

Reaping the Fruits of Sugar

- **Cases of South Omo and Afar Pastoralists**

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To any one critically looking at the development activities in Ethiopia, it is vivid enough to see that all development efforts are geared towards the nation's constitution. Article 8 No.1 of the constitution states that nations, nationalities and peoples are the sole owners of power and have equal rights to benefit from the nation's resources.

And hence, all development endeavors use the constitution as a spring board during planning and implementation. A typical example is the construction of infrastructures, social service giving institutions, etc. which are being directed towards reaching mainly the long marginalized parts of the society who had been leading their lives devoid of any of these.

Some among these Ethiopian societies are the South Omo and Afar pastoralists. And, the Omo-Kuraz and Tendaho-Kessem sugar development projects, in addition to the nation's overall strategic economic advantage, are aiming at doing away with the marginalization of those living in and around the projects' command areas and also other neighboring people.

Unlike the biased and ill-motive outlooks of some foreign as well as domestic institutions, the South Omo and Afar marginalized communities have begun reaping the fruits of sugar even at the project's early implementation stage. Since hearing from the horse's mouth unravels the truth, let us have a glimpse at what these long forgotten pastoralists reflect regarding the respective sugar development projects carried out around them.

South Omo Pastoralists

The Omo-Kuraz Sugar Development Project command area covers some selected areas of



Natives getting access to flour mill

the three zonal administrations of SNNP Region namely: South Omo, Bench-Maji and Keffa. And, Sugar Corporation has only begun its work at some selected areas of Selamago District of the South Omo. Hammer and Nyangatom districts of this same zone and others are eagerly waiting for the project to reach them too hearing about the blessings of Selamago.

Here we need to note that among the natives namely the Bodi, Mursi, Bacha & Dimme of Selamago, it is only some members of Dimme who are acquainted with agriculture while the rest are pastoralists who lead their lives wondering here and there in search of water and grazing land. And, no one here is going to be displaced due to the project except being able to have access, through the villagization program, to various infrastructures and social services to which they had never been privileged all their lives.



Alaykat Munissi is from the Bodi who joined the villagization program at Algobiya village voluntarily. When asked about her new way of life, she said "It is due to the project at Selamago that I and others got access to potable water, flour mills, schools, health stations etc." She further went on saying "First, government officials came and discussed with us about the project and got

our consent; then after, they made these facilities available before our arrival to the village".

Alaykat further added "My elder son is enrolled in the new school constructed at our village while my daughter is too young to go to".

According to Setotaw Garsho, Deputy Administrative Head of South Omo Zone , the villagization program which emanates from the nation's as well as the region's Agricultural Policy is being carried out in all the region including the command areas of the project.



Bodi youth at school in South Omo

Regarding the creation of job opportunities for the local people, among 101 staffs working at the sugarcane plantation, some of them are from Bodi. And, Gajjuwa Waranimeri who is from Bodi said “I earn 1,067 Birr monthly as a regular staff; and there are other ten workers from my fellow natives too”.

Furthermore, according to Nuredin Assaro, General Manager of the project, the corporation, in the short term, has made the necessary preparation to train as many natives as possible in various technical professions like painting, truck driving, etc. which relatively demand short term training.

Recently Sugar Corporation in collaboration with the SNNP Regional Government has enrolled around 202 youth selected from different districts of South Omo, Bench Maji & Keffa zones to Jinka Construction & Industrial College at which trainees are equipped with necessary knowledge substantiated by practical work. These youth were trained in building, plastering, painting etc. And, almost all of these trainees are now found working at the project in various professions.

Though the command area of the project at Selamago is very sparsely populated, Sugar Corporation and other stakeholders have given due attention to the movement of pastoralists’ cattle. Accordingly, cattle crossing structures are under construction over main and secondary canals and these structures are made at points of the land where the cattle of these pastoralists are earlier accustomed to use while they were moving around in search of water. At the same time, irrigable farm lands are ready to acquaint them with agriculture and help these inhabitants of the area become semi-pastoralist. Furthermore, as there is enough grazing land around, the corporation is making water ponds accessible to their cattle.



Cattle Crossing Structure Under construction

Afar Pastoralists

Afar Region is one among others FDRE government has identified as an area of huge potential for sugar development. Therefore, Sugar Corporation is constructing two sugar factories namely Tendaho and Kessem.

The government built Tendaho and Kessem-Kebenna Dams not only to cultivate sugarcane plantation for the factory, but also to make irrigable water accessible to natives which will have tremendous effect in changing the region's ecology. And, this has come into the surface when one looks at Afar natives start tilling their land using the irrigated water.



"I earned some 225,000 Birr from the onion I harvested last year"

Aba-Amin is one among other pastoralists of Kessem area who, trained in agriculture, has cultivated his land using the irrigation infrastructure made available. He said "getting three hectares of irrigable land from the government, I earned some 225,000 Birr from the onion I harvested last year; I only invested some 45,000 birr for that". He further tells about how he had

benefitted from the maize crop he had harvested earlier too. " We are able to get irrigated water because the sugar development project started here; before the project, agriculture was not known here, and now we are not only participating on the cane cultivation and getting monthly salary but also get food for our cattle from the maize we are able to cultivate" Aba-Amin added.

The other native of Kessem who is enabled to practice agriculture through the access of irrigable water is Ahadi. She has three children and only her husband and the youngest two are now living with her at her farm land she has cultivated. Ahadi said "I built a house here at my farm land so as to protect my crop from being eaten up by wild animals; it is me who tilled the land and saw the seed; thanks to the sugar project, I am settled here and able to send my kids

to school constructed by the project”. According to Ahadi, her two elder children still live moving from place to place following their cattle while her family is basically joining the journey to become a semi-pastoralist.



“Thanks to the sugar project... I am settled here and able to send my kids to the school”

Any one might be taken aback if told about the practice of fishery at Afar. But, thanks to Tendaho Dam that the unthinkable is begun by the natives. Ali Salah is head of the Tendaho Fishery Association that has forty three members. According to Ali first some members of the association were taken to Bahar Dar (Amhara Region) for training. He then, recalling their first exposure to the nasty smell of the fish and their reaction, burst into laughter and went on saying “During training we used to cover our noses by our hands for the smell of the fish which was unbearable to us; then going through the training program and acquiring the necessary skill we came back and started the fishery using the two motor boats and other accessories the regional government granted us”. Ali at last added “This new practice and our new way of feeding were made possible only because of the sugar project” and extended his association’s gratitude to Sugar Corporation.

The Federal Government built schools, health stations, water wells, district offices, police stations, roads, residential houses, mosque, etc earmarking around 1.3 billion birr while the corporation has made ready irrigable land so as to introduce natives with agricultural practice.

Therefore, one can easily see that the Federal as well as the Regional governments are working hand-in-glove with other stakeholders to make the natives of Afar Region the first and foremost beneficiaries of the sugar development projects carried out in the region. Furthermore, Sugar Corporation is exerting its maximum effort to staff some sixty percent of the total number of employees of these factories with locals and efforts are still under way while more than 4800 youth are already trained in various professions like machine operating, foreman, etc. and got job opportunity at the project.