

Afar Region and Its Development

Nuru Ahmed 04/20/14

(Part Two)

Although the region has a very hot and very challenging climate, the many rivers that can be used for irrigation in the region can help the local semi-pastoralists guarantee food security.

The effort currently exerted by the federal and regional state to benefit the public from the development, in the shape of formulating many projects, should be applauded. Also, applause should be given to the developmental activities that are being undertaken by the public, now more than ever.

As it's known, if a change is to occur on one country's economy or attitude, an educational and training activities that's in sync with the country's and international developmental state should be there. So, when we discuss about the creative and the development level the world has reached, it's inevitable that we'll talk about education.

It has been more than 100 years since modern education started in our country. Even though our country association with education has spanned more than a generation, it wasn't inclusive of all citizens. Especially during the emperor's tenure, children of privileged background were only the ones that were able (allowed) to go to school, while the rest of the people were made to watch.

The Afar people, more than the other people of the country has been a victim of this, and it wasn't before the 1940s that any kind of modern

education started - notwithstanding of course the religious education that used to be given in the region just like the rest of the country.

All in all, in 1941 “Seble-Wongel School”, today’s ‘Awash Primary School’ the first of its kind was established in the region. But, the school was not accessible to the region’s community. The second educational institution was the former ‘Atse Gebremesqel’ and the current ‘Mohammed Hanfre Secondary and Preparatory School’ which is situated in Assaita.

As it can be shown from the region’s Education Bureau statistics, three schools were opened in the 1950s; 1951, 1954 and 1959 respectively. The first education office of the region by the name of ‘Awsa area schools office’ was established in 1967 in Asaita city.

Before this office was established in Asaita city, it used to be situated in Bati city in Amahara region. After this, between the years 1981 to 1984, following some woredas graduation into zonal status, education offices have been established for them. Following this, today’s Afar region’s State Education Bureau was established by state proclamation in 1986.

According to some data, after the change of regime in 1983 and establishment of a transitional government, there were 30 primary schools in the region in the 1984 school year. These data implies that from 1984 to 1999, especially after the 1990s, was the period where the region recorded huge educational developments. There were only 80 schools in Afar region in 1990.

However, following the governments formulated policy and strategy and its hard work to make schools accessible to the community, it has been able to

benefit the community by building 654 primary schools within a few years. This number has risen to 84,146 in 2000.

Starting from 2004, all levels of education (from kindergarten to university level), were founded in the region. In order to satisfy the demand for (skilled) labor force, 485 primary schools (297 with first cycle, 183 with both cycle and 5 with only second cycle), 444 basic education stations, 18 secondary schools 15 of those schools give preparatory education) are giving educational services. And within these educational institutions, more than 170,000 students and 4325 teachers & administrators are playing their own parts in the region's educational activity.

In another side, when we look into the higher educational institutions, 5 middle-level technic and vocational institutions ('Asaita Teachers Education College', 'Semera Health Science College', 'Lucy Water Works College') and 'Semera University' are providing professionals for the region, neighboring regions and country.

Although the aforementioned data offers a general view of the education state of the region, I believe looking into the educational level and participation of the student will gave a detailed knowledge on the works done in the region.

According to the region's education bureau data, there were only 860 children registered in kindergarten schools in 1999. And this number has risen to 1382 in 2002. Although it can't be said that these kindergarten schools were inclusive of all, but considering the dispersed living style of the region's community, it can be said that the future is bright.

One of the changes seen in the education sector from 1996 to 2000 was on the coverage of education. Within these five years, the numbers of primary schools have risen from 186 in 1996 to 323 in 2000. With this, in 2004, following the campaign of education made 160,092 students (67,285 females and 92,807 males) were registered, increasing the coverage of education to 67.8%.

In Afar region, the other educational option is the basic education. This education system is a way in which children; who are eligible but didn't get the chance to go to school, are made to complete from grade 1 to grade 4 within 3 years in a comparable way.

This educational system, is giving an optional basic education to those children who are eligible to go to school (but didn't get the chance to do so), in accordance with realizing the millennium development goal of expanding the reach of basic education to all children by the year 2008.

This optional basic educations program; which was started as an experimental project in 3 woredas and 14 stations on the year 1996, has now reached to every woredas and 345 stations, expanding education opportunity to 18,230 students (children). In 2000, out of the planned 382 optional (education) stations, the region was able to open 345 stations, while 444 basic educational schools became operational in 2004.

The other educational option is the boarding school that started to operate in Afar region from 1989. It can be recalled that boarding schools; as part of the primary education, has been playing a constructive role in creating educational opportunity to the pastoralists' children.

At the time, there were five boarding schools in the region that were situated on various central positions around the region. The 'Semera Girls Boarding School' that became operational in 2002 is worth the mention.

As part of the government's attention to senior citizen's education, there is a practice-oriented senior citizen's education program in Afar region since 2004. As topics like education, health , agriculture, women and children issues, workers & social issues, environmental protection, ethics and morality are included in this program, it's executed with a joint work with various sectoral organs.

As the students that are involved in this educational system are more than 15 years old, it's believed that they will be able improve their own, their family and their community's lives and play a role in the country's developmental activities, once they participate in the program.

With regards to strengthening and expanding special care education, there have been works done by stationing professionals that supervise the program. In addition to this, the region's three year (2005-2007) strategic plan is prepared.

Thus, the woredas and kebeles that are founded in the region are exerting huge effort to bring women to schools by carrying out campaigns, and by helping those who drop out finish their secondary school.

Many activities are being done to increase education participation. Looking at the efforts made to encourage female students to be registered, and add to the fact that women's affairs is accepting and teaching women by opening schools, along with the works done to cover some female students

fee (through giving scholarship) shows the immense effort made to increase female women students education.

The technical and vocational institutions; which are working with the objective of providing creative and trained labor force, are playing their own role in the country's effort to break free from poverty by developing the economy through transferring standard technology to the industry. With this, by opening two technical and vocational schools in the region, satisfactory works are being done.

The 'Adadale' and 'Lucy' technical and vocational colleges are giving various vocational trainings by accepting trainees that finished their grade 10 education since 1994.

Generally, the technical and vocational colleges that are operating in Afar region are creating professionals that can give service to the community by giving attention to the necessary and problem solving professions for the country and the region. 'Semera University', that is giving its services at a national level, is playing its own contribution in improving the educational level of the region's community.

These days, in order to curb the extremist, racist and chauvinistic outlooks, that can hinder the peaceful teaching and studying processes, about 12 preparatory schools & colleges and 'peace clubs' in secondary schools are playing their own constructive role in making the educational process peaceful.

The region's educational system makes us look into the goal set by the country and region in creating educated labor force and the efforts made to improve the quality of the education.

On top of the many works done in the education sector of the region, there have been also many works done to improve the living conditions of the region's community especially the pastorals and semi-pastorals.

As the region's pastoral community live in the arid part of the country where water is scantily available, their living style and existence is related to the availability of water.

Also as water is a very scarce resource to them, their animals and grazing lands, it decides how their living style. As a result, conserving and saving this scarce commodity is a very important work in these pastoralists area.

This is why projects that will enable them use surface and ground water in their area (where there's a huge problem of water), are being strongly done by the community, government and NGOs. Even though these are recent water works done in the region, the community was made to be beneficiary by carrying out many water projects in various parts of the region.

Considering the place where the Afar region community lives is desert, successful works have been done to curb potential disease outbreak on the region as part of the country's adhered disease prevention policy. By creating awareness within the region's community, it has been to prevent and lessen potential disease outbreak.

In relation to this, as the living of the region's pastoralists and semi-pastoralists is based on their animals, veterinary stations that gives the necessary medications to their animals are opened and operating. With this, medication to 1,566,760 animals has been given in the region. Thus, veterinary service with regards to the public infrastructure has increased from 32.4% to 46%.

The infrastructures and developmental projects, that are being built to improve the living conditions of the region's pastoralists, are contributing their own shares. For example, we can mention the 'Tendaho Sugar Factory' that's situated in Dubit woreda as one of the public infrastructures that are creating huge job opportunities for the local community.

As it's known, out of the sugar factories that are being built by our country to increase our country's sugar output, the 'Tendaho Sugar Factory' is one of them. The factory has created job opportunities for more than 7000 people from the community and it's believed that once the factory is fully operational, it's will give job opportunities to close to 50,000 citizens.

The factory by staging trainings on agricultural works and technical & vocational education; in collaboration with the Afar region administration, it's creating additional jobs by appointing head machine rivets, and machine operating professionals.

In addition to creating jobs, the project has given nearly 12,000 hectares of land, which can be used for irrigation farming and grazing to the pastoralists. By distributing lands to 2167 households involved in the irrigation works of Dubity, Gabaldytu, Ay'ylefa, Gasuri and Indaburi woredas, development works has started.

On top of this, the construction of schools, health institutions, clean water and other social service giving institutions and public infrastructures are going side by side with the 'Villagization' program.

There are some projects that have finished their construction. The "Tendaho Sugar Factory", which uses 50,000 hectares of cane farm land in the region, is constructed into two phases, and when the construction is

fully finished and becomes operational, it will have the capacity to grind 26 thousand tons of canes in a day.

This grand project at the end of the growth and transformation plan (GTP) will have the capacity to produce 619,000 metric cube of ethanol by increasing its sugar output step-by-step. On top of satisfying its own consumption, it's believed that it will offer from 65 to 70 mega watt of electric power to the national grid. The corporation, side-by-side to its sugar development works, it's doing many works that would make the people that live near the project the primary beneficiary.

And until the middle of 2005, about 1500 pastorals have benefitted from the project by 'Villagizing' near it. It should be noted that there are many works that are done in the region, it's not only the 'Tendaho Sugar Factory'. Many roads that links neighboring regions and gravel roads that link various woredas are built in huge abundance.

The effort made to involve the pastoralists in agriculture by using the rivers of the region, that would help them guarantee food security, should also be encouraged. This implies that the region is playing its own role in helping our country realize the five year 'Growth and transformation plan (GTP)'. It also implies the inevitability of the success of this development plan.