

# **Beninshangul-Gumuz – A success story**

**(Part- I)**

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It's plain obvious that during previous regimes Beninshangul-Gumuz region, like the other regions of the country, lived through social and political upheaval with regards to its development and human rights handling.

There are five native nation and nationalities in the region – Gumuz, Shinasha, Mao, Komo and Berta. Although the five nation and nationalities of the region are native of the region, there wasn't a time, before, where their culture and languages got the necessary respect and recognition. Instead, they have been made to be ashamed and shown up for their identity and languages under past regimes.

In addition, they have been made to suffer under the Feudals' inhumane and dictatorial rule at the expense of getting direct benefit from its labor and development. However, with the national struggle made to topple these inhumane and dictatorial rules, the whole people and communities have benefitted– including the Benenishangul-Gumuz region.

By benefitting from the rapid sustainable economic development that has been ignited all over the country, the people of the region is developing side-by-side with the rest of the nation and nationalities of the country.

In this article, I will try to probe into the performance of the region on health, education, agriculture, investment and human rights handling for the past 23 years after the end of brutal rule it faced from the feudal and dictatorial regimes. The 'Prevention first' national health policy of the

country has enabled the region to not only protect the health of its people, but it also has enabled it to put in a strong participation on the development activities.

On top of this, it has helped cut back unnecessary expenses. As a result, it was possible to increase the number of clinics which used to be 32 in 1983 to nearly 400. In addition, huge numbers of health stations have been built, while six hospitals have started to give service in the region.

A blood bank service, a first and unique of its kind in the region, has started to operate. It is expected to have a huge contribution on saving the number of children and mothers who die of blood shortages.

By expanding the number of Health professionals, both in number and quality, wide ranging works have been done on protecting the health of patients and in preventing diseases as well. The region didn't used to have any kind of vaccination coverage whatsoever under previous regimes; but nowadays, a vaccination service that covers more than 50% of the region's community has been given.

Generally looking at the region's health coverage at 1983, it used to be 7.4%. However, nowadays the region has gotten more than 83% health coverage.

With regards to access to health materials (like Ambulance, Medicine, Laboratory etc...), it was able to buy, distribute and facilitate to the whole Woreda's health institutions using the money from Millennium Development. In order to make the health service fast and more accessible in the region, private health institutions are also playing their part.

With it, nowadays Clinics, Drug stores, rural medicine stores and pharmacy works have expanded in the region, whereas there wasn't any kind of private health institutions in the region before.

These facts imply the success of the country's health policy and strategy. It's safe to say that the success garnered in the health sector and in creating healthy and industrious citizens has enabled the people to take care of their health at nearby health institutions, and focus their concern on the development front and not about diseases.

Generally, it can be said that the people of the region are garnering great results with regards to preventing diseases, as a consequence to the rise in awareness about health.

Looking at the region's agricultural activity, we can see that it is satisfactory. As the veterinary service coverage has got the same kind of effort as the health coverage of the region's community, it has been successful. Nowadays, by opening up 20 health clinics and by assigning huge manpower in the sector, it has been able to vastly improve the region's veterinary service coverage.

And starting from 1996/97, based on the study extension package, which started on a strong momentum in the region, farmers training centers have been giving close support to the farmers. Since the start of the program, there have been efforts made to free the farmers from traditional farming systems by giving them training.

By giving full farming training on crops, animal husbandry and other packages to 20 woredas within the 2012/13 budget year alone, it has been able to expand the capacity and productivity of small holder farmers. Accessibility to agricultural input which used to be modest has

now reached new highs. Especially fertilizers, seeds, irrigated water and generators have been hugely supplied.

Generally speaking, with regards to Beninshangul-Gumuz agricultural sector, huge works are being carried out to take the region's farmers (which accounts to 92% of the region's total population) from backward farming system to modern farming practice and change its living conditions for the better in the process by utilizing improved inputs and technologies.

Since the state government started to lead the region; in addition to bringing peace, development and democratic order to the region, it has also been able to garner results in its aim to take the development to new highs and in its effort to break free the region's community from the shackles of poverty and benefit step-by-step from the development by enabling the community to utilize animals resource.

In order to make the most of the agricultural sector in the country's move (transformation) from agriculture to industry, there is a plan to expand the agricultural sector within the remaining period of implementation of the Growth and Transformation Plan by optimally and cost-effectively utilizing the region's arable land and manpower, and also by strengthening further integrative procedures.

The fact that wide ranging works should be undertaken within the region's agricultural sector in a sustainable way cannot be debated. Especially, since the region is home to untapped arable land, it indicates towards the need for active participation from the farmers.

The other thing that was done in Beninshangul region after 1983 is the huge works carried out to make the coverage of water accessible to the

communities that dwell in the region. Works aimed at developing reservoirs and spring waters have been done.

As it's known, the people of the region used to suffer greatly with lack of clean water during previous times. As a result, there have been huge efforts made to increase the region's general water supply and clean water coverage.

With it, currently the coverage of clean water has reached 94.2%, while this coverage is made to reach 71% in urban area and 86.5% in rural areas.

With regards to utilizing the region's immense potential for mineral wealth, wide ranging works have been done in the region, especially these past few years.

Conditions have been facilitated for the private sector to enter into the sector. On the other hand, by planning to license up to 38 traditional gold mining associations and 20 investors, the people of the region are made to be beneficiary of the sector.

The region also has potential for geothermal energy resource. There have been efforts made to integrate many rural dwellers with electric supply.

By installing sunlight powered electric service, especially in zones in Assosa, 84.7% of the plan has been completed. Based on the plan put on the Growth and Transformation plan to make rural areas of the region recipient of electric service, electric lines have been installed in 73 urban and rural areas within the 2014 budget year.

On the other hand, as 'Debre Zeit' and 'Yasowa' are not recipient of hydro-electric power, out of the 20 seating cities of the Woreda

administration, huge installation of electric lines has been carried out in 'Debre Zeit' with the support of the Federal government.

It's expected that the woreda people will start to receive electric service within this budget year. And concerning 'Yasowa', preparations are underway to start the work to similarly light up the woreda as Debre zeit.

Just like electric power, wide ranging works have been done to make Telecom service accessible within the region. Within the 2014 budget year, by planning to distribute wireless phones in 358 rural areas; 341 of them have been carried out.

A Land-line phone service at Tobeg city in Mao-Komo special woreda has become operational, while alternative energy reserve generators have been installed at mobile station areas where there are repeated electric power outages. Out of these installations; the ones in Kurmuk, Assosa Airport and Assosa agricultural college are to name a few.

Since repeated electric outages occur and mobile network gets down at huge rate at Gizen city, works have been made to substitute the source of the energy with solar power.

By finishing the building of a mobile station that's found in 'Dangur' woreda 'Gooblak' kebele, it has been operational since. By focusing on service quality, reserve generators are made operational by repairing them; especially in order to prevent network outage that occur as a result of power shortages.

In order to improve upon the mobile network problem that's seen now, it has been said, before 2016, Telecom expansion project with strict supervision for its implementation will be made in the region's cities and rural kebeles where telecom service is not accessible.

As it's known, there wasn't any kind of roads in Beninshangul-Gumuz region up until 2001. Currently, Asphalt road coverage in the region has reached 176 kilometers.

All-season gravel road has reached 1,293 Kilometers. Before, there were no roads that links zones with other zones or woredas to kebeles, while now, the problem is solved and it's possible to link the region's zones with each other and woredas to kebeles.

As a result of the progress made on the road sector, the people of the region now is able to reach Assosa from Addis Ababa within a day on the newly built Asphalt road, unlike the old times where the people were expected to travel for three or four days with huge suffering in rain and mud.

To link the region with 'Metekel' zone, it now takes 3 to 6 hours (based on the speed of the cars) to get there (used to take 3 days before) by using the newly made 'Sheqole-Guba' road, bypassing two neighboring regions (Oromia and Amhara region).

This has saved wastages of time, labor and money. It has lessened the suffering that used to befall with the travel. With this, both the farmer and businessmen are able to facilitate the country's economic progress by presenting their goods and services to the market easily.

As it's known, up until 2001, there was only one branch of Ethiopian commercial bank. But, in 2013/14, 7 new Ethiopian commercial bank branches and One Construction business bank, a total of 9 government banks have opened in the region. In addition, 4 private share association banks have opened and been giving service to the community. During previous times, the community used to waste its time because it travels

long to get the service. However, currently the community has been able to save the time and labor it used to waste to get the service. The people's culture of trade, investment and saving is on the rise.

The huge change seen on the sector not only improved the region's trade and investment, economic and financial activity, but it also shows the region's future bright hope with regards its development and growth.

The other thing is that there was no other transport alternative outside of the gravel road that used to make it very difficult for the travelers and the people of the region. But, nowadays the road coverage is transforming from one gravel road to one concrete road and to a modern airport that can host Boeing 777.

Currently, it gives four flights in a week to the region. And this is facilitating the region's trade and investment activities. And it's expected that in the future it will play a huge role with regards to flights both in and out the region from both within and outside of the country and the flow of tourists.

The other thing the region lagged behind during previous regimes is education. The fact that education lagged for years in the region had prohibited citizens from playing a substantive role both in their region and country. However, although there are still some remaining works to be done, today the sector is recording huge feat in the region both in accessibility and in fair share.

In addition to the government educational institutions, four private institutions are playing their own role in the accessibility of education in the region. The numbers of schools that use the native language in teaching have risen to 145 in 2011 alone, which used to be zero in 1991.

On top of this, the number of schools that teaches in native language have risen considerably both in number and quality.

So, today the community of the region is teaching its children with the native language; coming a long way from a time when just education used to be just a far-fetched dream to them.

Tertiary educational institutions, which didn't exist in the region, are now producing the needed manpower by opening up teaching colleges, technical and vocational institutions, health professional training centers and various departments in universities. Today, Assosa University is contributing hugely by offering a chance for education for the region's community both in the day and night shift.

In addition to this, the university had a good start in offering researches and studies that would help the problems of the region's community in their day to day lives, and for them to embrace scientific ways.

In accordance with the plan for the budget year 2014, there has been an agreement made for the construction of four preparatory schools. And works are being done to complete the construction of elementary and secondary schools that have been started at various times.

By accepting children that are ready for education, it has been able the coverage from 92.8% (in 2005) o 104.3%; without including students studying at alternative educational institutions like Basic-education institutions.

The region's net acceptance into school, including Basic-education, has risen from 105% to 117.7%. These realities show that; as a system that can host diversity and ignite a development that can win against poverty is able to be built in the country.

And also for the peace, development, democracy and good governance demands of region's community is starting to get answers like the rest of our people. It's now getting peace, development, and democracy which it used to crave from.

The people of the region have started to be proud of its identity, unlike before where it used to be ashamed of it. It's now beneficiary of the development and the democratic rights.

As its democratic and national rights are guaranteed, it has started to learn and administered by its language and freely express its culture and identity. And at Federal level, it has found representation.

With institutions at regional and woreda level and by fully exercising its democratic right, the community has got representation through its representatives. It is now administrating itself up to zone, woreda and kebele level through a decentralized system of administration.

Generally, by fighting the poverty and backwardness that ridden the region for years with the four political organizations that were established before and after the change in regime.

It has been able to achieve huge feats including guaranteeing the region's nation, nationalities and peoples' sovereign power and self-administration, as well as ratifying and executing the constitution.

In order to transform this same act into new highs, benefit the people of the region from the development as soon as possible and to make the development, peace, democracy and good governance process successful; on October 12, 2010 they have established the 'Beninshangul-Gumuz People Democratic Party (BGPDP).

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.

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 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 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.

Of course, 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, within the past 23 years, where the people of the region has the chance to administer itself, it has been able to garner huge developmental successes in social and economic sectors like on agriculture, health, road, water and infrastructures, that brightens the region's future hope.

Dear readers! Beninshangul-Gumuz is home to land and mineral resources that are suitable for huge investment undertakings. It's also a region where two mega projects (the Grand Renaissance Dam and Beles integrated Sugar Project) are situated at.

This shows us how much the region can play its own role for the country-wide development endeavors. So, in part two of my article, I'll try to probe into the works and results gained in the national development

projects that are undertaken in the region and the re-villagization process and its success.