

Ghindae Sub-Zone: A Potential Agricultural Hub



Written by Habtom Tesfamichael

“Three seasons in just two hours,” a motto of the Ministry of Tourism, is what you experience when you travel from Asmara to the Ghindae sub-zone. Located in the eastern escarpment and marked by a lush green landscape, Ghindae is currently in its rainy season. It is a resting point for travelers from Asmara en route to the port city of Massawa. Travelers enjoy its naturally pleasant atmosphere while passing it through. This sub-zone enjoys two climatic seasons, which make it pleasant both for agriculture and recreation.

The subzone of Ghindae has towns in 17 administrative localities. Around 13 thousand households and approximately 54,000 people live within its boundary. The people mainly earn their living by commercial farming, herding and small scale trade. The highest altitude of the sub-zone is 2224 mts and the lowest 220 mts. This variation in altitude, coupled with its special location where the easterly winds rest, the subzone has three climates -- cool (Dega), temperate (Weine Dega) and hot.

According to the subzone’s administrative office, research conducted in 2015 demonstrated that the area is suitable for agriculture, grazing and wild life. Upon learning this good news, the administration, in collaboration with the local people, immediately took steps to adopt more careful plans to get more out of the land. The people protect the environment by preventing deforestation. As a result, the forests are getting intense and some wild animals that had disappeared from the area are returning. The natural diversity of the area is being restored in a way that captures visitors’ attention. Out of the total 2480 km sq. land of the sub-zone,

around 108 thousand hectares are currently under enclosure to enrich biodiversity.

The administrator of the subzone, Mr. Mohammed Yahya Haj, says that the area has had abundant rainfall in the recent years and that this has enabled plentiful agricultural production.

Since the 1994 government proclamation on enclosure corridors around this sub-zone, the people of the subzone, in conjunction with the Eritrean Defense Forces, managed to protect and work the land. At the moment there is a clear boundary of the wildlife reserve which is expected to be a tourist attraction. The enclosure stretches far beyond the highlands of Seyidishi bending towards Algaeta of Anseba region and around Filfil Selemuna. It also reaches the religious site of Akwar, Mai Habar, and the town of Adi Rosso. The subzone has places that have historical significance such as the Ghidaie trenches where heavy sacrifices were made in order to prevent the Dergue regime from making attempts to recapture the port city of Massawa after its liberation by the freedom fighters in February 1990. It also has ancient monasteries such the Debrebizen Monastery. The May Wuey spring water visited by as many as 4000 people a day is also located within this sub-zone.

In order to utilize the unique advantage that this sub-zone has, Mr. Mohammed Yahya said "our aim is to develop a sustainable tourism industry by providing the economic and aesthetic needs of visitors and managing our historical, cultural and ecological resources. But the hotels and resort areas that are necessary to serve tourists are not very well developed and we need to develop and upgrade our service rendering institutions". He said that there is a plan to invest in this industry.

Most of the area is rich in ground water, including the ever-flowing river of Mai Adkemom. Citizens are often seen engaged in using heavy machineries to work the land. Many of them are found in areas like Shebah, Metkel Abiet, Adi Shuma, Demas and Gahtelay. Farmers in the lowland plains often make use of the water that flows from the highlands in the summer to produce different kinds of crops and vegetables.

Many residents of Ghindae town live alongside the main roads. Few entrepreneurs own large agricultural fields, but most of the people are subsistence farmers. The people of the subzone are familiar with modern farming and grow fruits such as oranges, lemons, tangerines, papayas and watermelons.

Mr. Mohammed Yahya said that this area is very important for agriculture and tourism. The Gahtelay dam, which is being constructed in the sub-zone, will have the capacity of keeping up to 50 million cubic meters of water. Mr. Mohammed added that this will make inhabitants of the area beneficiaries through the irrigation schemes under the dam. The dam will

also ensure water supply to Massawa. Its construction is hoped to be completed at the end of 2019.

This area is also rich in cultural and historical heritages. The Tigre, Saho and Tigrigna are the dominant ethnic groups of the sub-zone. This multi-cultural nature of its population is also a good sign of how the people live in harmony with each other. Typically, any inhabitant from this sub-zone is bound to master three languages of the ethnic groups.

As part of the efforts that have been exerted to ensure social justice, the Government of Eritrea has done a lot to improve healthcare service and coverage in the area. Before independence, there was only one healthcare institution in Massawa, but today this number has risen tremendously. A referral hospital in Ghindae town is now serving all inhabitants of the sub-zone and people from other health centers. In the remote areas, seven health stations and one health center have been established in the local administrations of the sub-zone.

The Government has also expanded access to education. After independence, 51 schools ranging from pre-school to secondary level have been established in the sub-zone. Around 13,000 students are served in these institutions, of which more than 45% are female. Female enrollment after the elementary level needs special focus because most of these students fail to make it to higher educational institutions. "Cultural and religious stigmas are the main reasons of drop outs," says Mr. Mohammed Yahya.

Ghindae town has a very good potential to grow because it is located along the main route to the Massawa port and within the national park zone which encompasses historical and cultural heritages. There are already grand projects underway, including the renovation of the Dekemhare-Nefasit road which will offer additional advantage to the inhabitants of the sub-zone.