

“Gibe III Hydroelectric Project is a gift of God for the Dawro People”

The Gibe III Hydroelectric Project is being constructed in two zones, Welayta and Dawro, of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Regional State (SNNPR). Although the Project is at its early stage of construction, the two administrative Zones are getting prime benefits from the Project in various forms: road developments, job opportunities, small scale business activities, and other exposures.



Damena Dalota, Dawro Zone Administration Head

Located at the right bank of the Dam, the Dawro Zone is a major beneficiary of the Gibe III Hydroelectric Project. Damena Dalota, the Zonal Administration Head, in an interview held in late August 2010 in Tercha- administrative town of the Zone- verified that in the eyes of the people of Dawro, the Project is said to be a gift of God. In the following statements, Damena underlined the positive externalities of the Gibe III Hydroelectric Project for the local communities:

Q: Before we proceed to the social benefits of the Gibe III Hydroelectric Project, it will be helpful if you give us a brief picture of the Dawro Zone Administration.

Damena: Dawro Zone is one of the 13 Zones and eight Special Weredas of SNNPR. The Zone consists of five Weredas, 177 Kebele districts and a city- administration. It is found in the western parts of the country and has common boundaries with Welayta, Kembata, Tembaro, Hadiya, Jimma, Gamo Gofa Zones and Konta Special Wereda.

Lying in 500, 000 of hectares of land, Dawro Zone has 520, 000 of population. It is also surrounded by the Omo and Gojeb Rivers which were used to be condemned by the local com-

munities for their pitiless deeds in taking away lots of lives of the poor people all the way through the rainy seasons; the Rivers were also titanic hurdles to have communications with the other administrative zones/weredas since they had never allow to crossing on foot. As a result, the two Rivers had badly conceived by the local communities until very recently. Though that horrific image had not been vanished away totally, thanks to the emergence of the Gibe III Hydroelectric Project, which comes with development opportunities, the negative impression becomes unreciprocated history.

Dawro Zone is exceptionally renowned by its poor infrastructure system; it did not have road networks which would interconnect the Weredas with the Zonal administrations as well as the Kebele districts; one can presume that how livelihood was very much challenging without having the basic infrastructure.

Q: What is the role of the emergence of the Gibe III Hydroelectric Project for the development of Dawro Zone?

Damena: We presumably think that the Gibe III Hydroelectric Project has come about to the people of Dawro Zone. This is because, the Project has made real support before it has set things for itself. Obviously, we have started to gain benefits at the early stage of the project. It is true that the Ethiopian government as well as the other citizens of the country will acquire the substantial benefits out of it just after few years; however, the people of Dawro are experiencing it in advance.

As I said earlier Dawro Zone is bounded by the giant rivers-Omo and Gojeb- it had never had dealings with the rest of the country due to lack of access road and bridges. For that matter, by more chance, if there is someone who is educated among, he/she had not interest to come back again to work in the area; the same was true for the business people. From all these aspects, we can say that Dawro Zone was in isolation.

However, the coming of the Gibe III Hydroelectric Project has concurrently brought meaning-

ful and significant development to the Dawro Zone. In particular, the Project has helped us in terms of constructing roads in difficult terrains.

Initially, the Project has started its contribution to the local community by constructing a 32 km road in Loma wereda by crossing the very difficult topography. This, of course, was a big favor for the community who had suffered a lot from lack of access road.

In addition, Genna Bossa Wereda had poor local connection system with Zonal administration as a result of lack of all-weather road. A 27km standard road was constructed within short period by the Gibe III Project. What was unique about this road was also the construction has demanded to cross the entire hilly, rocky and huge mountains; nevertheless it was accomplished within few months.

Likewise, on the basis of the community's request, a 12 km road (from Duga to Angela), another very challenging landscape, had been constructed. What is more, the Project has pledged to construct a seven kilometer road by the same public request.

All together, so far more 70km access roads are constructed by the Project. The Project has done not only this but also a secondary school in Loma Wered. We should not also forget the contribution of the Project in creating job opportunities for many people in the area.

Therefore, we can say that the Project has given tangible solution for our deep rooted challenges. Since lack of access road was the cause for the backwardness in the Dawro Zone, the Project is a significant support by addressing the setbacks of the local communities. Although we expect full benefits from the Project in the future, we are now getting more ahead of time.

There are also other supports: so far, the Zone had not drawn potential investors because of lack of banking services in the Zone. The Project has made unreserved efforts taking the prob-

lem into account; as a result, a new bank branch is now opened in Tercha town

In general, the coming of the Project to the Zone becomes a special advantage. We have considered it was purposely given to the people of Dawro.

Q: Due to the realigned Chida-Sodo road construction some community members are compensated for their assets lost due to the road. So, what is the feeling of the community in relation to the compensation?

Damena: The construction of the road by itself is an indicator of development process. As I said earlier one of the reasons that we are left behind social and economic advancements is lack of road networks. When the Chida-Sodo road is redesigned to pass through the villages of the communities, it is really a big part of social development contribution of the Project.



Chida-Sodo Road Construction

Right now, the compensation to the affected people is going well in accordance with the pledges; in all these measures, the community members are in high spirits. So far, we did not receive any complaint against the construction of the road and the compensation since they

are getting the appropriate amounts.

Q: Adverse comments have been generated from some international opponents of the Gibe III Hydroelectric Project by saying it displaces many local residents from their farm land as well as livelihoods. What do you say in relation to these comments?

Damena: Those who did not get the chance to visit Dawro Zone can say a lot. However, they have to understand fully that the Gibe III Hydroelectric Project is a development wing of the people of the local communities. Decisively, the Project is changing the lives of people, and it has also been contributing a significant share in enhancing the development and good governance of the country. In addition, it is supposed to change our black image of famine and poverty permanently and transforms us to new way of innovation. In all these cases, we cannot say that everything is going smoothly. As big project there will be some minor issues which could be seen as disadvantages. The main point is mitigating the negative aspects.

In our case, for example, it is said that the Halale Kella is going to be affected to some extent; indeed, the appropriate governmental institution, Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage, has conducted proper studies and still working on producing remedial solutions or strategies how to mitigate the part of the Wall to be impacted. If it is affected inevitably, the Project will pay the appropriate compensation. It is our strong wish that if the Hallale Kella is not going to be touched any more. However, from the point of view of the multifaceted advantages of the Project, we could not say the impact is that much significant.

By the way, Hallale Kella has been registered and got recognition following the footsteps of the Gibe III Hydroelectric Project. We had been here for several years with the heritage but it did not have opportunity to be known by local as well as international communities. Thanks to the emergence of the Project, it has now been well promoted; many local and international visitors including the head of the country, President Girma W/Giorgis, have paid a visit to the Kella, which would never happen if it were not for the Gibe III Project.

In general, there is no time in which the local communities have showed disinterest on the Project, rather they say time and again that it is a gift from God to the Dawro people in particular.

Q: You have said that the Gibe III Hydroelectric Project has contributed a lot to the Dawro people at its early stage of construction. On the other way around, what was your role in supporting the Project?

Damena: It would have been proper if our role had been told by the Project's management. Anyway, we do not see the Project as different from one of our wereda administrations. In other words, we give equal weights to the Gibe III Hydroelectric Project like the Wereda administrations. In collaboration with the Project management, we have done all the possible things whenever a question arises from the Project. We have also taught the community to see the project as if it comes to their villages to place them in hub of benefits. We would like to assure that our effort will continue sustainably in supporting the Project.

The Omo River basin had pulled back the development of the Dawro Zone. Every year a lot of people were taken away mercilessly by the River; whenever a rainy season comes it was all about death of people by the floods. However, recently, things have been changed noticeably. Previously, Dawro Zone had never had good communications with the other parts of the country; thanks to the Gibe III Hydroelectric Project we have seen a glimpse of light. The Project will also have a significant share in the growth and transformation of our country. Hence, all the concerned stakeholders should stand besides the Project and should fight the baseless propaganda against the Project. So far, the allegations against the Project are not fact based; for that matter, we are the genuine witnesses.

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