



One who travels to Denkalia of the Southern Red Sea Region(SRSR) of Eritrea would not only admire the beautiful scenery along the way to Assab, but would also learn how potentially rich both in marine and land resources the region is. While travelling along the smoothly paved road, one would wonder on how effectively such a road was constructed in an area covered with volcanic rocks. The SRSR, which possesses over 600 km of coastal area, is situated along the Great Rift Valley of Eastern Africa. The total area of this region covers 49 % plains, 44 % mountains and hills as well as 7 % volcanic areas. Despite of its substantial natural resources the region was severely underdeveloped in the period prior to independence, whereas Assab was relatively spared as compared to the rest of the region just for the vested ends of the Ethiopian colonialism. The administration of Southern Red Sea Region therefore, conducted a two-day regional symposium that evaluated 20 years of development activities from 28 to 29 April of 2011 at Blien-Coma Hall in the region' s capital, Assab.

Since day one of independence the region faced a demanding task of establishing a viable socio-economic situation in most parts of the region. Particularly, in such arid and semiarid areas of the region there was no provision of potable water supply. SRSR's exhibition highlighted the overall socio-economic, infrastructural, and educational undertakings as well as developments in labour and human welfare and social services accomplishments to date that were discussed in the papers presented at the symposium.

In the first years of independence about 100 geophysical studies and about 75 technical surveys were carried out in 35 villages of the region so as to identify the total amount of water resources. Following which, Mr. Andemichael Solomon, Director General of the Region's Infrastructures Department pointed out that major programs of the first phase of developmental undertakings were focused on water supply projects, construction of schools and administrative offices. According to Mr. Andemichael 4 elementary schools, 5 health care institutions, and 22 water supply projects, were finalized. Besides, a three-store regional finance complex and a public library were built in Assab.

The second phase of developmental undertakings was in the period between 1996 and 2000. In this phase seven health care institutions, two boarding schools, and five water supply infrastructures were put in place. In addition, the Massawa-Assab road was also constructed anew in this phase of developmental undertaking. Moreover, 71 km of asphalted road that stretches from Assab to the Ethiopian boarder was constructed. Likewise, fish processing and reserving infrastructure was also established in Assab.

Infrastructural activities continued in an enhance manner in the third and forth phases of the developmental engagement. The master plans of Asseb, Rehayta, and Edi were finalized. Prior to independence, there was hardly any educational institution in the entire region. Where as in the third phase of developmental endeavour, seven kindergartens, Tio junior school as well as two additional boarding schools in Tio and Afambo were built. Ten of the 30 schools established in the post independence period were finalized between 2006 and 2010. Dehtun referral hospital in Assab which was constructed at the cost of 170 million Nakfa and other two hospitals were completed in this phase. Supply of electricity to five major towns of the region and more than 62 %of water provision was accomplished in the fourth phase of the 20-year infrastructural activities. Generally, a total of 127 million Nakfa for about 100 water supply projects, 84 million Nakfa for the construction of 30 schools and more than 207 Million Nakfa was dispensed for the construction of Massawa-Assab, Assab-Rehayta, and Assab-Ethiopian border roads. As it is hard to find underground water such arid areas of the region, about 20 underground water reservoirs have been constructed throughout the region. Hence, as a result of the overall concreted efforts directed towards securing provision of water, 70 % of the region's rural areas are now getting access to potable water.



The region's department of economic development also discussed about reawakening of as agriculture, tourism, marine resources, trade and others. Highlighting the significance of natural resources in promoting the tourism sector, Mr. Ghebreslasie Aradom, Director General of Economic Development in the region, gave briefings about underground hot springs found in Sireru, archaeological sites such as a buried city Hasereba situated near Rehayta, and ancient Mosques of Tio and Edi. Mr. Ghebreslasie also highlighted about the historical importance of the paintings and stone scriptures in Ayumen, Beylul and other places of the region. Moreover, Mr. Ghebreslasie mentioned that a new three-star hotel is under construction in Tio to facilitate tourism activities in the region. The renovation of Ras-Gembo hotel at the cost of 16 million Nakfa could be also cited as an example of rendering good tourism services. As regards advancement in marine resources, so far four fish preserving and processing plants have been set up in Tio, Edi, Berasole and Assab.

As part of the endeavours made to achieve food security, about 24 fishery associations have also been established. Trade activity which was once confined to Assab has started to flourish in different parts of the region along with the issuing of trade permits. Since 86 % of the region's population earn their living as pastoralists, farmers, and the rest, 14 % engage in fishing activities, concerted actions have been taken towards the development of agriculture as well as fishery activities. Vegetables cultivation was not practiced in this region in the past. In 1993, only two hectares of land was used for vegetables cultivation, at this time however, about 100

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hectares of land has been cultivated thorough irrigation. Taking into account the region's arid condition, through the utilization of greenhouses vegetables are now cultivated throughout the year. Towards agricultural advancement a number rivers have been studied for their potentials to aid in irrigation based agriculture, clinics of veterinary services, animal feed processing factories and poultry plants have also been established over the past 20 years.

The Department of Social Services in the Region also gave briefings about the benefits and outcomes achieved through the provision of viable social service rendering institutions. Accordingly, maternal and child mortality rate has been decreasing owing to the health care institutions that has been constructed. Even at hard times, construction of social services rendering institution grows substantially. It was difficult to locate health care and educational institutions on a map, at present they are widely distributed throughout the region.



Such a development played significant role in the reduction of maternal mortality by three folds. Since vaccination programs have risen to cover 76% of the region, there had been no occurrences of communicable diseases. The introduction of ophthalmic service in the region is one of the major achievements registered in the post independence period. Speaking of educational development 86, administrative areas of the region have gained access to education. The provision of social services helped for the resettlement of scattered small villages into centralized larger ones.

Plans of the Department of Social Services of the Region in the coming 5 years are to improve health care services and to increase educational access through the construction of new schools. In this respect, new junior schools would be constructed in Ayumen, Harsile and Hamerti and kindergartens in Harsile and Beylul. Also, the expansion of educational infrastructures in Wade and Edi schools is set to happen among others.

If harnessed effectively the region's natural resources would give redoubled outcomes. Though the endeavours made in water supply and agricultural undertakings could not be overlooked, the region's endowments of river basins have not yet been exploited to the utmost level. The symposium therefore highlighted the potentials of making maximum use of the river systems.

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The Southern Red Sea Region symposium also discussed about administrative undertakings, labour and human welfare as well as data collection and census programs that have been carried out in the region and concluded by making deliberations on the issues set for discussion and evaluation.