

# Socio-Economic Developments in Awabäl Wārāda (Ethiopia) during the Därg Regime

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## Abstract

Ethiopia is considered to be one of the oldest nations in the world but at present its socio-economic condition is not satisfactory. It is the second most populous country in Sub-Saharan Africa. Awabäl Wārāda is found in Amhara Regional state of Ethiopia. It is one of the eighteen wārādas in East Gojjam zone located at a distance of two hundred fifty nine kilometers northwest of Addis Ababa. An attempt is made to have historical analysis of the wārāda by revealing the different developments that wārāda had experienced before the Italian occupation period. The paper tries to notice developments that the wārāda had experienced during the Därg regime. The new regime's attempt to place its power on a better footing by introducing several measures at a national level had its own negative effects and its challenges, and positive effects in the socio-economic and political lives of the peoples of the wārāda.

**Keywords :** Wārāda , Därg regime, Awrajja, Qäbälé, Lumamé, Gojjam, Däbrä Marqos

## I. INTRODUCTION

The socio-economic and infrastructural development in Awabäl Wārāda was lamentable in the case of education, road construction, water supply as well as health facility and non-existent in the case of electricity and Telecommunication. The inadequacy or absence of these social services indicates that the wārāda population was unprivileged like other rural areas from the mere reforms that happened like dropping water and it was a clear manifestation of the successive two regimes concentration on large towns and their far away from the peasants unless for it was for tax collection. In fact as we will see below in this case the Därg regime is relatively better to reach to the rural population than the Imperial regime.

## II. EDUCATION

The introduction of modern education in Ethiopia can be traced back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with the opening of Menelik II primary school in 1908. Despite its introduction, during the time, it was after the occupation of Italy, the Ethiopian government started it in an organized and consolidated way [1].

Before the introduction of the so called modern education, church education was the exclusive way of education and means of transmission of the country's culture and values [2]. In line with this the province of Gojjam was one of the areas where the church education played an active part in the Ethiopian educational scene as well as center of the finest liturgical schools in the country. Church education was given in each qäbälé church center. Qäbälé members assign a teacher called Märiqeta (church leader) and he was responsible for providing basic church education starting from fidäl to advanced level to the kids. Children's of the local population Starting from the age of 5 were sent to Yä qéss temehert bét (local priest school). When they come to an advanced level there were centers across different places. In Gojjam, centers of higher level church education were Dima Giorgis, Däbräworq, Wašära Mariyam, Däbrä-Elias and Märṭulä-Mariyam [3].

Informants said that students go to these places for further education. And after they complete they returned and served their society through Qedasé (liturgy) and being Näfs Abat (spiritual father) [4]. Like the church education, there was also Islamic education among the adherents of the religion. According to informants in Awabäl mosque children's of Islamic religion followers attend basic Quran education. Awabäl was one of the Islamic education centers where there was large number of follower of the religion [5]. Moreover, followers of Islamic religion from the adjacent wārāda who need further education come to Awabäl [6].

The introduction of modern education in Awabäl can be traced back to 1963 with the opening of Lumamé Primary School in the center of the town. Its level was from grades 1-6. It started with fill-sar house and few students and throughout the province the teachers were traditional clerics [7]. The school was the only one in the wārāda up to 1973.

The period marked the opening of another primary school in the wārāda that was Lägga primary school from grade level 1-6 by the financial assistance of Swedish Government Elementary School Building Unit [8]. In fact, the society preferred to send their children to Qés temeheret bét (church School) than to Askuala (modern School) during that period. But through encouragement by some of the officials some people began to show willingness to send their kids to attend modern education. Students after they complete their 6<sup>th</sup>

grade were obliged to go to Däbrä Marqos for further education [9].

The military regime inherited these two schools in Awabäl from the former government. The coming to power of the Därg like other new reforms and programs along the socialist ideology, it also made diversified educational programs span from Adult Literacy Campaigns to opening primary regular schools in the *wäräda* [10]. The Adult Literacy Campaign which was conducted widely among the Gojjam peasantry was the one which the Därg campaigned to reach to rural population demand of education. The program enabled so many Awabäl young's to acquire at least basic education as they called it *mäsaf ena manbäb* (reading and writing) [11].

As compared to the former regime, the Därg was better in expansion of primary schools to the rural population [12].

**TABLE I**

**The following table shows the number of schools opened in the *wäräda* during the imperial period and the Därg regime**

School Name	Year of Establishment	Grade Level During its Establishment
Lumamé primary School	1963	1-6
Lägga Primary School	1971	1-6
Wojäl primary School	1973	1-6
Yäsänbät primary School	1973	1-6
Yäzéra primary School	1981	1-4
Duqé primary School	1984	1-6
Enäbé primary School	1983	1-6
Yägidär primary School	1981	1-6
Mäqdäs primary School	1981	1-6
Kutay primary School	1990	1-6
Çeliya primary School	1980	1-6

**Source:** Awabäl *Wäräda* Communication Office, "Awabäl *Wäräda* Statistical Bulletin of 2002 E.C.," (Däbrä Marqos, 2003 E.C.), pp. 16-18.

In relation to the fulfillment of necessities for teaching-learning process a teacher in the *wäräda* during the Därg regime said that it was not only inadequate but suffering for the teachers. Chalks, blackboard, radio and other inputs were insufficient and sometimes absent. Not only this, teachers took their salary by going to Däbrä Marqos for more than seven hours walk [13]. Here it is imperative to note that the number of students engaged at different times and other profiles of the schools were out of stock either because of lack of documentation in the time or because they were destructed at different historical episodes more particularly during change of regimes. However, as can be understood all of the above schools were elementary schools and no junior secondary school was established in the district in the period under discussion. In the case of secondary

schools the people of Awabäl sent their children to Däbrä Marqos secondary school which was opened in 1958 [14]. This trend continued up to 2003, until the *wäräda* holds its own secondary school in Lumamé town [15].

### III. HEALTH

The health center expansion in Awabäl *wäräda* in the period under discussion was indescribable. The modern medical treatment among the *wäräda* population was non-existent up to the last years of the Därg regime. The people of Awabäl like other peoples of the province largely depend up on traditional mechanism of treatment such as through holy-water, herbs and through other ritual practices [16]. Like other administrative and socio-economic reforms, in the 1940's the imperial government aimed to give due attention to health facility expansion. To this end it established ministry of public health. But the expansion was limited on the province level [17]. The effort of the government was limited to the capital of the provinces and its role to the rural areas such as Awabäl was incredible.

The nearest hospital for Awabäl people was in Däbrä Markos, which was the only hospital in the Awrajja at distance of 40 kilometers from Awabäl. Few peoples who were vulnerable to modern medical treatment and capable of doing it economically used to come to this hospital [18]. This hospital which was established in 1965 was still the only hospital in Däbrä Markos Awrajja and currently in East Gojjam zone [19]. The last years of the Därg saw the opening of a small clinic in Awabäl *wäräda* in the town of Lumamé which was ill-equipped with skilled manpower as well as medical instruments [20]. The same fashion was followed in Lägga, Yäsänbät and Wojäl [21].

### IV. ROAD

The connection of Awabäl with road from historical point of view was significant. In terms of motor road and its availability, Awabäl *Wäräda* was not different from the other rural areas of the country. It did not have an all weather road joining it with other *wärädas* of the province until the late 1930s. Basically, the Italians constructed the main road stretching from Däjän to Däbrä Marqos which passes through the town of Lumamé during their occupation period. However, it was not built in a way that it could provide better and more secured service to the people. Moreover, other roads have not been available in *wäräda* which connect different rural *qäbälé* to the capital of Awabäl. So that, people could not bring their products to the market easily and they have been suffering from lack of all weathered road [22].

In the period under discussion there was single main road which connected Lumamé town with the

town of Däbrä Marqos. This road was constructed during the Italian occupation for their easy movement to their respective camps from Däbrä Marqos to Däjän which passes through Awabal [23]. This road was initially constructed from gravel and not standardized. Later on, the road changed into concrete asphalt during the Därg regime in 1978/1980 and serve as a highway from Addis Ababa to Bahirdar and Gondar. However, there was no any other road constructed to link the different small towns and *qäbäles* of the *wäräda* [24].

#### V. Telecommunication, Water, and Electricity

According to sources Telecommunication service was introduced to the province in 1934 under the rule of Ras Imiru Haylä Selasé [25]. Despite, its expansion on the provincial level and to some towns, areas such as Awabäl *Wäräda* whose overwhelming population peasants were not beneficiaries of telephone service under the regime of Haylä Selasé I. An archival source indicates that a study conducted in 1976 on 17 towns of Gojjam for the provision of telecommunication service among which Lumamé was one. Accordingly, the study recommended that the opening of telephone was necessary and it officially started rendering of its service in 1976 in the town of Lumamé [26].

Facilities like water, electric and banking services in Awabäl *Wäräda* were inadequate during the period under discussion. Potable water was almost non-existent in the *wäräda*. Water and electricity service were unthinkable during the imperial regime in Awabäl *Wäräda*. For instance, People in the town of Lumamé, and other rural areas used rivers, streams and water wells for drinking and other purposes for several decades. Dwellers of Yägodäna had used ground water and water wells as the major source of drinkable water due to inavailability of perennial rivers in and around such areas. Moreover, the water wells were limited in number and they were unable to adequately satisfy the water needs of the people of the towns until the early 1980s [27]. Thus, people had to wait for many hours in queue to get water. There was no authority to look after better management and service provision of the water wells. However, some works were attempted to be put in place to improve the perceived water-related problems of the *wäräda*. For instance, during the Därg regime in 1980 one public water pipe (*bono*) was constructed in Lumamé town, though its service could not handle the whole people of the town [28]. In spite of, these necessary services remain dreams to the *wäräda*'s population in the period under discussion. As far as electric service is concerned, people of Lumamé town bought generator in the Därg period and used it for decades instead of hydro-electricity. Archival sources attest that to buy a generator, residents of the town collected around 60,000 Ethiopian Birr. Hydro-electric supply was

non-existent in Awabäl *Wäräda* in general and the town of Lumamé in particular until recent time. It was after the down fall of the military regime the people of Lumamé began enjoying hydro electric power [29].

#### VI. Conclusion

Awabäl *Wäräda* is found in Amhara National Regional State of Ethiopia. It is one of the eighteen *wäräda* in East Gojjam administrative zone. The history of the *wäräda* after the ousting of the imperial regime witnessed developments. The study has also found out the downfall of Emperor Haylä Selasé and the majority of the people of the *wäräda* received the subsequent installation of the Därg regime in 1974. The military junta began to establish its power base by introducing several socialist oriented policies that, it thought, were relevant to deal with the socio-economic and political problems of the country in general and Awabäl *Wäräda* in particular. In this regard, one of the programs of Därg that was launched in the *wäräda* against illiteracy was somewhat successful. The Därg rule in the *wäräda* had registered major success in the field of literacy, though thousands of male and female peasants were exposed to the basic skills of reading and writing in Amharic. It was one of the biggest successes of the Därg regime in the country in general and in the *wäräda* in particular. The Därg also introduced socialist-oriented programs like peasant associations, producers' cooperatives, service cooperatives and villagization. However, the people of the *wäräda* did not welcome the introduced programs of the regime. As a result, the implementation in most cases was fraught with strong resistance from the people, which eventually led to the demise of the regime. The *wäräda* until 1974 was not well furnished with the necessary social and economic facilities like the infrastructures of transport and communication.

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