

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

A History of Road Construction and its Socio-Economic Impact in East Gojjam, 1941-2005

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Abstract

In Ethiopia, infrastructure development remains one of the largely neglected areas of historical research. This paper, therefore, surveys the history of road building and its socio-economic impact in East Gojjam from 1941 to 2005. To this end, archival documents, oral information and secondary sources were consulted. The findings show that the post-liberation imperial period saw no significant development on the opening of new routes. Road construction reawakened during the military regime. It witnessed promising road networks that encompassed highway, feeder and rural roads. In contrast, road construction remained sluggish during the reign of the Ethiopian People Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) under discussion. The transitional government lifetime (1991-1995) was in particular a gloomy period. The failure of successive governments in expanding the road network emanated from economic, political, policy and related issues. Despite this, the impact of the nascent road network that extended all through the three regimes is clearly observable from the increasingly socio-economic interaction that appeared in the region and beyond.

Keywords: East Gojjam, Highway, Historical, Infrastructure, Rural Road, Socio-Economic

Introduction

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century marked the introduction of modern infrastructures like road, pipe water, post office and electricity in Ethiopia (Paulos, 1991A.M., PP. 297-298; Tekeste, 1984, P.13). However, there is a paucity of scholarly works that deal with the history of infrastructure development and its all-round effects. This has been the result of the shortcomings in the historical writing. Ethiopian history has given greater emphasis to the political history for long. Although recent developments witnessed the emergence of economic and social histories as major themes (Bahru, 2000, PP. 11-15), the history of road construction and its socio-economic impact remains one of the largely neglected areas of historical research. The meager studies that have been conducted on the field focus on major highways and on the Italian period (Pankhurst, 1976). Some touched it in a passing while treating the political and administrative history of major towns, *aw-*

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rajjas (sub-provinces) and *woredas*/districts/ (Abdu, 1997; Ewunetu, 2005). The expansion of road at provinces, *awrajjas*(sub-provinces), *woredas* (districts) and the ensuing socio-economic impacts are not revealed. East Gojjam is one of those regions whose road infrastructure histories are not reconstructed. Hence, this research tries to fill these gaps.

Before starting the main discussion, it is logical to provide a clear picture of the administrative limit of the study area across the three regimes and why the years 1941 and 2005 are made landmarks. East Gojjam denotes to the eastern part of the imperial's Gojjam Teqalay Gizat and the Darg regime's Gojjam Kefle Hager which roughly encompassed the then DebreMarkos, Mota, and Bichena *awrajjas*.² Currently, it refers to East Gojjam zone which was formed as an administrative unit towards the late Darg period (Clapham, 2008, p.464). The research took 1941 as its onset since it marked the end of the Italian occupation and the restoration to power of the imperial government that had attempted to introduce the provision of modern facilities. The year 2005, the concluding year, was a period where the EPRDF government made profound socio-economic reforms following the national election (Abadir, 2018, p.21; Berhanu, 2005-2006, p. 33). Yet, the discussion starts from surveying prior works so as to giving background insight.

The Beginning of Road Construction in Ethiopia

Modern road construction was introduced in Ethiopia by Emperor Tewodros II. Late in his ruling period, Tewodros undertook road construction aiming to enhance the movement of his army throughout his domain and curb revolts. The Emperor initiated constructing three roads radiating from Debre Tabor to Maqdalla, Gojjam and Gonder (Pankhurst, 1968, p. 284). He had exploited the road construction know-how of European missionaries and the labor power of his soldiers. But, he used no modern construction equipment. Partly because of this, the roads built during his time were rudimentary. However, the Debre Tabor-Maqdalla road, the only completed road, won a great appreciation of European witnesses. Tewodros used it to transport his mortar, Sebastopol, to Maqdalla plateau towards the end of his reign (Mekonnen, 1986, p.46; Pankhurst, 1968, p. 284).

Following the 1968 Maqdalla incident, road building had remained sluggish for more than two decades. True, Emperor Yohannes IV (r.1872-1889) had spent a great deal of his time battling with the Egyptians, Mahadists as well as the Italians. Yet, some writers suggest that the emperor disregarded road building believing that it would eventually serve the invading forces who were then on an offensive position better than the Ethiopians. Basically, Emperor Yohannes IV showed no a marked propensity to road building unlike he did to church. And, the importance of building road is not believed to have been well received by him(Pankhurst, 1968, p. 288).

Road construction showed territorial expansion and improvement in quality during the reign of Emperor Menelik II. In terms of expansion, the nascent road building experience of Emperor Tewodros II was extended to the west, south and east. Regarding quality, Menelik's period witnessed the building of relatively longer width and better leveled roads. The Emperor had imported modern construction equipment namely road flatterer and steam roller. Besides, he exploited the road building know-how of the Italians (Pankhurst, 1968, pp. 288-289).

2 Debra Markos University Archive Center, (Here after DMUAC) The Map of GojjamTeqalayGizat, Folder No. 00/339, File No. 10/10.

The year 1904 is a landmark in the construction of motor able road since motor car was first introduced into Ethiopia in that same year (Henz, 1977, p. 22). In the 1920s and early 1930s, the construction of several motor able roads had been running. In the northeast and northwest, the Addis Ababa-Dessie, Dessie-Bati and Feche-Abay Gorge roads were under construction while the Dessie-Debre Tabor-Gonder, Dessie-Woreilu and Dessie-Maqalle roads were at planning stage. In the east, the Addis Ababa-Dire Dawa road was constructed. Besides, the Harar-Dire Dawa road was extended to Hargessa via Jigjiga. In the south and southwest, the Mojo-Shashemene-YirgaAlem-Wondo-Hagere Salam-Dollo, the Nazret (now Adama)-Bale and the Addis Ababa-Jimma roads were constructed (Mahteme Selassie, 1942 A.M., p. 435;Pankhurst, 1968, pp. 291-293). In the study area, the J.G White Engineering Corporation of New York dealt about the construction of the Addis Ababa-Debre Markos-Lake Tana road in 1930. During this time, Ras Hailu of Gojjam used to run his car on adirt road constructed by manual labor at Debre Markos and its environs (Pankhurst, 1968, pp. 291-293).

The Italians, too, had constructed lengthy roads. From the north, they built two roads to Addis Ababa- the one through Maqalle and Dessie and the other via Gonder and DebreMarkos. The Asmara-Maqalle-Dessie-Addis Ababa road construction and upgrading was almost completed by 1937. The Asmara-Gonder-DebreMarkos-Addis Ababa road building was progressing slowly and was by no means completed upto south of Gonder. The difficult terrain together with the ardent patriotic resistance had stayed on an insurmountable setback (Pankhurst, 1976, pp. 34-50). In the east, they constructed the Kombolcha-Serdo-Assab and the Dagahabur-Moqadishu roads. The Italians had also built or rebuilt roads radiating from the capital to the provincial centers and frontier districts. These were the Addis Ababa-Jimma-Gimira, Addis Ababa-Ghedo-Bako-Lekemti, Addis Ababa-Shashemene and Addis Ababa-Arsi-Bale (Pankhurst, 1976, pp. 37-54).

The building of bridge, culvert, ford and pipe is the crucial element of road construction. In Ethiopia, the history of bridge erection is by far older than road construction (Dallelegn Teshome, 1988, p. 541; Pankhurst, 1968, p. 297). However, modern bridge construction is believed to have begun by King Teclehaymanot of Gojjam. Teclehaymanot built the Tamcha and other bridges using Italian experts (Dallelegn, 1988, p. 541; Pankhurst, 1968, p. 297). Emperor Menelik II, too, is remembered in erecting modern bridge. He built bridges over major rivers traversing the capital and existing highways. The bridges built over the Kebena and Awash Rivers were among his greatest achievements. Menelik had exploited bridge building know-how of the Italian prisoners, the French and Russian engineers. Ras Mekonnen was also prominent in bridge building. He had built significant bridges both in Harer and Addis Ababa. Bridge building continued, relatively in a larger scale, throughout the dual rule, the early Haile Selassie I regime and the occupation period. But, several bridges were destroyed during both the war of invasion and liberation (DallelegnTeshome, 1988, pp. 542-543).

Road Construction in East Gojjam, 1941-1974

Before the 1950s, Road building in Ethiopia was not well institutional. It was run by the Department of Public Works and Communication. The first independent body, the Imperial Highway Authority, was established in 1951 in charge of planning, designing, building and maintaining roads. All through the imperial period, the Authority focused on building highway irrespective of other options. It developed both domestic and trans-boundary links. While domestic links were extended to provincial capitals and cash crop production areas, trans-boundary routes were directed to ports. This was in line with, apart from others, the economic longing of the imperial government. Since imperial Ethiopia was

epitomized by agrarian economy coupled with poor infrastructure, it demanded establishing industries (with main focus on import substitution), introducing modern technologies, infrastructure and the like. But its foreign earnings relied on exporting raw materials, particularly agricultural products. Through easing the transport system, the imperial government intended not only enlarging the volume of cash crop production, the source of foreign exchange but also improving the import-export processes. It seems that the road building agenda of the imperial government was largely shaped by these grand motives (Pankhurst, 1976, pp. 37-54; Imperial Highway Authority, 1964, p. 6; Rony, 2012, pp. 17, 21; Shimelis, 1971, p. 4).

The first decade after the liberation witnessed no road construction in Ethiopia, in general and in East Gojjam, in particular. The dearth of finance, trained manpower and construction equipment proved a serious blow throughout the decade (Derib, 2010, p. 13). Yet, the QedamawiHaile Selassie Bridge was erected over the Abay River. The emperor, perhaps, felt the necessity of building bridge over the Abay since 28, April, 1941. Because, on the same day, his majesty together with his entourage had suffered greatly from crossing Abay while coming back from exile via Gojjam (which the emperor preferred to call it 'the road of peace') following the liberation of Ethiopia from Fascist (Emperor Haile Selassie, 1965, A.M., 308). The message inscribed on the bridge reads as:

ይህ ድልድይ በኢትዮጵያ ንጉሠ ነገሥት በግርማዊ ቀዳማዊ ኃይለ ሥላሴ ፈቃድና ትዕዛዝ በ፲፯ተኛው ዘመነ መንግስታቸው በ፲፱፻፴፱ ዓ.ም በዓባይ ወንዝ ላይ ተመሰረተ፡፡ ግርማዊነታቸው ከባህር ማዶ ተመልሶ ኢትዮጵያን ነፃ ለማውጣት ጠላቶቻችንን ኢጣሊያኖችን በወጋቸው ጊዜ እነርሱን እያባረረ የሰላም ጉዳና ከሆነው ከጉጃም ላይ ደረሰ፡፡ ከዚህም በኋላ በሚያዝያ 20 ቀን ፲፱፻፴፫ ዓ.ም በድል አድራጊነት ግርማ ይህን ወንዝ ተሻግረው አሁንም ለሃገር ልማት ጥቅም የሚያገለገለው ይህ ድልድይ እንዲሰራበት አደረገ፡፡ ይኸውም ለሰላም መታሠቢያ የታሪክ ማስታወሻ ሆኖ በኋላ ዘመን ለሚነሳው ትውልድ ምስክር ይሆን ዘንድ ቀዳማዊ ኃይለ ሥላሴ ድልድይ ተባለ፡፡
ጥር ፩፱ ቀን ፲፱፻፴፱ ዓ.ም፡፡

The foundation stone of erecting this bridge over the Abay River is inaugurated by the good-will and order of Emperor Haile Selassie I, in 1947, on his seventeenth reigning year. By the time when his majesty attacked the Italians to liberate Ethiopia after returning from exile, he reached Gojjam, the road of peace, chasing the enemy. Hereafter, his majesty crossed this river (Abay) with a victorious dignity on 28, April, 1941; yet again he erected this bridge which serves for the country's development. The bridge is named *Qedamawi* Haile Selassie Bridge to be the commemoration of peace, the reminiscence of history and witness for the future generation.
27, January, 1947 A.D

Figure-1: QedamawiHaile Selassie Bridge



Source: Palinstravels.co.uk

Road building was rekindled with the establishment of the Imperial Highway Authority in 1951. Right from its inception, the Authority had initiated consecutive highway programs (Derib, 2010, p. 13). But, no new road was built in East Gojjam throughout the four highway programs (1952-1974). This was because, while the first highway program (1952-1957) put great emphasis on rehabilitating war-ravaged roads particularly the Addis Ababa-Kombolcha, Addis Ababa-Jimma, and Addis Ababa-Nekemte, others favored the southwestern region, which is potentially rich in cash crop production (Rony, 2012, p. 17; Derib, 2010, p. 13). The greatest achievements registered in East Gojjam under the imperial's Highway Programs were thus upgrading and completing the old road constructed by the Italian. Off the major and minor roads selected for construction and reconstruction at country level during the Second Highway Program (1957-1966), the Gonder "Historic" route took the second priority owing to its role in linking the capital with the prominent tourist attraction sites: Lake Tana, Tis Isat Falls, the Gonder Castle, the huge Armachiho Canyon, the scenic Semen Mountains, and Aksum. Besides, the rich agricultural potential of Gojjam and Lake Tana areas was an obvious lure (Imperial Highway Authority, 1967, p. 3; Baker, 1974, p. 151).

As the road maintenance program clearly shows, reconstructing the Gohatseyon-Bahir Dar highway was carried out by dividing it into three phases. The first phase extended from Gohatseyon to Dejen which covers a distance of 39km. The 'Reconstruction' of this segment was scheduled to start in May 1959 and be finalized in July 1962 at a total cost of 5,886, 240 birr by a private contractor named Impresit. The second phase stretched from Dejen to Bure through Debre Markos for a distance of 185km. Here 'reconstruction' was programmed to be conducted from May 1959 to February 1961 with a cost of 2, 775,

000 birr. The 'reconstruction' of the third section that extended from Bure to Bahir Dar for a distance of 162km was prearranged to be done from January 1961 to February 1963 with a total cost of 3, 438,000 birr, by the authority's task force. But, it remains difficult to ascertain existing progress from sources available in hand (Imperial Highway Authority, 1967, pp. 6-7; Baker, 1974, p. 151).

Under the Third Highway Program (1965-1968), asphaltting the Addis Ababa-Debre Markos-Bahir Dar highway was running. But, it ceased at Debre Markos (Baker, 1974, p. 151). By the same token, plan was drawn to gravel surfacing the Debre Markos-Mota and Dejen-Mota-Bahir Dar roads under the Forth Highway Program (1968-1974). The first was interrupted at planning stage.³ Regarding the second, surveying work was in progress by 1970. Yet, construction did not start during the lifetime of the imperial government. In conclusion, because of the failure of the aforementioned road construction projects, the Addis Ababa-DebreMarkos-Gonder highway remained the only route traversing Gojjam TeqalayGizat throughout the imperial period.⁴

Road Construction in East Gojjam, 1974-1991

The road building program of the military government targeted at enhancing socio-economic development. From economic perspective, roads were built in view of promoting the advancement of mainly the agriculture sector, the back bone of Ethiopian economy. In terms of social development, roads were constructed not only for easing public mobility for various ends but also enabling the government reach the frontier villages so as to expand social infrastructures and assisting the rural society at critical times. However, political motives were not also lacking (Rony, 2012, pp. 17, 21-22). The military government wished to extend its influence far to the rural areas through raising the political awareness of peasants, and that would be difficult in the absence of an extended and dependable road network.

The military government made organizational and policy changes gradually. Initially, it inherited the Imperial Highway Authority as the Ethiopian Provincial Military Government Highway Authority until it was formally renamed by a decree in 1978 as the Ethiopian Road Authority. Basic change was made in 1980 when the Ethiopian Transport Construction Authority is used instead of the Ethiopian Road Authority with extra responsibilities of constructing airports, sea ports, railways and municipal roads. In terms of programs and approaches, the military government followed the imperial tradition for long or short distance road construction but with profound modification. To begin with, it implemented the imperial highway program in harmony with the newly initiated rural road program. Therefore, the Fifth Highway Program (1974-1976) and Sixth Highway Program (1976-1978), unlike the previous ones, came up with an agenda of building both highway and rural road (Rony, 2012, pp. 21-22; Derib, 2010, p. 37). Secondly, the military government designed the sectoral approach in place of the imperial project approach. Hence, the evaluation and planning of roads was greatly associated with their returns or contributions to the improvement of the various sectors like education, agriculture, health and so on (Mekonnen, 1986, p. 173).

3 Debre Markos Rural Road Maintenance Office Archieve (Here after DMRRMOA), Ato Molalign Belay Lältopia Transport construction BaläSelṭan, Folder, 18, Ref. No.,6579/ለ/ጳ/37, 1,Ginbot,1979.

4 Ibid.; Debre Markos Administrative Office Archive, (Here after DMAOA), Dajazmach Dereje Mekonnen LäFitawrariDilnasahuReta, folder, 235, file, m. m. 77, Ref.no.,3/3/L/24/21, 1,Miyazia,1962.

The military government is believed to have emphasized on building lower status roads. The rural road program was epitomized by building RR10, RR30 and RR50 rural roads having a carrying capacity of 10, 30 and 50 vehicles per day respectively. RR10 is a dirt road (dry season road) commonly constructed using manual labor. As their carrying capacity indicates, RR30 and RR50 are also low standard gravel surfaced all-weather roads (Metschies et.al., 1974, pp. 16-19).

Despite all, the military rule appears to have been remarkable in the history of road construction in East Gojjam. It witnessed the building of both a highway traversing the region and rural roads extended to awrajjia and woreda centers. Firstly, it initiated the imperial plan of building the Dejen-Mota-Bahir Dar highway under the Fifth Highway Program (1974-1976). The concession to build the first section, Dejen-Mota road, was granted to a local construction firm called Berta. The second section, extended from Mota to Bahir Dar, was earmarked to the Highway Construction Task Force. However, construction was sluggish at both sections and finally rescheduled.⁵

In May 1975, a project encompassing four roads including the Dejen-Mota-Bahir Dar highway was endorsed.⁶ Based on the previous arrangement, the construction of the Dejen-Mota section was started in 1976 and completed by October 1981.⁷ From the other end, construction reached Adet by 1979. But, the completion of the Dejen-Mota-Bahir Dar Highway had to wait for some years to come after 1981 as the road building did not proceed beyond Adet to Mota.⁸ When the remaining part was exactly completed cannot be verified from the sources available in hand. Interestingly enough, informants recount about the building of several bridges over Enabrga, Minase, Muga, Soha, Yidan, EnatCheye, Gilgel Cheye, Zeya, Tigdar and Sade rivers but to name a few.⁹

The military government's strategic reform that assures the building of rural road in tandem with a highway began to be executed in East Gojjam early. The Rural Road Construction and Maintenance Office was opened at Debre Markos in 1975. Not long afterwards, the office launched three rural road projects namely the DebreMarkos-Quyi-Bichena, Gundewoyin-Merto Le Maryam and DebreMarkos-Rob Gabaya.¹⁰

The Debre Markos-Bichena rural road is an alternative and a direct route to Bichena via the small towns of Yaboqla and Quyi. It extended for a distance of 67km¹¹. It had considerable importance in linking the then *awrajjias* and *woredas* such as Debre Markos Awrajjia, Bichena Awrajjia and Dabay Tilatgin Woreda.¹² Construction started in October 1980.¹³ At first, it progressed well. In the course of the first nine months, for instance, 38km road was cleared and the same length dirt road was paved. Of this, 26km road was gravel sur-

5 International Development Association News Release No.,75/22.

6 Ibid.

7 DMRRMOA, Ato Goshu Gabre Selassie Lä Gojjam Keflä Hägär Yä Gäṭär Mängädoch Ṭehfät Bèt, Folder, 21, Ref. No. ጰ/m 2/74, 3, Ṭeqemt, 1974.

8 DMRRMOA, Ato Yohannes Zerihun Lä Debre Markos Kätäma Aṭaqalay MekerBèt, Folder, 21, Ref. No. /695/4/71, 2, Nähasè, 1971.

9 Interview, Ato Sileshi Abteu, Ato Mose Andualem, Ato Yibeltal Andarge, and Ato Meselu Gesese, in Debre Worq 15 December 2010.

10 DMRRMOA, Ato Getahun Joba Lä Mesraq Gojjam Astädädär Akababi Ṭehfät Bèt, Folder, 19, Ref. No./ṭ/g/m /66/82, 15, Sanè, 1982.

11 Ibid.

12 DMRRMOA, Ato Amare Yalew Lä Mesraq Gojjam Astädädär Akababi, Folder, 16, Ref. No. 3/g /20/85, 12, Ṭeqemet, 1985.

13 DMRRMOA, Ato Getahun Joba Lä Mesraq Gojjam Astädädär Akababi Ṭehfät Bèt, Folder, 19, Ref. No./ṭ/g/m /66/82, 15, Sanè, 1982.

faced. The building of drainage structures (bridge, pipe, ford, and diversion ditches) was also encouraging. Two pipes and eight fords were fully constructed. Besides, the building of Muga Bridge was partially completed.¹⁴ However, construction did not proceed with the required pace.

Reports reveal that construction was stalled by the absence of quality sand in the nearby areas, lack of construction materials and equipment, technical failure of vehicles, and by the heavy rain.¹⁵ Finally, the project was suspended in 1984 due to financial constraints. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development had been discharging its duties of financing the road construction up to the end of the 1983 fiscal year, but failed to do so for the 1984 budgeting year. Construction interrupted and the Rural Road Task Force was transferred to the Pawi settlement. So far, 67km dirt road paving, 26km gravel surfacing, and one bridge building were completed. But, the construction of five bridges and thirty pipes was not done. At this stage, the road was opened for traffic in 1984 and was serving to 1987 with a continual maintenance.¹⁶ The Rural Road Task Force was brought back towards the late 1989 with the interruption of the Chagni-Wambera road building due to the dearth of peace. Soon, construction resumed and proceeded well particularly from December 1989 to May 1990. But, before its completion the Rural Road Task Force was, once again, transferred to the Chagni-Wambera route with the revival of peace in the area in 1992.¹⁷

The second rural road, the Gundewoyin-Merto Le Maryam road, turned off the main Dejen-Mota route to the right at the town of Gundewoyin and extended for a distance of 30km. Though it is short, construction took three years. It was started in 1980 and completed in June 1983. In the course of the 1980, surveying and 12km earth road paving were accomplished. Of this, 8km was gravel surfaced. The next year saw 11km earth road paving and 12km gravel surfacing. The year 1983, the completion year, witnessed 7km earth road paving, 10km gravel surfacing, and thirteen pipes placing.¹⁸ Along with the road building, two medium sized bridges were erected over the Bina and Tewa rivers. It was opened for traffic in 1984.¹⁹ Since then, the road was under maintenance. On the year its operation began, for instance, a maintenance work incurred 13,094.45 birr was done. For an effective and regular upkeep, the Debre Markos Rural Road Construction and Maintenance Office established branch maintenance agency at the town of Gundewoyin. However, it was not that much fruitful, and hence the road was at a precarious state by October 1990.²⁰

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- 14 DMRRMOA, Ato Dejene Tadesse Lä Gojjam Keflä Hägär ҢehfätBèt, Folder, h, Ref. No.277/1973, 14, Ham lè, 1973.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 DMRRMOA, Ato Getahun Joba Lä Kele Somet Mästädadir Serana Kätäma Lemat Biro, Folder, 12, Ref. No./ጉ/g/m -22/56, 19, Ңeqemt, 1986.
- 17 DMRRMOA, Ato Manberu Mengiste Lä Kele ISomet Mästädadir Ңehfät Bèt, Folder, 18, Ref. No.3243/mፑ/10, 15, Hedar, 1986.
- 18 DMRRMOA, Ato Getahun Joba Lä Mesraq Gojjam Astädadär Akababi Ңehfät Bèt, Folder, 19, Ref. No./ጉ/g/m /66/82, 15, Sanè, 1982.
- 19 DMRRMOA, Ato Getahun Joba Lä Mesraq Gojjam Astädadär Akababi Ңehfät Bèt, Folder, 19, No Ref. No., 20 Hedar 1983.; Ato Getahun Joba Lä Mesraq Gojjam Mäsetädader Zone, Folder, 19, Ref. No./ጉ/g/m/E /31/87, 19, Mäsekäräm, 1987.; Ato Šahay MSäwasäw Lä Gojjam Keflä Hägär Gäጥär Mängädoch Sera na Ңegäna Birgade, Folder, 21, Ref. No.1021/m/m, 20, 7, Sanè, 1975.
- 20 DMRRMOA, Ato Getahun Joba Lä Siso Enäsè Wäradä Astädadär ҢehfätBèt, Folder No.19, Ref. No./g/m 19/79, 14, Ңeqemt, 1979.

The Debre Markos-Rob Gabaya rural road was the third one among the first-born rural road projects in East Gojjam. Preliminary survey study was conducted early in October 1979, but construction was long belated.²¹ In this state of affairs, the Debre Markos-Mota road plan was envisaged. An ad-hoc committee comprised of representatives from the Rural Road Construction Department of Northwestern Region and the Gojjam Province Administrative Office conducted a feasibility study in May 1980. The study reveals that the completion of the Debre Markos-Rob Gabaya-Mota road would shorten the Debre Markos-Dejen-Mota line by about 93km. Besides, as the region traversed is of a highland, the head of the Choke Mountain, the new road bypassed many of the big rivers of East Gojjam which originated from the foot of the mountain. Hence, the number of Ford, Pipe Culvert, Culvert Box and Bridge required to be built were only four, seven, six, and one respectively. These made the road's advantage manifold: minimum cost of construction, shortest travel time as well as lower cost of travel. Despite all, it was failed at planning stage.²² Eventually, the Debre Markos-Rob Gabaya rural road building reawakened in 1986. Unlike the rest, it was built by manual labor under food-for-work program. Construction was completed within eighteen months, a period half shorter than initially planned. It was opened for traffic in May 1987²³. The local community requested for extending it to Mota. Though plan was drawn, it remained futile.²⁴

The construction of shorter rural roads namely Yewula-Elias, Chemoga-Yejube, Bichena-Ya'idWuha was in progress in 1985. Construction was done by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development. Unlike the two, construction cost of the Chemoga-Yejube rural road was covered by public contribution in cash and labor. The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development had provided construction equipment and technical support.²⁵

Towards the late military rule, plan was made to access several social and religious institutions through building branch roads that diverges from the nearest all-weather highways or rural roads. Accordingly, in Dejen, Anadad, and Awabel woredas, six farmers' cooperatives namely, Terch, Alaqtam, Qonchor, Badabena Fote, Shabla, and Wonga were linked with the nearest line since 1988. Construction was funded by the farmers' cooperatives.²⁶ Likewise, two spur rural roads were built in BichenaAwrajja by manual labor under food-for-work program. Both roads turned off the main Dejen-Mota line and extended to DimaGiyorgis and Yeraz Mikael. Construction cost was covered by the Christian Relief and Development Association. The earth road to Dima, having 10km length from the main line, was built by a grading machine in May 1990.²⁷

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- 21 DMRRMOA, Ato Kassahun Yimer Lä Gäṭär Mängädoch Sera DerjitTehfätBèt, Folder, 21, Ref. No. 389/225, 26, Teqemt, 1972.
- 22 DMRRMOA, Ato Anmut Kinde Lältopia Transport Construction BaläSelṭan, Folder, 18, Ref. No.7436/፳፻፲፱/10, 20, Ginbot, 1982; Ato Molalign Belay Lältopia Transport construction BaläSelṭan, Folder, 18, Ref. No.8549/፳/፻/37, 30, Hamlè, 1979; Ato Molalign Belay, Lältopia Transport construction BaläSelṭan, 8May 1987; Ato Molalign Belay, Lältopia Transport construction BaläSelṭan, Folder No.,18, Ref. No.,6579/፳/፻/37, 1, Gin bot, 1979.
- 23 DMRRMOA, Ato Molalign Belay Lältopia Transport construction BaläSelṭan, Folder, 18, Ref. No. 8549/፳/፻/37, 30, Hamlè, 1979; Kä DabreMarkos- Rob Gäböya project Sera Häläfi LäGäṭär Mängädoch Wana Astäbabari, 16, Mägabit, 1986.
- 24 DMRRMOA, Ato Molalign Belay Lältopia Transport construction BaläSelṭan, Folder No.18, Ref. No.,8549/፳/፻/37, 30, Hamlè, 1979.
- 25 DMRRMOA, Ato Eshetu Muhe LäChemoga-Yejub Erase Ageze Mengede Sera Komite, Ref. No.10/800/6-8, 2, Tekemet, 1976.
- 26 DMRRMOA, Ato Abebe Degf Lä Gojjam Keflä Hägär Gäṭär Mängäd Qernchaf TehfätBèt, Folder, 15, Ref. No.1812/, 23, Heddar, 1981.
- 27 DMRRMOA, Ato Astaṭaq Bayu Lä Gäṭär Mängädoch Construction, Folder, 15, Ref.No.,3984/፳/፻/10,

To conclude, road building in East Gojjam accomplished by the military government was very encouraging. About 500km road was constructed. And a fairly extended road network comprising highway, rural and feeder roads was set up. Consequently, all *awrajjja* and most of the woreda centers were linked with Debre Markos, and beyond it with Addis Ababa, Bahir Dar and Gonder. But, the road building work was generally epitomized by delay and interruption. The construction of some rural roads took a decade and half period. Some others were suspended. Only a handful construction plans were completed on time. Maintenance, too, did not progress well. Because of this, available roads had not been functioning fully. Such building and maintenance problems partly arose from cultivating an overzealous plan or failing to do exhaustive feasibility study. Indeed, accessing the scattered villages of Ethiopian farmers has been a cumbersome task with Ethiopia's fragile economy, scarce skilled manpower and poor technology. But the military government seemed oblivious of such difficulties until it declared the villagization program which aimed at collecting peasants to the appropriate places so as to create favorable condition to access infrastructure including road for the rural masses with a reasonable cost (Kloos and Aynalem Adugna, 1989, pp. 1, 35, 155; Clapham, 2008, p. 178; Girma, 1987, 1, 11, 21).

Road Construction in East Gojjam, 1991-2005

Like its predecessors, the EPRDF government underscored the role of having reliable road network for attaining development. And road was deemed pillar of realizing its development and poverty reduction policies and programs namely Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction, the Plan for Accelerated and Sustainable Development to End Poverty, Agricultural Development Led Industry. As part of decentralizing, the road building administration was bestowed for two bodies: federal and regional. The authority to construct and maintain highway is entrusted to the federal government. Rural road development is granted to the regional government (Rony, 2012, pp. 18-23). Since there was no highway construction in east Gojjam in the period under discussion, this section discusses about rural road development.

The political disorder appeared during the late military and early EPRDF periods caused government institutions fail to run their regular duties. The Rural Road Construction and Maintenance Office of East Gojjam was one of those victims. It encountered an organized looting right from the arrival of EPRDF fighters in the region. Two successful and one abortive case corroborate this. First, the front fighters took six of the office's cars in December 1990 and refused to give back.²⁸ Not long afterwards, the whole construction equipment including the project's mobile garage plus fourteen construction and service motor vehicles were looted from the DebreMarkos-Quyi road project camp.²⁹ Again, although it was aborted by the public, attempt was made to take the zone's crusher to other areas: either to Tigray or Eritrea as informants' suggest.³⁰ Reports show that government

22, Hedar, 1982.

28 DMRRMOA, Ato Getahun Joba Lā Mesraq Gojjam Astādādār Akababi ṬehfātBèt, Folder, 19, Ref. No. ፳/ጊ/ጠ/17/85, 10, Ṭeqemt, 1985; Ato Tsehay Tegegn Lā Mesraq Gojjam Māstādadir zone ṬehfātBèt, Folder, 19, Ref. No. ፳/ጊ/ጠ/47/85, 08, Māgabit, 1985.

29 DMRRMOA, Ato Getahun Joba, Yā Gojjam Astādādār Akababi Gāṭār Māngād Sera Askijay, Lā Mesraq Gojjam Astādādār Akababi ṬehfātBèt, Folder No. 19, Ref. No. ፳/ጊ/ጠ/39/84, 13, Tahesase, 1984.

30 It was failed due to the fierce opposition of town dwellers. Ato Tekle-Tsadiq Kassa (head of the Gojjam Province Highway Construction Office) and Ato Seltan Alemu (a journalist) had played a significant role in publicizing the issue. DMRRMOA, Ato Getahun Joba Lā Mesraq Gojjam Astādādār Akababi ṬehfātBèt, Folder, 19, Ref. No. ፳/ጊ/ጠ/17/85, 10, Ṭeqemt, 1985; Ato Tsehay Tegegne Lā Mesraq Gojjam Māstādadir zone

In conclusion, no lengthy road was built in East Gojjam in the period from 1991 to 2005. The Regional Rural Road building and maintenance office could not afford to embark on such undertaking for multifarious factors discussed above. Instead, it devoted almost all of its capacity on maintaining and rebuilding the previously constructed roads.

Socio-Economic Impacts

The socio-economic impacts of the road infrastructure development have been observable from the outset of construction operation. The road construction brought people of a different language, religion and culture to interact each other. Elderly informants looking back to the period of the Dejen-Mota road building, for instance, remember the remarkable social interactions established among members of the construction crew on the one hand and between the construction crew and the local communities on the other hand. They said that the workers of Berta, a local firm, took part in local festivities of both religious and cultural. Some members of the construction crew got married with the local and had children.³⁹ Commonly, the road builders intermingled with all sorts of the local people regardless of their rank, profession and place of origin. Thus, the people of Mota had felt a deep sorrow upon their departure with the completion of the road building. This is well illustrated by the following couplet:

ሴቶች ተሰብሰቡ ከዋርካው ድረስ፤
በርታ አገሩ ገባ እንድንላቀስ።⁴⁰

Come women, gather up at the Warka (a fig tree used as a public gathering)
To lament, for workers of Berta departed for their home.

Economically, the road building had encouraged the rise of small-scale business centers like hotels, tea/ coffee houses, shops, and so on in the then urban centers. Large numbers of men and women embarked on business undertakings. My informants in Mota, Debre-Worq and Bichena towns told me that some of the present big hotels, shops and business centers traced their origin back to the road-building period. Likewise, the road building and the subsequent traffic growth lured the establishment of petrol station and garage in many of the major urban centers: Dejen, Bichena, Debre Work, Mota, Debre Markos etc.⁴¹

Needless to say, in East Gojjam as elsewhere, travel to far away areas had been greatly hindered by the lack of access to modern road transport. Rivers, too, had remained a serious setback of travel. It was customary to stop both local and regional travels during rainfall season. One could not think, for instance, to cross Abay from July to December. This is reflected by the following oral poem:

አባይ ጉደል ብለው አለኝ በታህሳስ፤
የማን ልብ ይችላል እስከ ያድረስ።⁴²

39 Interview with Ato Yosef Assefa, Ato Assefa Belete, Ato Bante Melese, Ato Abebaye Nure, Ato Haile-Giyorgis Yiyilachew, and Ato Addis Alemu, 17, December, 2010.

40 Interview with Ato Addis Alemu, 17, December, 2010.

41 Interview with Ato Kifle Belay, in Bichena, 14, December, 2010, Ato Meselu Gesese, in Debre Worq, 15, December, 2010, Ato Mazemer Asebeha, in Merto Le Mariam, 16 December 2010, Ato Addis Alemu in Mota, 17 December, 2010, and Ato Zewdu Abebe, 19, December, 2010.

42 Interview with Ato Sileshi Abteu, Ato Mose Andualem, Ato Yibeltal Andarge, and Ato Meselu Gesese, 15, December, 2010.

When I plead Abay to subside, it said, in December
Whose heart would endure till then?

The worst tragedy was human and animal death due to torrents of Abay and other rivers. These age-old problems seem to have been solved to a certain extent. This is so with the building of bridges over the big rivers along with the road construction. *Aläqa* Wondimu Endalamaw's poem composed on the occasion of the inauguration ceremony of the *Qedamawi* Haile Selassie Bridge erected over the Abay River clearly shows this:

አባይ አባይ አንተ በመሬት እኛ በሰማይ፣
ሰውን እንስሳውን ስታሰጥ ምኞረህ፣
የዓሳ መፈንጫ ብቻሆ ነህቀረህ፣
ቀስተ ደመናውን አቆመልን አብ፣
ዳግም በማየአይህ እንዳይጠፋ ህዝብ።⁴³

Abay! Abay! You are underneath; we are above you
You had been sinking both human and animals
Now, you only become a play field of fish
Our God erected the rainbow, (an arc designed bridge)
So the people shall not be devastated by a torrent once more

At first, however, the local community had an ambivalent attitude about the newly constructed roads. Some parents showed antipathy towards the opening of modern route and put a curse on it as their children moved to faraway areas abandoning them alone. But, when their children came back home; they changed their mind and began to praise the road access. They expressed their regret as follows:

መንገድ አይት ይጥፋ አይባልም ደርሶ፣
የወሰደውን ሰው ያመጣል መልሶ።⁴⁴

A road should not be blamed, for it takes the beloved ones away
It is the road itself that brings them back again.

There are no adequate statistics of public mobility from the various awrajjja and woreda centers to the provincial capital and vice versa or beyond East Gojjam to other provinces and also to the country's capital, Addis Ababa, but through information obtained from oral informants about employee, it can be argued that public mobility had become quite frequent and increased in number with the building of roads.

People from the outlying districts, thus, had exploited the promising access to travel to the provincial capital, Debre Markos, and other major towns either in search of secondary education, better medication, high court for an appeal etc. They have also moved in search of a job and a better payment to faraway areas beyond East Gojjam. ⁴⁵The road construction, therefore, contributes much for a wider socio-economic interaction to take place in the region. It had also contributed to the improvement of the region's administrative matters, social security, and socio-economic endeavors. A letter from AnmutKinde, Head Administrator of East Gojjam Administrative Region, to the Ethiopian Road construction Authority indicates this:

43 Interview with Ato Sewnet Haile, 15, October, 2010.
44 Interview with Ato Sileshi Abtew, Ato Mose Andualem, Ato Yibeltal Andarge, and Ato Meselu Gesese, 15, December, 2010
45 Ibid.

ከዚህ በፊት በአስተዳደር አካባቢያችን የሚገኙትን አውራጃዎች ለማገናኘት የሚያስችሉ አያሌ መጋቢ መንገዶች በገጠር መንገዶች ሥራ ድርጅትና በግብርና ሚኒስቴር መሠረታቸው የአካባቢያችንን ደህንነት ለመቆጣጠር ፣ ከህዝባችን ጋር ዕለት ከዕለት ለመገናኘት ፣ የማህበራዊና ኢኮኖሚያዊ ሥራዎችን ክትትልና አፈፃፀም ለመገምገምና አፋጣኝ የሆኑ መመሪያዎችን ለማስተላለፍ አስችሎናል።⁴⁶

The building of several feeder roads some time ago by the Rural Road Construction Authority and the Ministry of Agriculture, linking the various *Awrajjas* of our Administrative Region have enabled us to keep peace and security, communicate with our people on a daily basis, monitor and evaluate economic and social activities and to convey urgent directives.

However, this does not mean that there was a regular public transport into and out of the various *awrajjja*, *woreda* and provincial centers from the outset of the opening of the aforementioned road networks. According to the information from the informants, only the towns of Mota, Merto Le Maryam, Bichena and Dejen had a bus transport service from Debre Markos by 1982. Among these, only Mota and Merto Le Maryam had a similar service from Bahir Dar. Cross-country public transport service was available only for the towns of Debre Markos and Mota throughout the lifetimes of the military government. The reasons behind such a limited public transport, according to informants, were many and varied. For one thing, large number of businessmen did not involve on the transport sector either due to financial constraints or lack of awareness on the business. Secondly, using motor vehicles transport was not customary by the local people at that early period. Thus, they preferred mule and horseback to motor car. It is worthy of note that single news of accident had a greater impact to discourage passengers as motor travel was a new practice in the region.⁴⁷

Scholars argue that, the origin of urban centers in East Gojjam was closely tied with the establishment of churches, market centers or administrative seats. The towns of Merto Le Maryam and DebreWorq are best examples of church origin. The town of Mota situated along the long distance trade route developed from a market center. The growth of Bichena and Manqorer (now Debre Markos) seem to have been encouraged by their role as a market center and administrative seats. Undoubtedly, the construction of modern roads reinforced the growth, if not the origin, of most of such a pre-twentieth century urban centers into a relatively sizeable towns (Abdusamad, 1980, pp. 2-4).

To sum up, the road infrastructure development in East Gojjam has had far-reaching effects on the nature and extent of the social intercourse of the local community, the degree of public mobility, level of urbanization and its economies, the political administrative system and stability of the region.

Conclusion

Despite more than half a century journey, road building in East Gojjam showed no adequate progress. The road infrastructure development was far from sufficient. Established road networks terminated at *woreda* centers. Thus, the vast rural villages located beyond *woreda* centers far to the Abay George and to the Choqe Mountain were not accessed. Many more highway, rural and feeder roads linking the province with the neighboring

46 DMRRMOA, Ato Anmut Kinde Lältopia Transport Construction Balä Selṭan, Folder, 18, Ref. No.7436/my/10, 20, Ginbot, 1982.

47 Interview with Ato Haile-Giyorgis Yiyilachew, and Ato Addis Alemu, 17, December, 2010.

provinces, woredas with woredas and the various villages situated in the border of the province along the Abay George and the Choqe Mountain would have been required to be built so as to exploit the rich agricultural potential from and introduce modern ideas and technologies, and manufactured goods to the frontier areas. Yet, registered achievements greatly vary from regime to regime. The imperial government could be accredited for reconstructing the old highway. Relatively, the military government had attained success. It managed to create a fairly extended road network comprising of a highway, feeder and rural road. Unlike its immediate predecessor, the EPRDF government under study had failed to enlarge the road network further.

So far, the road building in East Gojjam had a noticeable drawback both on the processes of construction and maintenance. One of the discernible weaknesses is the authority's failure to complete construction on time. Extended construction time exposed roads for damage even before completion and giving service. Secondly, the method of maintenance did not comprise the techniques of keeping the well-being of non-asphalted roads before damage namely erecting a road barrier to block the flow of traffic immediately after a rain and assigning a road inspector employed by the community (Metschies et.al., 1974, pp. 21-22). If roads were to serve for long, construction would be accomplished with the required standard and accompanied by a fruitful and continual maintenance works. This necessitated readjusting the age-old method and techniques of road building and maintaining.

Despite this, the road infrastructure development in East Gojjam has had far-reaching effects on the nature and extent of the social intercourse of the local community, the degree of public mobility, level of urbanization and its economies, the political administrative system and stability of the region.

An interesting aspect of the road building in East Gojjam was the involvement of different actors directly or indirectly. This includes the government, non-government organizations, the local community and development associations.

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