

Sugarcane Large Irrigation Schemes Easing Impact of El Nino

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01-25-16

The 2015 El Nino weather pattern, affecting the weather of some areas around the world, has exposed especially many parts east Africa to severe drought disturbing their seasonal rainfall. Tremendously lowering the volume of the rivers water was one among many others the impact of this catastrophic weather pattern is seen surfacing at this part of Africa. El Nino generally affects the macro economy of different countries particularly of those with rain-driven agricultural commodities.

On the other hand, big dams with large irrigation infrastructures constructed to halt the flow of water of rivers uncontrolled but rather use this resource wisely and efficiently play a very significant role to cope up the drought that usually follow the aforementioned weather pattern especially on those dependant on such agricultural practices.

Ethiopia is one among many other nations which have faced drought due to the current weather pattern. On the other hand, the Nation, for the last decade, has been working robustly, though not enough, in building big dams and large irrigation schemes to use its abundant water resource efficiently. But, the severity of the 2015 El Nino is so high that Ethiopia's great effort on the constructions could not stop, though minimize, the adversary impact of this unusual weather pattern in many cases except on Omo River where it has zero impact because of Omo-Kuraz Sugar Development Project.



Bodi native taking care of his Maize plantation field

According to the Head of South Omo Zone Administration , Ato Alemayehu Bawdi the Omo Kuraz Sugar Development Project has greatly helped all districts of South Omo Zone to do away with adverse impact of the current change of the weather that affect many parts of the nation where such large irrigation infrastructures are not available.

"As we are using irrigation infrastructures at Woitoo, Bezzo and Omo, we have faced no drought at all our districts", Ato Alemayehu added. Recalling the vulnerability of Selamago District earlier, following the start of the sugarcane plantation of the project we have never supplied food aid to the District, he says. "No shortage of either water or grazing land is reported till now" he has also disclosed, giving the credit to Omo-Kuraz Sugar Development Project.

"The irrigation schemes of the above sugarcane plantation has enabled both former as well as new villages of the Bodi nationality, who were not familiar with farming, to harvest maize up to 70 quintals per hectare for the fifth round" Ato Asres Adarro- Public Organization, Compensation and Rehabilitation Deputy General Manager of Kuraz-1 Sugar Development Project on his part says.

Chief Administrator of Selamago District, Ato Pashima Welkorro is another official who has shared his views on the project's role in doing away with the impact of the current weather pattern at his district. He, recalling the now & then

exposure of the district to food assistance prior to the inception of the Kuraz Sugar Development Project, discloses the zero impact of the current worldwide adversary weather pattern at the district due to the project. We used to supply food aid as the yearly maize harvest of the pastoralists at Omo-Shashi was meager to cover their annual demand, he further noted. According to him, pastoralists around need no more now to wonder here and there in search of water or grazing land and it was all possible since the inception of the project.



Bodi youth getting access to schools

Bochi Doorba is a pastoralist of Bodi community and is one among many others who voluntarily have joined the villagization program. He recalls how much members of his community were skeptical when the project began at their area and how they were watchful on every activity of the project with uncertainty till their as well as members of Murssi community's visit to Benna Tsemai, Dassenech and Gngangatom Weredas pastoralists of South Omo Zone who have become beneficiaries of the irrigation schemes earlier than them.

“We also have paid a visit to the pioneer of the sugar industry of the nation- Wonji Shewa Sugar Factory and share the rich experiences of the farmers around from whom we have learnt how the industry has enabled them to become self sufficient

from their past experience of their repeated exposure to food aid ”, Bochi further went on saying. Requesting the Zone Administration and the project to participate in Kuraz Sugar Development Project and being handed over with 0.75 hectares of irrigable land cultivated with sugarcane, we are now waiting eagerly for the beginning of sugar production of the sugar mill currently under construction, he has also added. “We have also harvested Maize for the fourth round and are now preparing it for the fifth one with the help of the project while we are also taking care of the cane field parallel with the former” he also says. According to Bochi his kids are enrolled at the school constructed at his door steps and members of his community are no more moving far in search of water and grazing land for their cattle as ponds are made ready everywhere for this purpose.



On the other hand, with regard to the amount of consumption of the Omo River to the large irrigation of the project Deputy General Manager of Construction of Irrigation and Maintenance of Kuraz-1 Sugar Development Project Ato Behailu Getachew on his part says the project, through its main and secondary canals, uses only 0.0023 meter cube water out of 22.76 meter cube it intakes from Omo River letting the rest to flow back to the River’s route.

When it comes, likewise, to Gibie River power production, the water directed for the purpose will normally go back to its usual course causing no variation on the amount of the River.

Ethiopia's engagement in building dams and constructing large irrigation schemes for the past ten years especially in relation with sugarcane plantations at the various regions of the nation has bear fruit in coping up, though not avoid the impact of the 2015 El Nino weather. And hence, sugar factories such as Metehara, Kessem, Tendaho as well as Wolkayit Sugar Development Project have played a very significant role in assisting natives around them exposed to the drought by supplying water, top sugarcanes as well as bundles of hays to their cattle.



Potable water made accessible to natives

Had it not been for the construction of the large irrigation infrastructures and dams the nation has been carrying out especially for the last decade, the world would have heard the most horrible impact of El Nino on the nation, especially at arid areas, early in 2015. One can site here the role the Tendaho Dam of Tendaho Sugar Factory at Afar Regional State has played since the first two or three months of 2015 to date in easing the water shortage of natives around and their cattle have been facing.

Hence, Ethiopia as the Water Tower of Africa is righteous in using its abundant water resource fairly. And, it is with this in mind and together with the vulnerability of the nation to repeated drought due to its dependence on the rain-driven agricultural practices that the FDRE Government has been engaged for more than ten years on using the nation's water resource efficiently building big dams and large as well as small irrigation infrastructures which in the long run will definitely enable the nation to cope up with the adversary influences of worldwide weather changes like El Nino.

Kuraz Sugar Development Project where the nation is constructing five sugar factories, three with 12 thousand and two with 24 thousand TCD, has created job opportunities to 31,472 citizens.