

The Gash Effect: Eritrea-led Development

Written by Natnael Yebio W.



In my first edition of the Gash effect, I took a look at the chief catalyst for the Gash-Barka's recent transformation in agricultural development: the National Crops and Livestock Corporation. In this edition also, I'll take a brief look at the region's agricultural structure, in line with the interview I had with the managing director of the development region Mr. Hailezghi Habte.

Agriculture has been the cornerstone of the Eritrean economy in the past and is still the main source of income and food for more than 60 percent of the population. Eritrea has substantial and varied natural resources that can be developed to sustain socioeconomic development. Generally, Eritrea possesses modest land and water resources.

Eritrea's agricultural policy is based on the twin pillars of modern agricultural undertakings to enhance food security in its broadest sense – to meet domestic consumption needs as well as to focus on high-yield exports – and purposeful interventions and support to individual small scale farmers to increase household income. In this sense, the economic improvement of the farming section of the society will have a corresponding effect on the development of infrastructure and services that would give them an opportunity to move up on the socio-economic ladder. (G.Damr 2015.)

On his annual New Year's address President Isaias Afwerki indicated that Eritrea is divided into three development zones: the East, West and the Highlands. In line with this and my recent trip to Gash-Barka, which falls in the West Development Region, this article will focus solely on this.

The objective of the Regional Agricultural Development Program is to improve food and economic security for the population. The program focuses on three strategies to accomplish this goal. It works to improve the productivity of crops and livestock sectors; it supports policy measures that facilitate growth in the agricultural economy. The projects undertakes agricultural constraints analyses on extension services, irrigation systems, quality and availability of seeds and planting materials, post-harvest handling and storage, accessing opportunities for women, cooperatives and associations, and fertilizer and crop protection products to inform the Ministry of Agriculture's policy development processes.

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Driving program activities are embedded in the three development zones. Their deep agricultural knowledge and established working relationship with Eritrea's Ministry of Agriculture makes them the ideal focus of the project. This bold and comprehensive approach embodies the government's vision for Eritrea-led development, from short-term stabilization to long-term sustainable growth.

Food security has been the priority as diverse factors converge to affect the demand for food around the world and in particular in Africa. In Eritrea, there was scarcity of mechanization, transportation and storage at the dawn of independence. Hence Agro-Macro policy as devised, irrigation based agriculture was introduced to increase output and create surplus in cereal crops, vegetables, fruits, and livestock. Dams, micro-dams and water diversion schemes were constructed. Since 1991 in Gash Barka region 90,000 hectares of land have been cultivated through irrigation, splash irrigation, and drip irrigation. Agro-industries have been put in place. Aligider cotton farm, Gereset, the Fancos and

Ad Omer agro-industry are examples of what has been achieved over the years. The Gash-Barka region is situated in the south-west of the country, bordering the Anseba region to the north, and the Maekel (Central) and Debub (Southern) regions to the east; the country of Sudan lies to the west and Ethiopia to the south. The major crops in the region are bananas, tomatoes, cotton, onions, millet, sesame, green pepper and sweet melon.

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