

## **HORIZONTAL INEQUALITY AND POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN AMHARA REGION, ETHIOPIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In countries like Ethiopia where democracy is under risk and the ruling government dominates the people by all mean; strike, mass protest and demonstration (political instability) are inevitable. There are many reasons for the outbreak of political instability. This article tries to investigate the causes of political instability in Amhara region, Ethiopia. The paper is qualitative type and data collected through interview and literature review. The study revealed that, horizontal inequality (economic, social and political) inequality is one of the main cause that forced the Amhara people to start struggling TPLF dominated EPRDF government. The Amhara people have been oppressed by TPL for the last 27 years and lagged behind other regions in all types' development activities. This condition angered the Amhara people and political instability erupted across the region to end TPLF oppression.

**Keywords:** Horizontal inequality, Political instability, Amhara region, Ethiopia

### **INTRODUCTION**

Many scholars argued that internal political instability in many countries have been caused by inequality, political oppression and scarcity of resources. Conflict literatures explicitly put the correlation between conflict and causes. The first is poverty instability correlation; violence is generally more frequent and severe in economically poor states than wealthier ones (Embudeniya, 2013). Secondly, autocratic state having 'democracy deficit' passing through transitional phase from autocracy to democracy are always prone to violence. Thirdly, there is strong correlation between large number of uneducated and unemployed youth and conflict. In sub-Saharan Africa, majority of population falls within average age of 15-30 years; younger age has made population more prone to violent behavior. Fourthly, the recurrence of violence, when a country has experienced violence in the past, strong possibility of repetition of the phenomenon

exists. Finally, politically and economically weak states suffer serious fallouts of happenings in contiguous states commonly known as ‘neighborhood effect’.

## **THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

The works Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler on the theory of Greed and Grievance in association with civil war is one of the most famous works dealing mostly with the African political instability. This theory emphasized on what conditions lead to political instability, and therefore when do the conflicts change from latent to open and violent. As the name of the theory implies, the study of these two authors examines the terms greed and grievance considered as the primary cause of political instability and their real impact on their initiation. Under the term greed economic issues, particularly the financing of the war, is included by the authors of the theory, while the concept of grievance involves inequality, political oppression and persecution, ethnic and religious differences and hatred (Collier, Hoeffler 2000).

Grievance is concerned with political instability and conflict motivated by injustice is, there are three main reasons for it according to Collier and Hoeffler (2000). These are inter-group hatred (mostly inter-ethnic or inter-religious hatreds), political exclusion of a certain group or groups and vengeance. This perspective is founded on the proposition that economic factors often shape the calculations and behavior of parties to involve in political instability (Embuldeniya, 2013).

Stewart (2000) has introduced the concept of ‘horizontal inequality’, which refers to the inequality between groups. Primarily influenced by the work of Gurr (1970), Stewart (2000) advanced horizontal inequalities as the reason behind grievances felt by excluded groups. Most literature on the role of horizontal inequalities for the outbreak of political instability and the causes divided in to four types: economic, social, political and cultural inequalities (Embuldeniya, 2013). Therefore, horizontal inequalities played a significant role for the outbreak of political instability and finally civil wars in Brazil, Sri Lanka, Uganda and Côte d'Ivoire (Stewart, 2000; Langer, 2004). Although, studies of horizontal inequalities in post-colonial Nigeria highlight educational, economic, income and political inequalities particularly at the federal, regional and state level.

Stewart (2000) and Langer (2004) elaborate the dimensions of inequalities. These are economic, social, political and cultural dimensions. Economic Horizontal Inequalities include inequalities in access to and ownership of assets financial, human, inequalities in income levels and employment opportunities, which depend on such assets and the general conditions of the economy. Social Horizontal Inequalities include inequalities in access to a range of services, such as education, health care and housing, as well as to the benefits of educational and health care outcomes. Political Horizontal Inequalities include inequalities in the distribution of

political opportunities and power among groups, including control over the army, the cabinet, local and regional governments, parliamentary assemblies, the police and the presidency. They also encompass inequalities in people's capabilities to participate politically and to express their needs. Cultural Horizontal Inequalities include disparities in the recognition and standing of different groups' language, religion, customs, norms and practices.

Ethiopia's impressive economic achievements have recently been accompanied by social unrest and widespread demonstrations in the Oromia and Amhara regions. The demonstrations exposed deep-rooted developmental, social and political concerns with Ethiopia's state-driven model. Protestors were demanding greater political voice and participation and drew attention to the growing challenge of job creation for increasingly educated Ethiopian youth. The Government has acknowledged that some of the concerns raised by protesters were legitimate, and is working to find solutions through dialogue with opposition parties represented in Ethiopia and intensified citizen engagement (WB, 2017).

Amhara region is one among the nine regional states in Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. It is the second most populous region (27%) in the country next to Oromiya region which constitutes 34% of the total population (CSA, 2007). The Federal government is not providing appropriate social services for Amhara region as per the number of people. The region has been suffering by a number of problems like economic inequality, unemployment and social inequality.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This article focused on investigating the causes of political instability in Amhara region. The researcher employed qualitative approach for making a detail description, diagnosis and explanation of the causes of political instability in the study area. This method is selected due to the reason that the type of data collected and the nature of the research in itself is a qualitatively explanatory type. Explanatory research focuses on why questions. It is appropriate research design to investigate the causes of political instability in Amhara region. Answering the 'why' questions involves developing causal explanations.

The researcher used interview and literature review to gather data. For the purpose of interview, the researcher selected five cities in Amhara region where major mass protest, strike, demonstration and other forms of political instability happened. The interview data of this research was analyzed by following Miles and Huberman's (1984) three stages of analysis method: data reduction, data display, and conclusion. The data reduction or sensitization was used to analyze the grouped data critically by coding them, which constituted an important part

of the analysis. The aim of this step is to produce systematic themes and issues from the interview data.

### **Economic Horizontal Inequality**

According to McCracken (2004) Tigray has changed significantly since the 1991 revolution. Before the Revolution, Tigray was economically limited and relatively undeveloped. Since the Revolution, Tigray has experienced vast economic growth which directly helps to develop huge industries, hospitals, education centers, electricity and roads. Addis Standard Magazine (2017) based in Addis Ababa notes that Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray (EFFORT) flooded Tigray by industries. TPLF officials and former fighters claimed that EFFORT established by using seed money from the liquidated amount of capital of the TPLF, accumulated during Ethiopia's 17 years civil war of the militarist Derg regime to establish these companies. Aregawi Berhe (2008) a former veteran of TPLF who later on left the party did his Ph.D. dissertation somehow supports the story. In his account of the party's earliest times, Aregawi wrote about one of the first a successful operation was Axum Operation. It is a military operation that succeeded in raiding a police garrison and a bank in the historic city of Axum TPLF plundered 175,000 birr (US\$ 84,000).

Ermias Legesse on his book *Ye Meles Liqaqit* (2016) advocates several stories on how EFFORT used to get its finances unfairly from the Ethiopian state and how it transferred it to its own account. Ermias went an extra mile to display a letter written in 1994 and was signed by the then Prime Minister, Tamrat Layne, demanding the Addis Abeba Health bureau to refund TPLF's medical expenses of the civil war time. The money requested amounted to more than four million birr (almost 67% of the city's annual budget at that time), but the total amount paid by the Ministry of Health was actually 17 million birr. Ermias also wrote that the medicines that TPLF had distributed to the locals during the civil war, for which it had requested a refund, was actually robbed by the guerilla fighters from public pharmacies. The money that was paid back in such a bizarre demand by the then Prime Minister was put in TPLF's accounts. Other regions of Ethiopia suffered significant social and economic devastations during the 17 years civil war before it ended in 1991. Military expenditure was Ethiopia's biggest expense during the entire rule of the militarist *Derg* regime. Thus, other regions also demanded endowments of their own. It seemed it was in response to this concern that TPLF 'provided' seed money for other rehabilitation funds.

In Oromia regional state is DINSHO endowment, which was established in 1992 and was renamed *TUMSA* Endowment for Development of Oromia in 2001. It is led by top officials of the OPDO, the party representing the region within the EPRDF coalition. In Amhara regional state is TIRET first established in 1995 and went on to incorporate several pre-existing

companies. TIRET is led by senior officials of ANDM, the party representing the region within the ruling EPRDF. And in Southern Nations Nationalities and People's Region (SNNPR) is WENDO trading, which was established in 1994 and is led by senior officials of SEPDM, the party representing the region within the ruling EPRDF. TPLF gave a portion of its capital to each of the three parties within the EPRDF to establish their own endowment funds". However, the combined numbers of companies run by these three 'endowments' are less than twenty; whereas at least 24 companies are listed under EFFORT; (some put these numbers as high as 380). The nature of secrecy surrounding this delicate matter means one may never find out the real figures.

Nonetheless, the three "endowments" run by OPDO, ANDM and SEPDM were supposed to create employment opportunities for more than 80% of Ethiopia's population as compared to EFFORT's targeting of 6% of Ethiopians in Tigray regional state. According to Vaughan & Mesfin (2011) TIRET companies based in Amhara region employ only 2,800 staff, as compared with the more 14,000 permanent employees or 34,000 contract staff of EFFORT and its companies. Some other writers increase the number of people employed by EFFORT more than 75,000. The poorest regional states of Ethiopia, namely, the Somali, Afar, Benishangul-Gumuz and Gambella regions do not have their own endowment companies, although they are politically administered by EPRDF's sister parties.

One respondent from Gondar city elaborate the situation of economic inequality as follows;

*We Amharas do not have industries because Tigrayans are using our (Amhara) natural resource for their huge industries opened by TPLF. We do not have political party that can reflect the interest of Amhara people. For example, see Maichew Chipud factory, Tigray has no forest to provide all the necessary input for the factory. It has been cutting and transporting Amhara forest. Our mountains are deforested and degraded. We are rich in history, in natural resource and man power but we are poor because of TPLF.*

TPLF companies are located in Mekelle and few in Addis Ababa. It creates big job opportunity for ethnic Tigrayans to be employed both in Addis Ababa and Mekelle. These conditions widen the economic gap between ethnic Tigrayans and ethnic Amharas. The Amhara people, more than 85% depending on subsistence agriculture demanding the government to create jobs by opening new industries like Tigray region. But TPLF dominated Federal government did not answer what the people requesting and at the same time the regional government is also been dominated by non Amhara ethnic groups who did not worry for the Amhara people.

### **Social Horizontal Inequality**

Imbalanced development that involves sharp horizontal inequalities leads to the outbreak of political instability. Al Jazeera documentary in 2015 on Trachoma disease on Amhara region advocates that “Amhara region is not only the poorest in Ethiopia but the poorest in the world”. The region has no adequate health institutions to provide treatment for the people

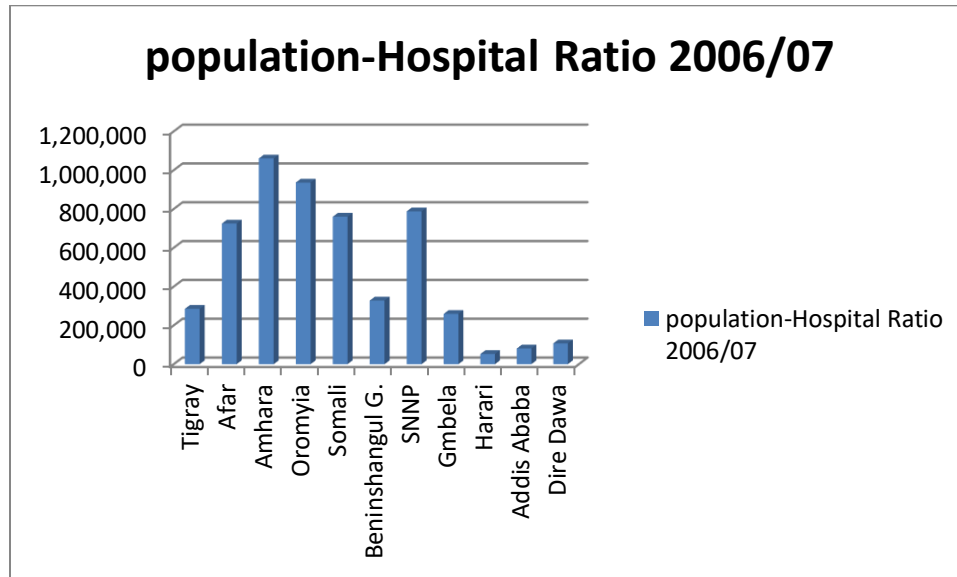
**Table 6.3: Total Number of Hospitals Run by the Ministry of Health and distribution by Region (2006/07)**

No.	Region	Number of Hospitals
1.	Tigray	16
2.	Afar	2
3.	Amhara	19
4.	Oromiya	30
5.	Somali	6
6.	Benishanul Gumuz	2
7.	SNNP	20
8.	Gambella	1
9	Harari	4

Source: CSA (2006/7)

As Table 6.3 shows, the number of hospitals varies from region to region. The most populous region, Oromiya has 30 hospitals, and the other two most populous regions Amhara and SNNP have 19 and 20 hospitals respectively with Tigray trailing in fourth place with 16 hospitals.

Figure 6.1: Population-Hospital ratio in Amhara region



Source: CSA (2006/7)

In terms of the hospital-population ratio, Tigray ranked first place as a region with the least population-hospital ratio when compared to the three most populous regions namely Oromiya, Amhara, and SNNP. There is a question why Amhara has high population-hospital ratio? Many believed that it is not because of financial constraint rather TPLF leaders are expressing their hate towards Amhara people. As discussed in the TPLF manifesto in the first section of this chapter, TPLF leaders developed deep rooted hate towards ethnic Amharas. In order to affect the Amhara people negatively, TPLF employed several methods like denying social services, denying employment opportunities and minimizing annual budgets. On the other side, TPLF dominated EPRDF allotted large amount of money for Tigray region to construct Hospitals.

After coming to power, the TPLF dominated EPRDF established several economic programs purposely to benefit Tigray by using Ethiopian money. Through these "post-war rebuilding programs," the TPLF/EPRDF has diverted large quantities of Ethiopian government resources including international aids and funds to Tigray (McCracken, 2004).

The other huge problem that the Amhara people have faced is inaccessibility of road. World Bank based on a spatial review of Ethiopian road density within 10 years (2006-2016), noted that the highest road densities within the 10 years were recorded in Addis Ababa and its surrounding Oromia towns and Tigray region while the least road networks or densities had been found in Amhara region in particular and rural areas across the country. By virtue of these findings, the

investments and infrastructural developments in these regions also mirror the road densities (WB, 2017). Roads are very essential for the poor. Substantially, rural roads provide services in areas such as health, education, agricultural extension, and provision of information.

Ethnic Tigrayans are the most favorable to be hired in different Federal institutions for the last 27 year. They have been highly involved in Ethiopian airlines across the country, telecommunication, Military and security sectors and custom and revenue authority offices. In line with this, Girma (2017) notes that ethnic Tigrayans are and were disproportionately assigned to the most sought after disciplines and academic positions including scholarships, partly at the expense of members of other ethnic groups, in particular the Amhara ethnic group.

Girma (2017) conducted research on inequality and poor academic educational quality in Amhara region; and about the reason behind this poor achievement, all the respondents put the blame the motivation level of the students and the parents were also blamed for not disciplining their children. There was no mention of structural or systemic defects. This is a good example of scapegoating and blaming-the-victim discourse. Scapegoating and creating a denigrated other has become a fundamental component of public policy today. Scapegoating, which relies on the ability to dehumanize and demonize relatively powerless populations or ethnic groups defined as "other," has effectively served to distract most citizens from recognizing the economic and social inequities that have increasingly permeated the Ethiopian society.

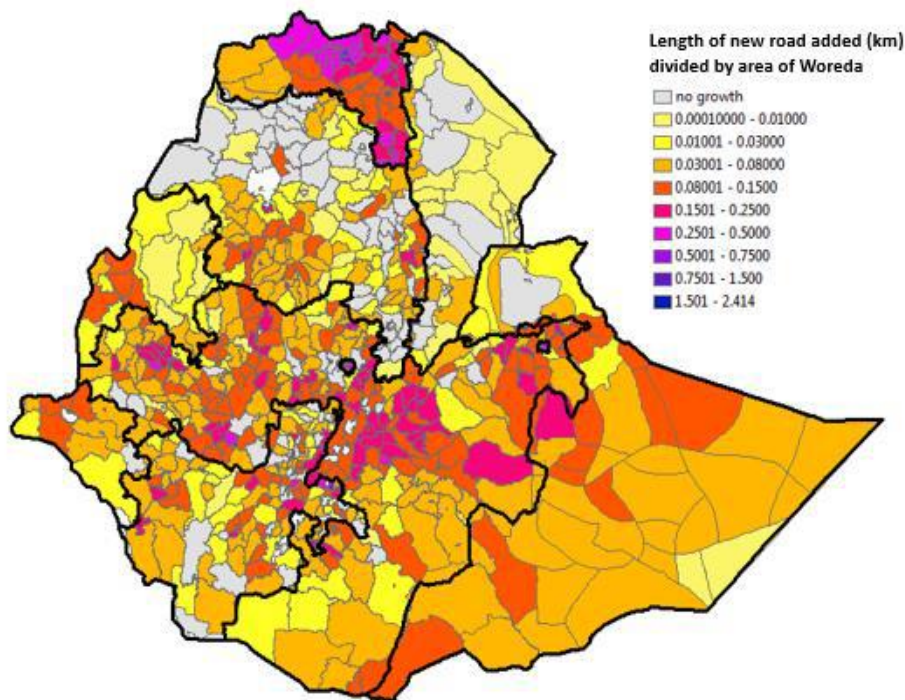
Based on statistical analysis, Ajala and Asres (2008) revealed that there is inadequate provision of facilities to prepare the youth for their future, in Amhara region. The study also revealed the inequality of accessibility to basic education services among the 11 administrative zones in the region, with antecedent impact on the development the people in the region at large. The authors further explain the number of higher education preparatory schools in Amhara region run until 2008 were contrary to the present government policy on higher education. The federal government has established more universities in the country to increase access to university education in Ethiopia. However, in Amhara region were 24 higher education preparatory schools, which is a prerequisite to regular university admission. This is quite inadequate for the number of students completing their grade 10, thus it puts the students from Amhara region at a disadvantage among the nine regions in Ethiopia. It shows a high level of inaccessibility to education. One important observation about the distribution of the schools in Amhara region is that there is a wide gap between the numbers of schools available for different levels of education. There are 4177 schools of all types for both primary and secondary education in the region, grade 1-8 schools account for 97% (4056 schools), grade 9-10 is just 2% (97schools) and grade 11-12 account for 1% (24 schools). This gap portends that a large proportion of students lack access to further their education beyond grade 8 on a regular basis.



The discriminatory practices with regard to higher education opportunities, scholarship grants, and investment on a specific ethnic group at the expense of members of other ethnic groups is another trouble in the region. Bright intellectuals of other ethnic groups, in particular those who belong to the Amhara ethnic group as well as other groups and perceived as solidly intellectual with full integrities and unconditional love of their country, have been summarily dismissed from their research and teaching positions (Ajala and Asres, 2008).

Similarly, World Bank (2017) reported that Mekelle (the capital city of Tigray region) has the highest level of total brightness and average brightness of nighttime lights whereas Gondar (historical city in Amhara region) has the least level of total brightness and average brightness of nighttime lights. After the establishment of EFFORT for the purpose of rebuilding Tigray in the wake of the 1991 revolution, capital accumulated from several sources, including: non-military equipment captured from the Derg, money from private and public Ethiopian companies, financial contributions of Non-governmental Organizations, and money borrowed from the state-owned banks of Ethiopia (McCracken, 2004).

**Fig 6.2: Road Density in Ethiopia from 2006-2016**



Source: World Bank (2017)

Money supplied through EFFORT has allowed the TPLF to develop Tigray's cities far beyond where they were before the 1991 Revolution. In addition to EFFORT, several other NGO's facilitate the economic advantage that Tigray holds over other regions of Ethiopia. NGO's have been tasked to construct new schools in remote areas. NGO'S that are actively involved in social and economic activity in Tigray region include the Relief Society of Tigray (REST), initially established by the TPLF during the course of the 1991 Revolution, and the Tigray Development Association (TDA). These organizations have an increasing involvement in the commercial sector, for example, REST operates a bus service. The diversion of Ethiopian resources to Tigray is not limited to NGOs. Other expensive projects proceeding in Tigray are not directly traceable to an NGO or the TPLF/EPRDF, but seem suspect given the troubled state of the Ethiopian economy. For example, three colleges have been built in Tigray's capital city of Mekelle: a business school, a medical school, and an engineering school.

Unaccountable and corrupt governments with large amount of revenue can divert funds for illegal activities. An article appeared on Forbes (2017) discuss a lot on illegal transfer of money and looting. According to Forbes, the amount of American financial aid received by Ethiopian government since 1991 is \$30 billion and at the same time the amount of money stolen by Ethiopian leaders for the same period of time is \$30 billion. The latter figure is the UN's own 2015 report on Illicit Financial Outflows. The same Ethiopian leadership that's begging the world for yet another billion for its hungry people is stealing several times that amount every year.

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