

Afar Region and Its Development

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(Part One)

Ethiopia is a country of great history. But, it's also a country which went through many tumultuous and challenging period, while its citizens didn't had a way to get fair justice. Especially, as there was no long & lasting peace and security around the country, it wasn't able to garner economic growth by carrying out successful works.

However, starting from the last 20 years, as our country took many works in bringing peace and security; the political, economic and social measures and actions taken by the government to realize the country's renaissance, are now even being used as a benchmark by the other developing countries.

The success garnered in green development, agricultural & infrastructural development and in generating job opportunities for the youth, are part of the success story. In addition to the fact that these success stories are inclusive of all the public from one corner of the country to the other, the fact that they are a developmental path taken by the public as its own has guaranteed these developmental plans to be successful.

The equality of all nation, nationalities of people of Ethiopia and the publics' right to use the country resources mutually and equally; which is enshrined in the constitution, has made the public to work for development, peace and mutual benefit.

Thus, in this article I will try to give you, my dear readers, a brief book into the Afar region; which is part of the aforementioned success like every other regions of our country, by probing into the peace and development effort that is being carried out currently in the region.

I don't think it will be an exaggeration to claim that the Danakil Depression (lowland) is one of the main places in the world that harbors gorgeous (beautiful) natural beauties and amazing land resources like the Assale and Afdera Lakes, the Erta Ale volcano and the Dallol sulfur springs and potash minerals are found in the area.

The Danakil Depression is one of the hottest and lowest places in the world, situating 116 meters below sea level. Being gifted with immense natural resource is not only what makes this place amazing, but also the fact that it harbors beautiful (gorgeous) colorful magma crater lakes bubbling from the earth's core and the potassium that are ejected from the inner of the land. It's a place where many tourists choose to visit.

In addition to this, the pyramid-looking and various other shapes shaped mountains that are believed to be formed of tectonic movements are the other beauty of the place. The salt pan that's founded on Lake Assale and Afdera, not only brings economical benefits to the region and country, but also the process in which they are formed and the lake changes into salt by itself is a mesmerizing sight, which needs a unique scientific study, by itself.

Notwithstanding the economic benefit of these resources, the fact it's endowed with beautiful colors and various natural shapes, has enabled it to attract the attention of the world. Its importance within the frame work

of tourism is immense, as can be seen from the fact that 95% of the people, who care to visit the region, are foreigners.

Considering its potential for tourism, the regional government is working by focusing in this endeavor. And following the expansion of the infrastructural works in the region add with the suitability of the Addis Ababa-Djibouti railway will provide tourists with easy access to the place through road transport.

In addition to this, the 'Semera Airport' which recently became operational, is becoming the other transport option. On top of the works done to expand up to standard service-giving institutions, the fact that banking services; which includes foreign currency exchange service, are becoming easily accessible is making the tourist to choose the region.

Based on this, the region has been able to create huge, tourism investment opportunities, whilst the investors involved in the sector are becoming successful by being involved in Tourism training, in service-giving institutions, in regional touring and private museum business. In addition to this, there are other huge numbers of job opportunities in the region's tourism sector which can also be used for research and studying.

When we look at the growing tourism flow into the region, we'll found out that it has to do with the peace and security that's founded in the region. As it's known, the tourism flow in a certain country grows, if there we guaranteed peace and security in that region.

With regards to this, there have been many works that are done as part of the regions state government's effort to bring good governance, peaceful conflict resolution mechanics and to guarantee peace and security.

The various zones and woredas are made to work on their own plan strategy, which itself is based in the region's government's Security Council plan for the budget year.

Also, the necessary security and supervision works needed to facilitate the grand infrastructural works that are being carried out by the region and federal government.

It has been able to do a satisfactory supervision work with regards to deterring anti-peace and anti-development forces that are working to hinder the successful peace and development works that's being done in the region, by mobilizing the people in woreda and kebele level.

In addition to this, by stopping and rehabilitating many (former) members of anti-peace groups, it has been able to make them involve in the developmental works that are carried out in the region, and to benefit from it.

The fact that the dangerous illegal arms and business trading; which is harmful to the country and to the region, has been made to reduce as a result of the concerted effort made by all the security forces and the local people, the region is now in a relatively developmental state.

As part of the works to stop the contraband activities in the current budget year, items that are evaluated in 6, 818,308 birr were stopped before it entered into the country, by the investigative work of the region's police force.

In relation to this, as part of the effort to curb illegal human trafficking, that has reached critical level within the country, many works have been done in Afar region. As the 6 month report of the region implies, illegal

traffickers used to smuggle many citizens from various parts of the county through many transport vehicles in an inhumane way; day and night.

And by holding them for ransom, after smuggling them into Yemen through Djibouti and the Yemeni sea before they get into Saudi Arabia, they made their families send more money.

By commissioning a taskforce that investigates these criminal activities, very successful results have been gained in bringing these culprits and their collaborators that operate within the country to justice. The work to clear illegal agents that operate in the illegal human trafficking business is still continuing strong.

As Afar region is neighbor to Tigray, Amhara and Oromia, it has been able to solve these problems by strengthening the joint security and development works and by opening ties with these region's professionals. And as these works cannot be successful without the involvement of the people, there have been works done in staging joint public conferences.

In parallel to this, in order to create an environment free of extremist and chauvinistic attitude (outlook), there have been works done around schools and various organizations in the hopes of creating attitudinal change. This has enabled the public to turn its attention to development and do successful works.

There have been also huge efforts exerted to solve the region's problem with regards to good governance by identifying good governance problems that are seen in public service giving governmental organs. With this, efforts have also been made to solve the public's complaint at every stop.

With regards to this effort, by holding huge deliberation with the public, by encouraging the public to take charge of the developmental works and by creating a public inclusive working atmosphere, it has able to get to the public the needed service. And the administrators based on the path that's put to them and their pledge to solve the publics' complaint, they are currently involved in works to mobilize the public at every woreda level.

And this public mobilization is also playing a huge role in the development. One instance for this is the Afar region pastoralist community. The pastoralist and semi-pastoralist community mostly live in the arid and hot parts and region of the country. During past regime's administration, the Afar pastoralist and semi-pastoralist community have been forgotten and was frozen out of any economical and social activities.

As it can be recalled, since there was lack of public infrastructure and social service giving institution, in these areas, it had been in an even more poverty pit compared to the country's other regions and people. Being victim of repeated drought and other natural and manmade disasters, it has been forced to move from one place to the other just to save their lives.

Thus, in order to solve the economical and social problem that have had strangled the pastoralist community for a long time, the FDRE government by formulating polices and strategies, as part of the unique attention it gave to the community, its exerting heavy efforts into it.

As a result, promising developmental results have been gained; the pastoralist community developmental project being one. The pastoralist community development project, which is formulated by the financial support of IMF, WB and the government along with money collected from

the concerned community, is being overseen by the Federal Affairs Ministry and the region's pastoral and agriculture development Bureau.

The project is scheduled for 15 years in three five year segments: while the third segment is concerned with enabling that local administration to have the capability to self-rehabilitate from disasters and to give quick response if and when disaster strikes. The project's first phase was from 1996 to 2001, while the second phase is going on new starting from 2001. Many instances can be presented to show that successful works have been done during this time.

The project has been accessible for 44 kebles that are founded within 14 woredas. According to the project's 2005 report, 319 projects have been operational since 2001. Looking at the huge changes made in enabling the community to protect itself from any disaster and calamity, it's easy to determine the kind of huge changes to be seen in the region at the end of the project.

In order to set up the region's pastoralist community (permanently), by establishing loans and saving cooperates in the region, the door has opened up for the community to play its own role in the development. Within these past years, by establishing more than 60 loans and saving cooperatives, it has been able to benefit many citizens.

As a result, the pastoral community has been profitable by fattening cattle and putting them to up for the market. By giving awareness training to the leaders of the loans and saving cooperatives, it has been able to give them awareness on the issue.

In addition to this, in order to curb and lessen the disasters that can happen to the pastoralist areas, there have been works done to set up a decentralized disaster prevention and preparedness body at woreda and regional level and a pre-warning and response system.

With regards to presenting strong extension services to the community, it's necessary to identify the link between the professionals and the beneficial bodies, as the relationship between the professionals and the community is important.

Out of the factors that determine this link are the place climate, land feature, population settlement & dispersement, accessibility by transport, this living style and level of awareness. As a result, now three professionals are stationed at every Kebele in which they give service from 300 to 350 pastoralists, while a single professional give professional service to 100 to 120 pastoralists.

In an efforts to guarantee food security for the local pastoralists by giving various farming inputs and huge farming lands, not only was the effort able to farm 48,633 hectares of land in 2005 E.C, but it has been also able to benefit 40,942 Semi-pastoralists with farming development. And according to the assessment done on this product year, out of the farming lands of 48,631 hectares, 1,463,962 quintals of harvest has been garnered.

In this endeavor, there have been efforts to improve productivity; to harvest 25 quintals per hectare land of canes, and 4.5 quintals per hectare land of grain.

In addition to this, it has been able to increase productivity by producing 23 quintals of cotton per hectare land, 6.27 quintals of sesame, and 131.5 quintals of fruits and vegetables per hectare of land.

And to increase this fruit and vegetable harvest, there are many expanding works being done currently. In various woredas, by setting up fruit and vegetable expanding centers, there has been some distribution done to some selected semi-pastoralists.

And this effort to make the region's pastorals food secure and self sufficient, implicates the fact that the government's formulated policy and strategy (with regards to the agriculture sector) is successful.

With the support of (FAO), it has been able to carry out works that benefited 6,838 semi-pastoralists by getting involved in seed multiplication in 5 woredas, and in presenting best(quality) seed and fruit plants.

By giving training to professionals that were selected from five woredas of the region, and by distributing 105 quintals worth of maize seed and 466 Kgs of onions, it has been able to develop more than 420 hectares land with maize and 93 hectares land with onions.

Considering the community that dwell in the region live as pastoralists, we can easily understand that it's not an easy role that it's taken part in.

Also, considering it wasn't possible to benefit the pastoralist; which lives in a dispersed manner in the region, from the development, it can be said that the effort to 'Villagize' is satisfactory despite its shortcomings.

By identifying the problems that were incurred in the works done to 'Villagize' in the 2004 budget year and by revising the 2005 'Villagization'

plan, a new plan is set in place to 'Villagize' 15,391 households in 8 woredas and 29 development centers. By budgeting 85 million birr to execute this plan many successful works have been done.

With regards to preparing irrigation farming and agricultural development activities, by preparing and distributing 6,713 hectares of land of new irrigation farmland to households that are to be 'Villagized' in the development centers, and by preparing 15,132.80 hectares farm lands, the region administration has been able to enter into work.

In order to realize the planned pastoralist 'Villagization' work, there have been efforts to benefit the pastoralist by setting up development centers and by supplying them, farming inputs. Also by setting up veterinary stations within the development centers, there have been many successful works being done.

Generally, by formulating a rural policy and strategy that's in sync with the region's realities on the ground, and also by making in-tune to the development forces that operate within rural development, there have been visible successes seen with regards to enabling the pastorals get full social and economical services.