

Strategic alliance towards building community capability and freedom for development in pastoralist Afar Region

A CASE STUDY PAPER PRESENTED AT HDCA 2006 ANNUAL MEETING

BY

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Key words: Strategic, alliance, capacity development, dialogue, basic services delivery, pastoralist

Abstract:

This case will bring to the conference the experience of enhancing the capacity and building coalitions with a pastoralist community in Ethiopia, in order to realise their own development.

The Afar pastoralists live in the dry lowland regions of Ethiopia. The total population is 1,106,383, with 92.2 % living in rural areas. Afar Region is poorly served in terms of primary education, health and veterinary services, clean drinking water and other basic services.

The Strategic Alliance Partnership (SAP) was jointly established in May 2004, by APDA (Afar Pastoralist Development Association), Oxfam Great Britain, SNV and DfID (UK Department for International Development), to work together for three years in the Afar pastoralist region

The key objective of the SAP is to support the improvement of health and education for the rural Afar community, through setting up and strengthening systems of basic service delivery and building capacities for dialogue and networking.

Building partnership between development actors is critical in localising Millennium Development Goal (MDG) targets and building a society where all people enjoy the freedom to pursue their own sustainable development. To this effect, SNV's involvement in SAP is centred on strengthening capacities of local organisations towards coalition building and dialogue for setting shared visions, objectives and approaches to improve service delivery and facilitate participation.

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I. Introduction

Afar Region is one of the pastoralist areas of Ethiopia. It is dry lowland, located in the north east of the country, bordering with Eritrea and Djibouti in the north and north east respectively. The population of Afar Region is 1.1 million according to the 1996 census of the Central Statistics Authority (CSA), with 92.2 % living in rural areas.

The Afar region is poorly served in terms of primary education, health and veterinary services, clean drinking water and other basic services. In 2006 the regional government reported that primary school enrolment is 25 %, with girls making up only 30% of enrolled students. Health and rural water supply coverage is 31 % and 17% respectively. The report further indicated that basic service coverage in Afar region is 75% below the national average. The underlying causes for this include institutional capacity limitations; weak linkages and networking; inappropriate policies; poor understanding of pastoralist issues and development approaches; degradation of natural resources and lack of a coordination system for pastoral livelihoods.

The service providers in the region are primarily community led traditional organisations which are mostly clan and religious structures. There are also around 23 NGOs (local, international, bilateral and multilateral) working in the region. Consultation, coordination and collaboration among these agencies is almost non-existent, in particular regarding approaches and implementation of development initiatives and geographical coverage. This situation necessitated setting up a partnership for dialogue between development actors in the region and was the basis for the Strategic Alliance Partnership for the development of the Afar pastoralist community.

II. Policy background

The rural population of Ethiopia constantly face challenges that impede their development, including acute and chronic poverty; inadequate social and economic infrastructure; and the threat of recurrent drought. Some 31 million people, or 44% of Ethiopians, live below the poverty line equivalent to 45 US cents per day (PASDEP, 2005). The level of poverty is particularly high in pastoralist communities who depend upon livestock production. There are around 7 million pastoralists in Ethiopia, occupying approximately 60% of the nation's land mass (PCAE, 2000).

The Ethiopian Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) encompasses rural development and sector based development strategy, decentralisation and capacity building programmes. The policy on basic services emphasises decentralised community based delivery with strong cost sharing components, and also encourages participation of the private sector. Paradoxically, the document encourages pastoralist settlement as the only means of securing pastoralist livelihoods.

The most recent PRSP, which has been renamed Plan for Accelerated and Sustainable Development to End Poverty (PASDEP), has given low emphasis to pastoralist development. However, the document accepts that human development indicators and poverty among pastoralist communities are uniformly worse than those of other communities. The inability of service providers to understand the unique needs of pastoralist communities compounds the poor state of human development. Under the PASDEP major efforts will be made to reach pastoralists with tailored programmes, such as a network of informal community based schools and mobile outreach health services (PASDEP, 2005).

Most national policies and strategies have not yet properly addressed issues related to pastoralist development in general, and the Afar in particular, due to the following reasons:

- During policy formulation, pastoralists were not invited to participate
- Policies for the diverse socio-cultural and agro-climatic regions were formulated on the basis of the perceived success and dominance of the highland/ sedentary way of life
- Slow progress in practice of decentralisation and good governance

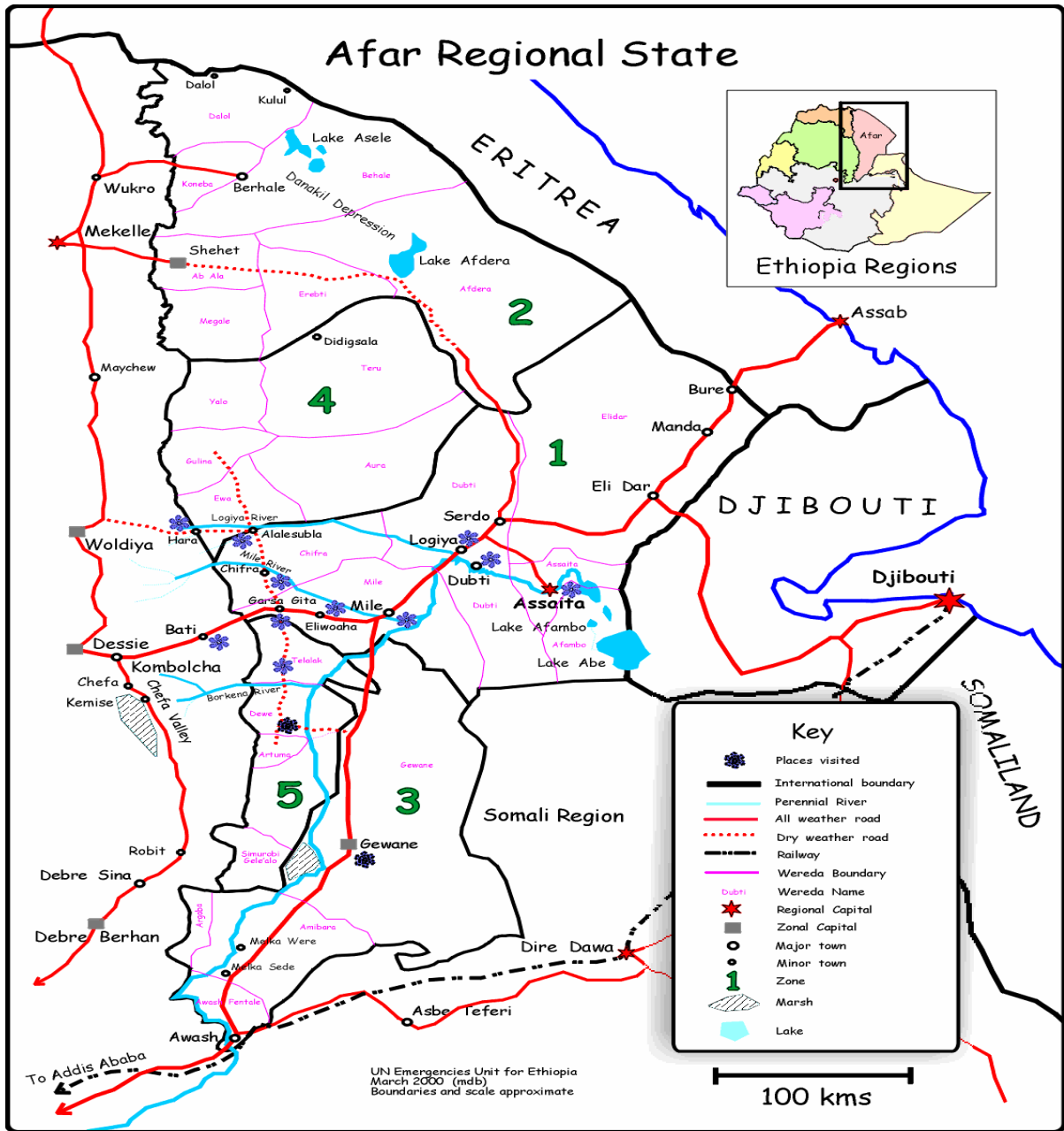


Figure 1: Map of Afar Region

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs

III Strategic Alliance Partnership (SAP)

Afar Pastoralist Development Association (APDA) was the first indigenous non-governmental relief and development organisation to be established in Afar Region. In 1993, concerned Afar citizens, including prominent clan elders and leaders, came together on a voluntary basis to establish APDA. Initially, the association was involved in relief activities, in response to chronic drought situations and resultant conflicts. In addition to responding to immediate survival needs, APDA focused on primary health in the Eli Da'ar district and in 1996, tested alternative methodologies to improve primary health care and literacy, with funding and technical support from Oxfam GB. At present, APDA is one of the strongest NGOs representing pastoralists in the region and is actively engaged in delivery of alternative basic health, education, and rural water supply programmes in 60% of the districts in the Afar Region.

An impact assessment was carried out in June 2003, and subsequent consultative workshops were organised to share the findings with community representatives, relevant bureaux and the regional council. The workshops raised the need for partnership building; documentation and dissemination of APDA's good practice; capacity building for local actors; and networking. This was the basis of the Strategic Alliance Partnership.

Strategic Alliance Partnership was established in May 2004 by four organisations working in Afar Region: APDA, SNV (Netherlands Development Organisation), Oxfam GB and DfID (UK Department for International Development), in order to strategically address capacity gaps in local development actors through organisational development processes; network and build partnerships; and to learn from the ongoing practices of service delivery at community level.

IV. Cases

1. Working against the policy and eligibility requirements...

1.1 The mobile basic service delivery model and approach

When APDA started implementing development programmes in 1994, the literacy rate in the region was just 2%. Only 8.4% of women received antenatal care, and 1.4% of deliveries were attended by trained birth attendants, resulting in very high infant and maternal mortality rates, of 11.2% and more than 7% respectively.

Pastoralist livelihoods depend on livestock, so communities are constantly on the move in search of food and water for their livestock. In this context, the most effective way to provide basic education and health services in Afar Region is through alternative basic education and health services delivered by mobile providers. The Afar regional government was not providing such services due to a fundamental flaw in understanding and conceptualising the context in which services are

delivered, combined with lack of infrastructure, supplies, management systems, human resources and capacity, and issues related to the remoteness of Afar Region. Education and health policies adopted by the regional government are handed down from federal government, and do not consider the specific situation in Afar Region.

APDA modelled its methodology for service delivery on pastoralist lifestyle and traditional modes of communication, decision making and systems, by adapting traditional structures from the clan system. Their system involves active community participation in discussions on important and urgent matters, such as those at risk of being infected or affected by HIV/ AIDS, traditional harmful practices that affect gender relations and socioeconomic wellbeing, and managing natural and cultural resources.

The mobile approach focuses on training men and women from the community in the methods of alternative basic education (ABE) and functional literacy for adults, and in the concepts, issues and skills involved in delivering basic primary and community health services. Other development activities, including drinking water, veterinary services and income generating activities, are integrated into a package of basic services and delivered by mobile female extension workers who travel by camel, and who receive new inputs during regular reflection and planning sessions.

1.2. Comparative advantage of the mobile approach

More coverage: Mobile health and school provision reaches pastoralist communities, including women, children and old people, at convenient time and places.

Efficient and effective use of community health workers and teachers to reach people over scattered geographical areas, which does not require excessive logistical and technical backup.

Accessibility and affordability: Conventional schools are situated in towns, far from pastoralist communities, and pastoralist households often cannot afford to educate their children in towns despite state-supported free schools. Local materials are used to build mobile schools and the structure can easily move around with the group it services. The alternative services have directly resulted in greater uptake of health care and educational services, and contributed to higher school enrolment rates and a reduction in maternal and child mortality. District administrators, village leaders and police officers are also participating in the adult literacy programme.

Working within local context: The education calendar is flexible, in accordance to seasonal mobility, unlike the government education system which is uniform across the country.

Creation of employment and enhancing capabilities of the pastoralist community: More than 90% of APDA administrative staff and 100% of the local level staff, including teachers and female extension workers, are from the pastoralist community. Instructors in alternative basic education, who were trained by APDA, are now employed by the Regional Education Bureau as instructors and teachers.

Case witness 1: Mahmud, an elder from Hakkara Village

“Until APDA brought education to our village, no family was interested in sending their children far away to government schools in towns like Eli Da’ar. We cannot afford the money required for educating our children in towns and anyway, we need their labour for herding and other tasks. As a result most children remained uneducated.

Since APDA started mobile schools in my community, I have enrolled my children, and so have other parents. We selected potential teachers from among the community, and APDA trained them, so the teachers live and move with us and our children. The children are taught underneath a tree at whatever time is suitable. The other good thing is that the children are taught to read and write in Afar language and all the lessons are in Afar. These are some of the reasons that motivated us to enrol our children in the mobile school. In our village, the school is run by one teacher and at present, it has a total of 45 students, including 10 girls. Three of my children are attending and now they can read and write in the Afar alphabet and they know numbers. Also, they are learning about new ways of doing things which save lives and keep people healthy. If children are educate they are less likely to take up bad habits like addiction to *kaat* or other things. The APDA way is good to bring education to our children.

Case witness 2: Kadiga

“One of the outcomes of APDA mobile schools is the increased number of literate Afar youth and adults. Another impact is that many kebele and clan leaders from APDA target communities have been able to start communicating with government bureaux in writing. Communication and leadership of Afar men and women have improved through literacy skills, leadership training and opportunities provided to local leaders. Also, pastoralists educated by this project have been recruited to fill various government positions at kebele, woreda and regional levels. I can say that the education programme and training given to local leaders has contributed substantially to strengthening the administrative capacity of regional government.”

Case witness 3: Ali Musa from Hakkara

“My whole family joined the literacy classes two years ago; my wife, my children and me. Now we can all read and write, which helps keep daily records and balances of our business. We can record the amount we make by selling goats and butter and how much we spend on our household needs. We have sent the children to Eli Da’ar town to school now; the oldest is in Grade 7. I sell a goat every month to pay for them to stay in the town with a relative.”

1.3. Documentation, disseminating good practice, institutionalisation and revising policy

The good practices of APDA in alternative basic health and education service delivery have been documented, published and disseminated. The main reason for the focus on documenting and disseminating good practice is to present evidence-based experiences to influence other development actors towards building strategic alliance and putting in place appropriate policies and approaches. The SAP provided the opportunity for researchers from Addis Ababa University,

Institute of Development Studies, to sit down with communities and government bureaux and listen to their stories of engagement with the development programmes of APDA.

Good practice of APDA has been disseminated in three ways; the original version of the document was in English and it has been translated into Afar language. The document was then shared with government bureaux, non-governmental and civic organisations working in primary health care and primary education at national and regional levels.

The way forward to institutionalise the approach at regional level was discussed at a workshop presenting the highlights of a best practices document. Since 2004, the regional bureau of education has adopted the mobile alternative education as a strategy to deliver basic education, opening 110 pilot primary mobile schools in the region. The education bureau has also revised its requirements about essential grade qualifications for non-formal ABE facilitators.

2. Creating space for dialogue, participation and partnership building

The Strategic Alliance Partnership facilitates capacity development and provides support for learning and scaling up of good practices through partnership building and networking. The following sections outline some of the activities that aim to create space for dialogue, participation and partnership building.

2.1. The Afar Development Conference

The Afar Development Conference was organised by APDA, in collaboration with the regional government, in December 2004. It was attended by Afar in the diaspora (North America, Europe, Australia, Asia and Africa), local partners (NGOs and government agencies) and members of the community, who thoroughly discussed regional and local development issues for two weeks. The conference was divided into seven days of discussions and seven days of field visit, and facilitated by SNV.

The conference was very successful, as it brought together different stakeholders and potential partners who agreed on a position statement on many aspects of the vulnerability of Afar people and ways of managing the situation. Some of the points to mention include:

- Community based management of high vulnerability situations that are due to recurrent drought in the region
- Innovative and flexible ways of increasing the spread of education and reach of health services
- Combating violence against women and actions for changing gender relations
- Improving livestock productivity and marketing
- Resolution of conflicts with neighbouring communities

2.2. Participatory strategic planning exercise and consultative workshops

Developing APDA's strategic plan involved staff from APDA's head office, field offices and extension programme as well as participants from government bureaux, employing the Appreciative Enquiry methodology. This was the breakthrough point in the relationship between APDA and representatives from regional and district bureaux. It was the first time that representative from regional bureaux, clan representatives and development agents participated in the development of a strategic plan in the region. At that time, APDA was the only organisation in Afar Region to develop a strategic plan, which it continues to implement. As a result, the regional council accepted APDA's strategic plan as an input in the development of their own strategic plan for regional government. Recently all bureaux in the region have developed their own strategic plans.

Subsequently, consultative workshops were organised at the regional headquarters and in four districts, with the aim of sharing APDA's development approach as reflected in its strategic plan. It was the first time that the Regional President, heads of sector bureaux and pastoralist association administration, clan leaders and APDA's staff had met together to discuss development issues of the region.

2.3. Creating Afar Pastoralist Development Forum (APDF)

All development actors, including the Afar regional government, consistently expressed the need for a common platform to share information and develop strategic thoughts about the development agenda of Afar pastoralist people. The process of forming the forum was slow, as it sought to involve major non-governmental development stakeholders and to keep government counterparts informed about the process and decisions reached. In April 2006, Afar Pastoralist Development Forum (APDF) was finally launched with 14 NGOs as core members and government officials as observers.

The APDF has started to work on creating and strengthening the network, with the aim of creating conducive environment for NGOs and government to work together; specifically in efficient use of resources in order to localise the MDGs and achieve the targets of MDGs 2, 3 and 7 in the Afar Region.

V. Strengthening capability for development and freedom

The Afar pastoralist lifestyle suits their existence in a dry and arid area. However, unless the Afar pastoralists adapt their lifestyle and improve their capacity to meet ever increasing outside influences, the viability of their lifestyle will be compromised to the point of severe societal harm.

Considering the existing situation in the Afar community, development approaches need to enhance community capabilities for their own development; for example, the mobile service delivery system,

used by APDA and facilitated by the SAP, synchronises service delivery and a transformative learning process, where communities are prime movers in the development process.

APDA's programmes help the community to build their own capabilities for self-learning and use their traditional knowledge to design alternative basic schools for the community. Self confidence is another outcome, as the community perceive that teachers and health attendants can be from their own community. On the other hand, they can explore their capacity to change and development, such as eradicating harmful traditional practices. After consistent dialogue with traditional leaders and other opinion formers, where evidence was presented about the harm caused by female genital mutilation (FGM), many Afar women who previously conducted FGM are now advocates against the practice.

The SAP tapped into the opportunities created by APDA's approach to the development of the Afar community. The SAP facilitated the strengthening of APDA and the Afar community by:

- Building APDA's strategic thinking and planning for their own development priorities
- Increasing the collaboration of actors in the region
- Recognising the need for organisational capacity development and creating space for participation, dialogue and partnership building.
- Influencing the Afar Regional Government to institutionalise and scale-up good practices
- Creating a common platform by establishing APDF and other networking in specific sectors

In order to achieve, and even go beyond, the MDGs the first priority is to understand the root causes of poverty and marginalisation. This involves developing a shared vision, objectives and mechanisms for collaboration between NGOs, government and the community.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

The historical structural marginalisation and chronic vulnerability of the Afar community has led to adverse socioeconomic indicators. SNV and the SAP's close interaction with APDA has strengthened community based non formal approaches towards achieving and surpassing the MDGs. Work on locally acceptable, affordable and adaptable approaches has begun a process of transforming Afar society and balancing power relations.

Collaboration by development actors, policy makers and community based organisations is critical in localising MDG targets and building a society where all people enjoy the freedom to pursue their own sustainable development. In this regard, SNV as part of the Strategic Alliance Partnership focuses on strengthening the capacity of local organisations to work in coalition, engage in dialogue about shared vision and objectives, agree on approaches to improve service delivery and practice participation, which enables empowerment and development.

Recommendations:

- Strengthen local organisations capacity towards coalition building, networking and mutual learning forums.
- Promote an enabling environment that fosters dialogue and collaboration, in order to create conditions in which local communities can more effectively use their own knowledge and capabilities to achieve better livelihoods. There should be concerted effort to develop partnership among different actors on negotiation, influencing policies, strategies and programmes.
- Ensure that the whole process of development is linked with implementation of interventions that help the emergence of collaborative endeavours
- Give equal opportunities to implementation of basic service delivery and transformation processes for wider and more sustained engagement in achieving the MDGs and beyond.

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The capability approach model

