentum

APDA's student number per teacher is up in 2008 and in particular, female attendance is greatly improved. The program female student participation is now on 42% of the student total. The government program to mobilize teachers into remote areas has increased and again, there are more NGOs now involving in Afar pastoralist education. However, APDA remains the only institution implementing Afar literacy, the activity vital to securing education in the pastoralist society and essential to the ongoing development of the Afar language.

4.4 Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is stopping and pastoralist women are getting rights in marriage

All over the program, FGM is stopping as the practitioners are being identified and brought to the point of giving it up. Again, the issues making Afar women miserable in marriage are being vocalized and identified. Mobilizing the local – level religious leaders through awareness, training and networking to the woreda Islamic authorities has greatly stimulated this. APDA has identified places and communities to work on who are still resisting or who have not had the opportunity to dialogue on the matter. This then will lead to fairer participation of pastoralist women in development at all levels, firstly education.

4.5 Responding to drought has been life – saving as well as stimulating recovery

APDA was enabled to respond to the critical needs of pastoralists under drought: water transporting for the thirsty; food – for – work and cash – for – work in constructing essential infrastructure of water reservoirs; pasture improvement and feeder roads; treating severely malnourished people; treat animals and feeding milking animals as well as working to prevent a repeat of 2007's acute watery diarrhea through enforcing community hygiene and sanitation. In the year, APDA and the community has

- Constructed 10 double birikuts (cisterns for storing rain-water or transported water)
- Constructed 9 dams
- Constructed over 300 kilometers of feeder – roads
- Re-sown 140 hectares of pasture with grass-seed.

Again APDA has

- Supported 4 goats per household in 3,000 households with animal feed
- Treated tens of thousands of animals
- Currently 553 severely malnourished children and adults are on severe malnutrition treatment.

Out of these activities, the thrill of seeing emaciated animals pick up to reproduce and give milk as well as the exuberant community participation in work activities constructing excellent roads and water reservoirs has given enormous hope. The community is now a 'new – believer' in fodder!!!

APDA was able to recommence vaccination as a campaign in remote areas in September having completed a project in March. The all – essential measles and whooping cough vaccine is again going out to affected areas. Again, APDA health workers went out in campaign to assist communities affected by measles.

4.6 Community cooperatives are strengthened

Having facilitated the community to establish the first 6 animal marketing cooperatives, in the year APDA spent time to train these cooperatives and another 2 new groups in bookkeeping, management and finance planning. Again, 11 woredas each got a person to facilitate community cooperatives in training, information gathering and diversifying income. The organization assisted a further 4 women's income generating groups (now a total of 8 groups), first teaching them to read and write Afar and basic calculation and then training them in cooperative management. These groups link their activities to stopping FGM.

4.7 HIV community response is emerging

In communities where APDA is working intensively the community has begun testing people for HIV before marriage and government testing has revealed the extent of the problem. There remains a need to rid the community mind of stigma toward AIDS. The youth response is emerging as critical to this.

4.8 Strategies to lower maternal death are now more effective

The women's treatment center as the 'hub' to this is within 3 to 4 months of being completed in Mille. It is a mini hospital that will initially take on the expertise of volunteering overseas obstetricians and midwives. Eight surrounding districts are the rural base of the project aiming to secure a waiting area for 'identified 'at – risk – mothers in each district. Community health workers, women extension workers and traditional birth attendants are vital to this in the household/ field contact with the mothers providing antenatal checking as well as raising awareness to improve safety for pastoralist mothers.

4.9 Charcoal production in 3 targeted districts is now very much reduced

Having used prominent leaders as advocates and utilizing traditional environmental protection laws, much of the charcoal production that arose in the past 7 years has stopped. However, those

who involve in the trade out of destitution having lost their herd to drought now require an alternative livelihood through re-stocking or income generation.

5. Expectations for 2009

As noted above, the immediate issues relate to providing ongoing response to drought – affected communities that have fallen into destitution and are affected by severe acute malnutrition. Pivotal to this is

- a) Continuation of animal feeding that the remaining goats are secured and milk remains in the house
- b) That water is transported to thirsty communities in Eli Daar, Kori and Biru
- c) A continual supply of supplementary food as well as relief food to the affected communities and that therapeutic treatment of severe acute malnutrition continue until the population is secure.
- d) Providing recovery for destitute households.

There remains 'hanging issues' that APDA sees as strategic to achieve in order to accelerate development gains. These include

- a) Establishing school feeding especially in drought – affected districts in APDA's mobile schools
- b) Establishing community radio as the microphone of all development messages as well as creating productive community discussion resolving issues such as local conflict and giving a forum for broadening the platform of community attitudinal change particularly on issues affecting pastoralist women's rights and HIV & AIDS.
- c) Gaining specifically - needed scholarships to train upcoming APDA leaders qualifying them according to international expectation.

APDA looks forward to consolidating the following:

- a) Establishing environmental protection based on traditional knowledge making it directly applicable to the pastoralists
- b) Working more on the development of Afar literature
- c) Securing a more affective relation between community development committees and the program as well as with local government
- d) Improving the safety for girls/ women adversely affected by traditional practices as well as gaining an affective family law in the region.
- e) Working on the way forward for pastoralist children to continue education into the intermediary phase of grades 5 to 8.
- f) Working on equalizing education opportunity for girls and women through awareness and incentive to female students such as Afar – appropriate traditional blouses.