

## The Gibe III HEP implementation is very much in line with the local communities: ESAP

In the preceding month, the Social and Environmental Advisory Panel (ESAP) members of the Gibe III Hydroelectric Project visited the Project's Site. While concluding their official visits, Dr. Yacob Arsano, Chairperson, and Ato Teshome Tadesse, member of ESAP, held an interview with the Project's Communications Officer. Excerpts:

**Q: Would you please briefly explain your visit and your impressions of the Gibe III Hydroelectric Project?**

**Ato Teshome:** We know that very huge development activities are underway in this country. So, the availability of power is very much essential to speed up the on-going development activities in various sectors. In this regard, the Gibe III Hydroelectric Project is very much essential. We were able to see the project implementation and its environmental and social issues. The construction and all other activities are going very well, and specifically we are responsible to observe the social and environmental issues. In this regard, the safety of the environment like the waste disposal management systems are properly set in and handled well; the hazard-



The Independent Advisory Panel members had made thorough discussions with various departments



**Dr Yacob Arsano**



**Ato Teshome Tadesse**

ous chemicals are sorted out and handled carefully. Also, the safety of employees is very well followed up and maintained up to the standards. In general, the activities that are underway in the Gibe III Project site are really promising.

In addition, we made thorough discussions with the appropriate personnel who are responsible to monitor environmental and social issues, and gave them some comments. From our observations we recognized that the Project implementation is very much in line with the local communities. We also observed that the local communities are very much enthusiastic and cooperative with project implementation.

In general, we have properly comprehended all the environmental and social issues that happen as a result of the Project and the management system for mitigating the possible adverse impacts.

**Dr.Yacob:** yes, just to add few things, I must admit that I have been very fortunate and very happy to have been here. We have visited several sites of the Project as already explained by Ato Teshome, Project Site Coordinator. Our observation has been selective as it was not possible to see everything in two days. We have seen key environmental and social monitoring



**The Independent Advisory Panel members had also discussed with the local communities**

sites, like the preliminary waste damp, the garage unit where oil and water are separated to obtain acceptable quality of water when disposed to the environment, and to check whether the performance is up to EPA's standard. We have visited the local community where the Chida-Sodo realigned road is under construction. We talked to various technical persons of the Project. We talked to local administration, local committee members and community leaders. We learnt that the Gibe III project management, especially the Environmental and Social Monitoring Unit, has been able to address the community concerns.

ESAP members are very much satisfied with the overall activities and achievements of the Project. We have, of course, some comments to make right on the spot and provided our advice as necessary. As can be expected detailed observation of ESAP is incorporated in the field visit report. The report is aimed to provide the feedback to all offices of the project. The Panel members hope that everything will be in much higher performance, and that Gibe III will be completed as scheduled. So, we thank the Project Management for helping us to understand

the various activities and the overall progress of the Project.

**Q: What was your conception about the Project before paying a visit to and right now after observing the realities on the spot?**

**Ato Teshome:** Before visiting the site as this is very huge Project one may not have a clear idea or perception what is going on around. After seeing for the first time, however, I was able to observe and understand that the project will have very significant positive impact on the development of the country, especially in the power sector. As we have been facing serious power shortage, the implementation of this project would absolutely enhance the social and economic development of the country; and it would also enhance our relationships with the neighboring countries. So, this is very beneficial and very good Project as I observed.

**Dr. Yacob:** The Project is quite significant to have substantively higher hydropower energy in Ethiopia. We know what it means by additional hydropower energy in terms of economic development that the country aspires for.

Secondly, the Omo River and the whole water system is going to be utilized at an optimal level. The downstream communities will benefit from the regulated water of the River. There will not be unregulated flooding during the rainy season and big shortage of water during dry season. It is expected that in dry season the Dam will discharge the water regularly not only within Ethiopia but also across the border to users in Kenya. The seasonal floods will be controlled relieving the downstream communities from the hazards of ephemeral and often floods.

The Gibe III hydropower project will usher a new economic relations between Ethiopia and the neighboring Kenya. The latter can buy cheaper hydropower energy from Ethiopia. And this would help enhance cooperation between Ethiopia and Kenya. The two nations have been best of friends up to now in the region. This will positively add to the already established good relations between the two countries. This would also positively add towards better relations in

the broader region of Northeastern Africa. It sets good example for other trans-boundary water development in Northeastern Africa including in the enigmatic Nile Basin.

So, I am personally very happy to see the project is in progress and the result is going to be a big achievement for Ethiopia as well as for our neighboring countries.

**Q: In terms of monitoring and taking mitigation measures for the environmental and social impact particularly for the Chida-Sodo realigned road construction, how do you signify the role of the Gibe III Hydroelectric Project?**

**Ato Teshome:** We have learnt that there is environmental and social management plan; so, the management of the social and environmental issues should go in line with the plan. As we mentioned earlier, we are able to observe the environmental and social management is going according to the plan some with few minor issues will yet be addressed. So, the safety of the



**The realigned Chida-Sodo Road construction is progressing well, Welayta**

workers, the spoiled waste disposal system, and social issues related to the community resettlement and rehabilitation are handled wisely and according to the plan. We did not observe huge critical problems. But we have communicated and discussed any particular concerns with appropriate offices of the Project.

**Dr. Yacob:** As stated earlier on, and far as the overall observation is concerned, the Project is doing very well. But this doesn't mean that everything is perfect. The project will have to continue with good care and responsiveness. The outcome of the project must be beneficial to all stakeholders locally, nationally and regionally. That is the anticipated result of Gibe III.

In view of what has transpired, ESAP members are very happy to observe that the Environmental and Social Monitoring Unit and the local communities are working hand-in-hand. They



**A farmer and his wife receiving their bank book for the compensation of their assets**

are consulting on a daily basis, making utmost efforts to look for options and strategies to handle some of the outstanding issues. We have learnt that they handle any outstanding issues in close consultation. I think this is a very healthy way of doing things, but it must be strengthened and further improved. There is still a long way to go before the Project work is completed. Everybody wants to see a successful accomplishment of the Project.

As far as the wellbeing of the workers and everybody involved in the project is concerned, the safety unit is doing fairly well. We have discussed about safety issues with officers and other personnel at various work stations. We have learnt that safety matters are given close attention as part of project activity. We very much wish this would continue and we will see the end of the work according to the plan. Our observation where improvement is necessary, we have included in our report and discussed with concerned offices of the Project.

**Q: The Gibe III Hydroelectric Project Office is constructing the realigned Chida-Sodo road just after paying the appropriate compensation for the communities who might lose their assets. I think you had also held conversations with those people. In this regard, what was the reflection of the community and your recommendations as the independent advisory panel of the Project?**

**Ato Teshome:** We have discussed with the local community members and community leaders, and the people who have been affected by the Project. So, as mentioned earlier, there is a plan: social management plan to look after the project affected people to rehabilitate and to make sure that their livelihood is not affected. The compensation issue is going as planned; people have received the money that has been approved by the compensation committee which comprises the representative of affected people as well. So, the Project at the moment is doing its activities of rehabilitating the people looking for other optional livelihood activities. Also, the consultation is underway and we have recommended EEPCo to send the money on time basis.

**Dr.Yacob:** I think this also is progressing fairly well. At general community level, the committee is taking care of the matter and the consultation is smooth. The monetary compensation for the property has been fairly estimated and the procedure of money transfer on individual or family basis has already been arranged quite satisfactorily. The Omo microfinance has agreed to train the affected persons and families how to handle the money and future relocated jobs. The management of the compensation money has been overseen by kebele committees and woreda administration. The local administration has given utmost concern for this matter. When the affected persons individually asked, they told us they are very satisfied.

The only thing they need is training or good advice to create better jobs so that they will use their money in the best interest of their livelihood. So, that is also taken care of. This is an additional responsibility borne by the Project as well as by the local leadership. I think there is a big concern and attention to handle the matter for the benefit of all.

**Q: For Dr Yacob, as you know some opponents of the Gibe III Hydroelectric Project raise questions in relation to the impact of the Project on the downstream communities. So, what is your view point as scholar of water politics?**

**Dr Yacob:** I am not aware of evidence that the construction of the dam will affect the water flow. The amount of water of the Omo River will not decline in terms of its volume due to the dam construction. The same amount of water will continue to go downstream. The Dam only keeps some portion of the water temporarily for until the dam is filled up. But the water continues to flow downstream while still producing the hydroelectric power. It regulates the water in terms of time, which means there will be a regulated but continuous flow after the Dam. I have not come across any plan that aims to divert the water to create water shortage in the downstream areas.

There is no apparent reason that the downstream communities within Ethiopia or the inhabitants in the Lake Turkana area of Kenya will go short of water. Nobody will take away this water. So, the international NGOs or whoever it is may make their opinion the way they wish. But

their opinion cannot change the facts on the ground. So, according to the general studies of the Omo basin, the amount of water will continue to be there. In fact, there is added benefit with the Dam; there will not be the usual seasonal flooding which used to dislocate the downstream communities as we have repeatedly observed previously. The downstream stakeholders get regulated flow of the water as well as hydroelectricity. Both will create a new impetus for their socio-development. For this reason, I don't think that the opinion of the international NGOs is sound.

**Q: Finally, what does ESAP plan to do next? This question goes to the Chairperson, Dr Yacob.**

**Dr Yacob:** In this visit, we have experienced quite interesting things around. We know now Project activities are progressing. We know now what are further planned. We want to come back perhaps in six months time and visit not only the project site. We want to go to downstream areas and talk to people about their impressions and expectations. One of our interests will be to know how the downstream communities are integrating the idea of the Project into their livelihood.

We want also to go to the upstream places where the Dam water is expected to inundate. There also we want to assess the perception of the community, the management of compensation money for loss property. We want to observe the activities of the environmental and social monitoring unit of the Project. So, we are planning to come back in six months' time. In the mean time, we will continue to have regular meetings and also will be talking to the management officers about the progress of the Project between now and the time we will come back. This is more or less what we would be planning for our next site visit.

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