

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

**(Part- II)**

**Mekbeb Taye 12-26-14**

In part one of my article I've tried to glimpse at Beninshangul-Gumuz region's people all-encompassing transformation it achieved on peace, development and democracy within the past 23 years after it had broke free from the shackles of the brutal rules of previous regimes.

As promised, in this part of the article, I'll try to probe into the Grand National projects that are underway in the region, and how the communities that are relocated for development are living their lives.

Before I enter into my main area of focus, I would like to raise on some facts here about the region that I didn't get to mention on part one of my article. As it's known, the region is one of the nine regions that make up the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

The capital city of the region, Assosa, lies situated 670kms west of Addis Ababa. The region borders with Amhara in its northeast, with Oromia in its eastern frontier and Gambella in its south. In addition to this, it borders with South Sudan and Republic of Sudan in its western front.

The total area of the region is 50,380 sq.kms; it's comprised of 3 zones with three different climates, 19 woredas, a special woreda and a city administration. It is estimated that the total number of the region's population reaches 784,345 people.

Most of the people (about 93.22%) live in the rural areas. Various Data show that most of the people's lead their life through traditional farming

practice. On top of this, there are many communities that live off through animal husbandry and traditional gold mining.

In addition to those known as region's indigenous nation and nationalities (such as Berta, Gumuz, Shinasha, Mao and Koma); nationalities from Amhara, Oromo, Tigrai, Hadiya and other nationalities lives in peace and harmony.

As the region is endowed with huge untapped arable land and large Rivers and streams that could be utilized for large-scale investments, it has made it to be a chosen destination for investors that are involved in agriculture and investment. It's also home to huge quantities of limestone, gold, gum forests, incense, bamboo and other minerals and natural resources.

Currently, out of our country's forest coverage, the region is home to huge forest wealth both in quantity and type. With regards to water resource, the region has huge swathes of surface area and reservoir water. From surface area water sources like rivers and streams, we can mention Beles, Dabus, Dedesa, Diga, Hoha, Kamasch, Sherqole, Tumet. And all these rivers are tributaries to Abay.

These rivers have the potential to be utilized for large-scale irrigation development works and for generating hydro-electric power. They have also huge potential and opportunity for fishery.

By utilizing these natural resources and the conducive investment environment the state government created, both local and foreign developmental investors are investing by getting involved in agriculture, mineral and research, mining, incense and gum forests, hotel and tourism, education and on the health sector.

Out of these, currently there are 245 investors involved in agriculture (only counting those involved in production), 30 in incense production and many others in various sectors.

And out of those involved in the agriculture, 30 of the investors are composed of foreigners and from the Diaspora community, while 23 of the investors are native to the region.

Generally, the area of the land that's in control of the developmental investors is more than 225,789 hectares. Products that are yielded by these investors include sesame, soybean, sorghum, barely, maize, pepper.

In parallel to this, studies shows that there are huge potential and yet modest start in animal husbandry, poultry, fruits and vegetables. And on the mineral mining sector, which the region is known for, there more than 48 investors involved in search and mining of gold, limestone, granite, iron and charcoal. Currently, gold mineral is marketed after it's mined at individual and company level.

The other thing that shouldn't be left out is the activities undertaken on the service sector. Nowadays, there are many government banks, along with eight private banks that are operating, which includes overseeing the region's saving and loan.

There are also one government and two private insurance companies. Information shows that up until 2012 alone; 4,725,668,751 birr capital was registered from 1043 projects. Generally, it can be said that the investment activity in the region is satisfactory.

With regards to licensing projects, out of the planned 120 projects in the 2014 budget year, license has been given to 130 projects that have

registered 919,511,863 birr capital. When they start to be fully operational, they are expected to generate job opportunities for 19, 835 people.

By researching, identifying and integrating rural land that can be utilized for agricultural investment in to land bank, plans to wire the lands to developers has been done. In the future, wiring lands to the developers will be done according to the law.

Basically, suitable conditions for investment have been created in the region. Out of these, lands identified for investment will be made tax free from 1 to 3 years for investors who invest in rural areas. Equipments and machineries that are to be used for investment (with 15% tools) are made to enter tax free. A letter of support will be written for them to a Bank.

Large swathes of rural land that's suitable for investment is the one and main comparative advantage of the region. As it's a fitting place for work and have the needed infrastructure, it can be said that it's a suitable place for investment. More than anything, since the place is peaceful and stable, it has made it more suitable to the investors and for investment.

Since I have said this much about the region, now let me take you to the works being done on the Grand National projects. As it's known, the whole Ethiopian people know really well about the woreda where the GERD is being built – 'Guba' woreda. More than 20 thousand people lives in the woreda.

Three city and thirteen rural kebeles lie situated in it. And everybody knows that it's the place where the Grand Renaissance Dam is being built.

As the saying “today is the result of yesterday’ goes, I think everybody can agree that when we mention about the dam the first thing that comes to our mind is the “we are the coordinators, the builders and engineers” comment of our great leader Ato Meles Zenawi .

We can recall that the reaction of Ethiopia’s nation, nationalities and people was the same following the cornerstone laying ceremony of the project on March 24, 2012.

And the way how the people reacted, reaffirming and echoing the comment of our great leader “we are the coordinators, the builders and engineers”, cannot be forgotten.

As it’s known, the construction of the dam is filled with many phenomenons. It’s a project that ended the ‘its impossible to utilize the Nile River’ attitude with “yes we can” mentality; also a project that every Ethiopian living in every corner of the globe pledged to give its national duty; and it’s the only project in the world that’s being built only with the money and ownership of its citizens.

We are now nearing the third anniversary since the laying of the cornerstone of the Dam. The project is going at the needed pace since is initiation.

As it’s known, the project of the Grand Renaissance Dam, which is projected to generate 6000 megawatts of electric power, is being built at spot (between 20 to 40 kms) that the river used to leave the country.

As 1600 of the people that dwell around the spot where the Dam is being built will be situated at the bed of the water once the project is finished, works have been done to ‘re-villagize’ the dwellers.

Those people re-villagized for development reasons by the program in 'Fengeso' and 'Bobihanda' kebeles are happy with the program. Some Villagization centers have started to transfer knowledge and experience to the farmers through farmer training centers.

The farmers are upgrading their homes from hut. By implementing health extension package program, and by keeping the cleanliness of their home and environment, the farmers have now started to prevent themselves from diseases. The number of mothers that give birth at health institutions is improving.

Generally, those who villagized at development centers at various times are benefitting from nearby schools, health posts, water institutions, and veterinary posts. And this can be easily seen by going to the place.

It's common to hear them state that their livelihood is progressing and that their future is bright as they found help from agriculture professionals.

So, the people of the region are able to see for themselves the improvements in their lives and livelihood that came as a result of re-villagizing program and through their hard work.

The re-villagizing program has enabled to guarantee food security sustainability and to fundamentally change the living style of half of the population; which used to live scattered around places that are not suitable for development in poverty, by strengthening the accessibility of social and economic service giving institutions.

With this, it was able to sustainably change the living style of 45 thousands of family heads from 19 separate woredas (including a special woreda) and 221 development centers within the past four years.

By planning to produce 8,794,646 quintal by covering 243,798 hectares of land within the 2014/15 budget year; it was able to cover 211,066 hectares of land with seeds, while being able to make fertilizers and seed accessible to the farmers.

With regards to water institutions, there have been success in providing deep water wells, water well, medium and small water institutions at chosen nearby centers to those families that are relocated for the Grand renaissance Dam and Tana Beles Sugar Development projects. When the general works are finished, it's expected that they will give services to 36,820 people.

On road construction, 796.7 km long roads are constructed. At the area, by building primary schools and by completing 28 schools in 2014, they are now ready for work. In addition, about 37 health posts have started to operate.

Within the budget year, many heads of family have been graduated with health extension package; while its been able to make mothers give birth at health institutions and by facilitating the distribution of 'Agober' at every centers.

In order to make the farmers of the woreda non-dependent on the rainy season, works have been done to make the farmers that are found at kebeles, which the three rivers (Aroma, Beles and Abay) pass through, to develop their land through irrigation by organizing them and by distributing various generators.

Those irrigation association that are found in 'Bamza' kebele have marketed their products last year, surpassing self-sufficient level. Satisfactory results are also garnered on other development works.

By organizing the youths in micro and small projects at kebele level, huge works are done to get them to work. The region is especially home to bamboo production.

Thus, although there are some youths that are working on bamboo production and wholesale trading, there wasn't enough focus given to the formerly and newly organized youths as there was huge lack of awareness about micro and small development works. However, as there is now a body that's concerned with the issue, there is a huge work being done by identifying unemployed youths.

As 'Guba' is the place where the Grand Renaissance Dam is being built, an awareness creation project is been done about the necessity of the project to the community.

As a result, they have been briefed and made aware about the necessity of the project when they were villagized leaving the place they used to live. Of course they have found it much more accommodating in the Villagization program as the developmental, social and basic service they are getting with the program is much better than they used to get when they used to live in a scattered manner.

The other Grand National project that's being done in the region is the Beles Sugar Development project. Although the project is mainly situated at Amhara regional administration, some part of the sugar cane plantation work is done at Beninshangul-Gumuz region.

The project lies situated 576km away from Addis Ababa. The factories get their water for their sugarcane plantation farms from the water diverting weir that's built around Beles River. When the three sugar factories became fully operational, each will have the capacity to produce 242



thousand sugar and 20,827 meter cube of ethanol. At the project site, commercial sugarcane plantation and the construction of factories, serviceable and non-serviceable houses have been done.

As its known, the people that will relocate from the site where the 'beles Sugar Project' is undertaken will be villagized in another cite. The necessary compensation have been paid to those farmers that been relocated from their lands, while they also were given a replacement farming land.

Using their compensation money, they have started to organize themselves by building new homes. Infrastructures like water, schools, road health and veterinary stations, telecommunication and other infrastructures have been allocated nearby by the government.

Wide-ranging works will be done by the regional and federal government to make the villagized farmers recipient of electricity and all-season-out roads.

Generally, as it has been able to create 'it concerns me' attitude within the region's community towards the development work that's undertaken in the region, it can be said that successful results is able to be garnered in the region.

Using the suitable environment and policy the state government afforded, many youth are changing their lives for the better by organizing themselves into micro and small development sectors.

As these youths are afforded manufacturing shades, loan service, and market chain, many of them has been able to be millionaires out of nowhere.

A number of them have and currently are transforming themselves into middle-scale industries. These days, successful and model associations that are organized into micro and small are becoming rampant in Beninshangul-Gumuz region.

On top of changing their lives and their families' for the better by organizing themselves into manufacturing, construction, urban agriculture, service giving institutions, steel and woodwork, they are also according huge contribution to their country's development.

In addition to being the top focus of the government's policy, micro and small enterprises are now a source for many millionaires and industrialists, and are also expected to be the main player in the economic transformation (from agriculture to industry) of the country.

Thus, as it beef-up the youth by facilitating them producing and selling shades, loan service, market chain, training and knowledge sharing, and also has huge economical and social ramifications, it should continue to be strengthened.

As we all know, our country's successful implementation on the Millennium Development Goals and on the Growth and Transformation Plan, has garnered it international accolades. This is the result of the government's committed leadership and strategy and the public's active participation.

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.

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 basis for the development that we are seeing in all the regions is the result of the government's sound policies and strategies, and its committed effort to implement them.

In addition to this, mobilizing the public and creating a sense of 'the development concerns me' attitude within the people, and its ability to participate the public at every chapter from the planning to the implementation phases attributed to the success.

The region has also performed satisfactorily by achieving great development successes in almost every sector, with regards to the Growth and Transformation Plan.

Thus, in order to continue on with the great results garnered in the economic, social and infrastructural sectors and to enable the public to directly benefit from the development, there needs to be huge efforts exerted more than any time in the past.

Its obvious that the investment opportunities, peace and stability found in the region will make it a top destination for development. The verve that's created within the community of the region during the celebration of nation, nationalities and people's day should strongly continue. So, its clear that Beninhangul-Gumuz region will play its own role in the efforts to realize the renaissance of the country.