

## A Glimpse of Adi-Quala Sub-Zone



By: Habtom Tesfamichael

The Adi-Quala sub-zone is one of the twelve sub-zonal administrations of the southern region. It borders the sub-zone of Emni-Haili to the north, Tserona to the east, Mai-Mne to the west and Ethiopia to the south. It is the most populous sub-zone of the southern region with around 97 thousand population who live in 106 villages grouped in 22 local administrations. The ancient town of Adi-Quala is the center of the sub-zonal administration. Agriculture is the main occupation of the population and some engage in other activities.

The total area of the sub-zone is around 107 hectares, of which only about 21 thousand hectares is arable. This year there was sufficient rainfall, an average of around 700 mm, and is expected to lead to a good harvest.

Through its extension service, the Ministry of Agriculture's (MoA) advises farmers to practice rotation of crops. Farmers in the sub-zone used to grow taff in the past year in year out even though the production level was decreasing. But as of last year, they have been employing the integrated farming scheme in order to enhance their productivity. According to the scheme, the sub-zone has been divided in to three farm zones, where farmers grow a designated crop. This has proved to be effective and very productive and the farmers have accepted it after seeing the results.

The sub-zone is also suitable for the production of honey. Since 2012 there has been an extensive campaign to encourage farmers to engage in the production of honey. As part of the efforts to secure the nutritional needs of families, every farmer is expected to have one bee hive. The honey producers are grouped in unions. This was designed to benefit the farmers. Through the unions they can be accessed easily for training and be given material support. They can also sell their produce at a fair price. Farmers have reported that they harvest upto 30 kg of honey from one bee hive. Mr. Nguse Weldemichael, director of the MoA's branch in the

sub-zone, said that there is a promising potential in this sector and if exploited properly, an abundant amount of honey can be produced in the future by adopting modern and mechanized types of bee reproduction.

Mr. Andemesqel Adhanom, administrator of Adi-Quala sub-zone, said that the locality was one the least developed areas and had limited access to social services. But due to the integrated efforts made to improve the quality of living of the population, the development of social services has witnessed a fair progress in the last couple of years.

Education plays a key role in the development of a nation's human resources which is a means of alleviating poverty and promoting economic growth. All of the local administrations of the sub-zone have their own schools, from pre-school to the secondary school level. Prior to Eritrea's independence there were eight schools, one secondary school among them, and all of these were located in and around the town of Adi-Quala. Now, the number has increased to 41. Though there are still areas where additional educational institutions are needed, access to education has been made easier and the people are getting educational services not far from their respective localities.

Mr. Tesfay Sbhatu, director of the MoE in the Adi-Quala sub-zone, said that one of the challenges they have not solved so far is providing mother tongue teachers to the Saho ethnic group students in the local area of May- Alba. There is a major problem of getting enough teachers from the ethnic group in the region, in general, according to Mr Tesfay.

There are around 24 thousand students enrolled this year, and female enrollment is increasing from time to time. The ultimate goal of the MoE is to raise girls' enrollment so that they can make up 50% of the total student population. Today girls make up 46% of the students enrolled.

Mr. Tesfay said, "So far the focus has been on improving access to educational opportunity. We still have a long way to go to achieve our vision of increasing the number of students who can join higher institutions of education. We have designed a special program for the eighth and eleventh grades to help them prepare for the general and matriculation examinations respectively".

Eradicating illiteracy has been one of the goals where the MoE has been working. As a result, around 74% of the population is literate, but on-going efforts are made to mitigate the problem of relapses by setting up rural libraries for the newly literate citizens.

Health is an essential component of human beings and developing the sector is very critical for a healthy and productive society. The government of Eritrea is committed to improve the health status of the

population, as reflected in the macro and health policies as well as in the strategic concerns.

In the Adi-Quala sub-zone, the health service has been improving both in quality and coverage. There are three health stations and the only health institution that was serving the people of the sub-zone has been upgraded into a health center. Mr. Sirak Debas, director of the MoH in the sub-zone, said that though the health institutions are not enough and additional health institutions are needed, because some sections of the communities are traveling long distances for medical services, the MoH branch in the sub-zone has adopted different measures to tackle the problem. These include the training of community health representatives, foot medics and outreach campaigns.

The health institutions offer all kinds of medical service except operations. Mr. Sirak said that they have introduced the ultrasound service for pregnant mothers for which in the past they had to go to Mendefera Referral Hospital. A neo-natal IC (intensive care) unit was also established to deal with babies born immature or abnormal.

Waiting rooms for pregnant women have recently been set up in two health centers at a total cost of 2.9 million Nakfa as part of the effort to improve the mother and child care. Mothers are admitted to the health centers some weeks before their delivery and they are offered services free of charge.

This year, new dental and mental health departments opened to improve the service that was being offered. The ophthalmic department and blindness control division have now acquired full capacity to give adequate service to the people of the sub-zone. It has a lens production equipment for those who need it and the service is offered almost free of charge.

Mr. Sirak said that though good progress has been registered in reducing the traditional medication systems, much remains to be done in terms of raising public health awareness on the use of drugs. One of the commonly seen problems is the use of drugs, especially antibiotics, without the prescription of a health physician. Frequent misuse of antibiotics for simple infections is causing drug resistance problems.

“As we have worked to raise the public awareness about different diseases, we need also to work on raising awareness about the use of drugs. Some people don’t even know that some infections can be healed through simple home curing methods” Mr. Sirak said.

One of the areas the MoH has been working on is the community-based total sanitation (CTS) policy. According to the policy, all households are required to build latrines so that the ODF 2022 (open defecation free) target can be reached. This can help in reducing water borne and poor

sanitation caused health problems. This year the sub-zonal administration plans to launch 50 ODF villages and in 2020 it will add some villages to the list. Some areas of the sub-zone are suitable for mosquito reproduction, making them prone to malaria. Other related diseases such as the dengue fever and chikungunia are also public health problems. Mr. Sirak said, "We have been working to control these diseases through different mechanisms in the last couple of years and succeeded in decreasing the death rate caused by these diseases".

The sub-zone has had zero cases of HIV in the last three years. Therefore, it can be said that the HIV prevalence is under full control. A new clinic has been opened for people with HIV virus so that they can get anti-retroviral drugs without having to travel to Asmara. The aim is to get 90% of the patients to start taking the drugs, which are provided for free. The health center has also recently acquired a new gene expert machine that can give quick and accurate diagnosis. Mr. Sirak said, "Our approach is community-based health service which is helping us to offer a good and effective health service without which many of the successes we have achieved wouldn't have been realized."

The sub-zone has registered significant progress in reducing harmful traditional practices. Mr. Sirak said, "We have been working for the last several years to make people aware of the damaging consequences traditional practices, especially FGM, cupping, under-age marriage and other harmful use of traditional medicines". A health committee made up of different public and religious institutions was established to deal with this kind of problems.

Transport functions as a catalyst of economic and social development and it is closely linked to the SDGs. The main route from Eritrea to Ethiopia passes through the sub-zone and there are many villages along the road. As part of the ongoing efforts to renovate all of the national roads, the road that passes through Adi- Quala is being expanded. The people are always engaged in renovating and reconstructing the seasonal roads damaged by the summer rains.

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