

A partnership for pastoralists

Delivering education and health services in Afar, Ethiopia

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Formed in May 2004, the Strategic Alliance Partnership has united local and external agencies working in the Afar region. The coalition has achieved notable successes in improving health and education services for pastoralist communities.

The Afar region of northern Ethiopia is a vast, dry area across which pastoralist communities migrate in search of water and pasture for their livestock. The government provides some basic education and health services, but their outreach is limited, and they are often not geared to the needs of pastoralist communities and their itinerant way of life.

The Afar Pastoralist Development Association (APDA) was set up in 1993, initially to provide emergency relief for pastoralist communities affected by drought and local conflicts. Gradually, APDA's priorities have changed, and it is now focusing on improving the delivery of basic services. APDA has based its approach on the pastoralist way of life, including traditional decision-making processes and clan-based structures in which all community members participate in discussions on important issues. In 1996, with the support of Oxfam GB, APDA began working in Eli Da'ar district to test alternative ways to deliver basic healthcare, particularly for women, and primary education for children in remote areas where the average literacy rate was just 2%.

Mobile schools

As part of its education programme, APDA introduced mobile schools for pastoralist communities. Each group selects potential teachers from among the community, and APDA trains them. These teachers then live and move with the community, and give lessons to the children whenever possible. Most important, they teach in the Afar language, so that the children learn to read and write in their mother tongue. The mobile schools provide employment, they are affordable for parents, and more children now receive an education that is rooted in the local context.



Today, APDA is involved in a variety of basic education, health and rural water supply programmes. Following an assessment of APDA's activities in 2003, the association recognised that in order to scale up its mobile services approach throughout the region, it would have to work in partnership with other actors, as well as improve its documentation to allow the dissemination of good practices. Efforts to improve the capacities of partners at all levels, and effective networking, were essential.

At that time, some 23 local, international and multilateral agencies were working in the region, yet there was little consultation, coordination or collaboration with regard to the implementation and coverage of projects. Thus, in May 2004, APDA, SNV, Oxfam GB and the UK Department for International Development (DFID) formed a Strategic Alliance Partnership (SAP). The partners agreed to coordinate their efforts to address the capacity needs of local actors through organisational development, as well as to promote learning from the ongoing efforts to improve service delivery at the community level.

Scaling up the approach

The partnership has achieved a number of notable successes. Following a campaign in 2004, the regional bureau of education adopted APDA's mobile schools as an effective strategy for delivering basic education. The bureau is now supporting 110 mobile primary schools for pastoralists in Afar.

The collaboration between partners, and with other actors in the region, has enabled APDA to scale up its mobile services approach. It soon became apparent that a broader platform was needed, and in April 2006 the Afar Pastoralist Development Forum (APDF) was launched. The forum, representing 14 local NGOs and the regional government, is now developing a common strategy for assisting pastoralist communities throughout the Afar region.

Links

[Afar Pastoralist Development Association](#)

[Community Development Resource Association \(CDRA\)](#)

[FARM-Africa, Afar Pastoralist Development and Rehabilitation Project](#)

[Eldis Pastoralism Resource Guide](#)

[Human Development and Capability Association \(HDCA\)](#)

[Oxfam GB Pastoralism programme](#)

[Pastoral and Environmental Network in the Horn of Africa \(PENHA\)](#)

[SNV Ethiopia](#)

Further reading

T. Haile and J. Roy (2006)

[Strategic Alliance towards Building Community Capability and Freedom for development in the pastoralist Afar region](#). Paper presented to the Human Development and Capability Association.

Oxfam (2006)

[DFID/Oxfam GB Partnership Programme: Final Report](#)

S. Soal (ed.) (2003)

[Holding Infinity, Guiding Social Process: A Workbook for Development Practitioners](#). Community Development Resource Association (CDRA).