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WARSAI-YIKEAALO PROGRAM AND ITS IMPACT IN POST WAR ERITREA – A DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE

Ravinder Rena *

Abstract

The Warsai-Yikeaalo Program (WYP) has been introduced in Eritrea with an objective of constructing and reconstructing infrastructure in the country. It has been under implementation since May 2002. The present study has been carried out to assess the impact of WYP in Eritrea in infrastructure and economic development of the country. The defense personnel who are in the national service and the permanent staff as well are carrying out all the works under this program. It is to be noted that infrastructure created for the last four years of the program helped to improve the economic development of Eritrea in the post-war period. The construction of roads, railway, airports, and ports greatly helped movement of people and goods and services for the betterment of the people in the country. The study covers different sectors agriculture, industry, education, health, tourism services etc., of the economy. The study also revealed that the people are happy to see the infrastructure in different areas of rural Eritrea. The study was carried out during the period 2002 to 2005. This study has limitations in that it is confined to the impact of Warsai-Yikeaalo Campaign in the development of Eritrea. However, various other developments under this program have not been discussed in detail. The broader issues of the economics, cultural, and political aspects that related to Eritrean economic development are beyond the scope of the paper.

Keywords: Warsai-Yikeaalo Program, Eritrea, Economic development, Agriculture, Industry, Tourism, education.

JEL Codes: A22, H51, H54, Q13.

1. INTRODUCTION

Eritrean economy suffered an irreparable loss in all aspects during the 30 years protracted war for liberation. Eritreans have fought hard for independence, freedom, and economic development and they virtually paid high price. As a matter of fact, nothing could have been achieved in Eritrea without the participation of its people inside and outside the country both during the freedom struggle and after independence. It is to be noted that, after the independence, however, the Government has inherited dilapidated physical infrastructure, industries, power plants, communication lines, Schools, bridges and roads, etc.¹ As the historical evidences support that Eritrea was relatively developed in comparison to other Sub-Saharan African countries in the 1950s. Nevertheless, decades of war, neglect, deprivation, lack of resources, and inappropriate policies prior to 1991, and particularly the border war with Ethiopia (1998-2000) have resulted and weakened the

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economy. Eritrea, received all damaged and dilapidated infrastructure, and deterioration in the human resource base. It also inherited obsolete institutions and weak instruments for managing its economic policies. While it was a part of Ethiopia, and in the context of the centrally planned economy, the provincial administration in Eritrea had little autonomy and policy making capability. After independence, the problem was further compounded as many Ethiopian civil servants left Eritrea.

Eritrean Economy is undoubtedly rising from the scratches of war and destruction, is entering into a new era of political stability and promising economic prospect in sub-Saharan Africa. Eritrean economy is a developing economy with the per capita income US \$271. Despite the present economic and social difficulties, the economic potential and favourable geographic location of the country is worth mentioning.² Its hospitable social tradition and entrepreneurial fostering environment playing a vital role in accelerating the national economic development. Further, Eritrea is gifted with good natural resources and a strategic location for establishing business operations regionally and internationally. Above all, Eritrea has hard working, well-disciplined and kind-hearted people who are enthusiastic to be educated, trained and developed.

People Participation in Development:

Eritreans are known for their hard work, dexterity, technical innovation, and resilience. These are noble traits that have contributed significantly to the attainment of their long cherished goal of national independence. Cultural pluralism is important in Eritrea where social mobilization has led to the stabilization of ethnic integrity and active participation in economic and social activities. Eritreans have developed a strong sense of national identity and communal allegiance in their culture. These feelings have been forged over years of struggle for national independence and sovereignty.³ The people believe in self-reliance and therefore diligently working to develop their own human and material resources which would fortify the development of Eritrea. The extended family system in Eritrea and traditional heritages reflect the cultural norms of the people working together, encouraging family solidarity, developing the sense of cooperation, and helping one another in times of adversity and prosperity.⁴

The people's economic construction efforts have been successful in generating small and medium-scale investments, and improving the quality of the country's infrastructure. The overall reliability of the supply of power, transport and communication services has been restored and improved substantially in most parts of the country. Currently, there are many small and micro private enterprises and large government owned enterprises (some of them were privatised during 1999-2003), mainly: manufacturing, construction, service, and distribution.⁵

It is a universal fact that people are the greatest asset of any country. A country could not develop its economy without the readiness of its citizens to work-hard no matter how much money is allocated for development. Eritrea is lucky to have committed and patriotic citizens who are ready to sacrifice their lives to either to safeguard and/or to develop their

motherland.⁶ Apart from the all out national development campaign of *Warsai-Yikeaalo* project, people of Eritrea are not waiting idly, in passive or dependent state; rather it is observed that they are striving to support their lives, families, and working hard to shape the future of their country. Such endeavour, and creativity in a sense, is performed under the given pressure of border conflict and its effects. It would have been quite a common thing that many people of various walks are engaged in quite extra ordinary activities to cope with the effects of recent war with Ethiopia.

The *Warsai-Yikeaalo* Development Campaign is one indicator of that fact. The members of the Eritrean Defense Force (EDF) in coordination with the people are making big contributions in all sectors of the economy. These dedicated individuals are building and developing their nation on all levels, from exertion of physical effort to intellectual sacrifice with just one clear mission: to develop Eritrea.

This paper is an effort to assess the *Warsai-Yikeaalo* Development Campaign and its impact on the development of various economic sectors in the country. An attempt has been made in this article to analyse the numerous developmental activities that are undertaken in Eritrea between 2002-mid 2005. The data indicates that Eritrea benefited significantly and shown improved economic performance in its infrastructure through this programme. This paper has been divided into four parts. First part explains the introduction, second part *Warsai-Yikeaalo* Campaign, third one deals with various developmental activities took place in Eritrea under the *Warsai-Yikeaalo* program and finally last part of the paper provides some concluding remarks.

Objectives of the Study and Methodology

The main objective of the study was to delve the impact of the WYP in different economic sectors of Eritrea. As part of the study, data were collected both from primary and secondary sources. The methodology used in this paper is essentially a descriptive analysis of data obtained from the secondary sources, mainly government documents, Eritrea Profile, website articles from shabait and shaebia, survey reports, research articles, books and other published and unpublished materials on Eritrea. For collection of primary data, villagers were directly contacted and detailed discussions were held with them. The study was carried out during the period 2002 to 2005. This study has limitations in that it is confined to the impact of *Warsai-Yikeaalo* Campaign in the development of Eritrea. However, various other developments under this program have not been discussed in detail. The broader issues of the economics, cultural, and political aspects that related to Eritrean economic development are beyond the scope of the paper.

Eritrea is bordered on the north-east by the Red Sea, on the south-east by Djibouti, on the south by Ethiopia and on the west and north-west by Sudan. Eritrea is also bordered with Saudi Arabia and Yemen across the Red Sea. The 45,754 square miles, which make up Eritrea, include over 350 islands off the coast, of which 210 comprise the area of the Dahlak Archipelago. Eritrea's Red Sea coastline extends for about 1200 kilometers (700 miles) from the northern border with Sudan at Cape Kasar, to the southern extension of the

Red Sea in the straits of Bab-La-Mandeb at Cape Dumeira. The population of Eritrea is about 4.5 million out of these about 1 million live outside the country, basically owing to the colonial situation that prevailed in the country for three decades.

The border conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia began on 6 May 1998 that caused immense catastrophe to life and property of both the nations. It is considered as the deadliest war in the African continent. In line with this, a comprehensive reconstruction and development endeavour strongly aimed in Eritrea to rehabilitate the destroyed infrastructure within the framework of the *Warsai-Yikeaalo* development campaign.

2. WARSAI-YIKEAALO DEVELOPMENT CAMPAIGN

The campaign was launched in May 2002, and just after three years, the assessment of the campaign has been rated commendable, although a lot remains to be done. The *Warsai-Yikeaalo* Development Campaign has been focusing its developmental programs on the following major undertakings. These mainly focus on infrastructure renovation and development, agricultural intensification and modernization, raising industrial output, mining schemes, the tourism sector, human resource development etc.

Indeed, *Warsai-Yikeaalo* Development Campaign is considered as the Marshall Plan of Eritrea. It seems to be a comprehensive, an all-out, all-round economic rehabilitation and recovery program that designed not to be only a mere sedative but rather to be a crucial lubricant in the engine of economic recovery of Eritrea.⁷ It is understood that, Eritrea is not starting its economic recovery program with the declaration of *Warsai-Yikeaalo* Program. It has been engaged in a silent recovery program since it gained its independence in 1991. Thus it is an endeavour of extension to the existing recovery programs. The main task of this campaign is to embark upon the all-round reconstruction of a country devastated by war so as to realize the deep aspirations of building a prosperous and stable Eritrea. The Government of Eritrea engaged in building the dilapidated infrastructure under this Program.

3. DEVELOPMENT IN ERITREA

Infrastructure Development:

The infrastructure renovation and development part involves roads (construction of highways and small roads), airports, ports, telephone and electric lines, hospitals, schools, playgrounds in educational institutions, clinics, dams, roads, railway tracks, bus stations, electrical power generating plants, supply transmission structures, rural electrification, communication and transport services, housing, water provision and pipe installation, bridges, etc., are witnessing encouraging progress in the country.

The Eritrean railways⁸ is one example of this relentless effort. The railway line has been built by the cooperation of the Eritrean trucking industry, students on summer service and members of the *Warsai-Yikeaalo* Development Campaign. The country needs this line as an alternative to the only route that extends from Asmara to Massawa with a distance of

115 Km. This line is not only serves as extension of the road, but it has also an enormous potential for the tourism sector. Needless to say, the construction of this railway plays a significant role in the economy of Eritrea in the future.

For instance, the 29 Km Dekemhare-Teraimni road is built under the *Warsai-Yikeaalo* Campaign. Before the construction of this road, people were forced to first travel to Asmara, as there was no direct route line that connected two towns. Thus the construction of this road has saved the people's time and effort. In addition, the 66 kilometers Serejeka-Shebah, has been completed under this Campaign. The construction of this road is a step forward in the development of tourism industry since the greenbelt area of Filfil -Solamuna is one of the main tourist sites in the country. Furthermore, the renovation of Asmara water pipelines is also a product of the Warsai-Yikeaalo Campaign. Under this project old water pipelines are being renovated and new lines installed. About 360 members are participated in these pipelines installation.

It has also been witnessed that the 17 km-long Balwa-Kercha-Iratahtay road in Anseba region is another example in the development effort of the people. It is to be noted that the residents of the villages of Balwa, Kercha and Iratahtay first initiated the Balwa-Kercha-Iratahtay road construction in 2004. After a few community members brought up the idea, the community accepted the idea and formed a committee to collect money from every family of the three villages. Within a short period, the committee had collected Nfa 563,315 from the natives of those villages residing in the country and abroad as well.

It has been discussed and understood that the contribution was not enough to implement the project, the committee sought the Anseba Region Administration Office for assistance and the Administration promised both financial and material help. In addition to its technical support, the Regional Administration Office contributed Nfa 1,008,000 toward the project. It is reported that the residents of Eratahtay organized themselves in teams and worked for two or three days a week in completing project. All in all over 10,000 people participated in the implementation of the project.

One of the major problems that occurred while implementing the project was the occasional malfunctioning of the dozer. The rise in the price of fuel also resulted in the increase of the bulldozer's rental fee. However, this was solved through the cooperation of the community and the Regional Administration Office. Additionally, the Balwa-Kercha-Iratahtay road was inaugurated on 12 January 2006 by the Administrator of Anseba Region. The construction of this road made a way for the establishment of institutions rendering social services to the villages in the area. Noting the significance of this road, a resident of Iratahtay, stated that "they have already used it to send this year's agricultural product to the market".

It is to note that Eritrean economy was growing well with a growth rate of 8 per cent till mid 1998. However, the border conflict with Ethiopia crippled down Eritrea's economic progress. Despite the strain of the war, the Eritrean workforce build infrastructure with a

gun on one hand and a spade on the other.

Agriculture Development:

In the field of agriculture Eritrea made a huge stride for the last 10 years. Indeed, the main target is to achieve food security. On the eve of 14th Independence Day of Eritrea (24 May 2005), it is observed that the Government brought 250 tractors and distributed to different zobas (province) and sub-zobas in the country and they played a major role in the agriculture development of the country. Different divisions of the defence forces are being engaged in a variety of agricultural and animal husbandry activities. For example, the agro-industrial activities at Alighider, Afhimbol, Sawa etc., currently taking place in Gash-Barka province scored notable results.⁹ It is to be noted that the agricultural products exported have met positive response particularly in Middle East and other countries, while the amount of supply consumed domestically generated relatively attractive revenue in the country. It has enabled customers to enjoy fresh vegetables. This has paved the way for more ardent work.

Similarly, they cultivated 40 hectares of land in the desert area of Beylul. The members of *Warsai-Yikeaalo* harvested different fruits and vegetables and distributed them to the market. Since there was a scarcity of such products in that area, these farms began to play an important role in alleviating the shortage of agricultural products. Kurkuji farming project is also cultivated onions, tomatoes, bananas and other fruits and vegetables in 20 hectares of land under the *Warsai-Yikeaalo* Campaign.

The work being stepped up to introduce best seeds that resist drought, fight disease and need less water and/or less water, is also part of the agricultural development plan in the country. The research and development section of the Ministry of Agriculture has proven that different crops, fruits and vegetables which were assumed unthinkable to give yield in Eritrea were indeed found to be suitable and even better than in other places. Yet even if the consumption of milk, meat and milk-products is an ever-growing one, the production capacity is also being enhanced yet much has to be done to achieve the food security in the country.⁹

Industrial Development:

Eritrea is been developing its industrial output both in quantity and quality with the advent of privatization in the country. However, there are certain exceptions in this regards some of the privatized industries were not performing better. The cement, a decisive material in building different structures, complexes and buildings, is produced in Masswa.¹⁰ It is observed that the present output is not satisfactory, hence a lot of hard currency has been spent on importing cement from foreign markets like Indonesia, Egypt etc. Eritrean President Isaias Afwerki in an interview with the local media on 13th Independence day stated that "*the Government of Eritrea plans to boost cement production in collaboration with the Governments of the Peoples Republic of China, Pakistan, and Libya, thereby relieving different projects from recurrent shortages, and provide other projects with adequate supply of cement in the country*".

Textile industry also plays a pivotal role in developing Eritrean economy earmarked for renovation and expansion. From growing cotton up to the process of producing garments, the step-by-step measures taken to ameliorate the production. Some investors particularly Italians have shown interest in investing substantial amounts in to this industry and the outcome is expected in the near future. Besides, skin and hides processing, plus making different items from this material, namely shoes, bags, jackets and other leather wares are also developed.

Tourism Development:

Eritrea has enormous potential in tourism. However, the tourism industry require basic facilities such as pensions and hotels, modern restaurants, recreational centres and other complexes which are not well developed in accordance with the growing demand. Within the framework of the *Warsai-Yikeaalo* Development Campaign, the Massawa-Assab¹¹, Asmara-Tessenei, Agordat-Sawa, Serejeka-Shebah, Mendefera- Barentu, Massawa-Afabet and other highways were asphalted. Another milestone is opening of new Massawa International Airport, which is expected to boost the tourism in Eritrea.¹² The other airports namely, Assab, Asmara and Sawa International Airports are believed to enhance air transport services to the optimum level in the future. It is assumed that they will play a significant role in importing and exporting the necessary goods and services. Indeed, this will encourage domestic and international tourism. As stated earlier, the railway renovation scheme, under the *Warsai-Yikeaalo* Campaign also gives an added impetus to the development of tourism sector in Eritrea. The Railway line between Asmara – Massawa was renovated and in operation which attract scores of tourists every month.

The launching of Eritrean Airlines on 17 April 2003, which was considered as one of the nation's overall development plan, has been extended its services to different destinations. It started its operation to the Middle East in mid 2005. Although the global competition in airline industry seems to be challenging, the Eritrean airlines management, the staff with the support of the Government, is working hard to produce satisfactory outcome. However, Eritrean Airlines suffered irreparable losses in some of the routes like Asmara-Kenya. It is to be noted that Eritrea, has more than one thousand Km. sea coast, 350 islands, unpolluted beaches, historical places, indigenous birds and animals, tourists therefore could certainly benefit from.

Mining Development:

It is reported that mining, the potentially viable and reviving economic sector in the country. Already the quarrying of granite, marble and other non-metallic minerals has started on a small scale within the scope of the *Warsai-Yikeaalo* Development scheme. Besides, recently in the western part of Eritrea, the intensive work exerted to extract gold and other base metals. This gold mining project is expected to start full scale operations in the year 2009. It is observed that other mining activities are also been carried out through out the country.

Housing Development:

Housing is one of the main problems Eritrea has been facing since its independence. The residential housing complex construction is considered to be yet another development in the economic sector of the country. To alleviate the housing shortage the *Warsai-Yikeaalo* Campaign built housing complex in 11 town and cities in Eritrea: Asmara, Massawa, Gindae, Dubarwa, Mendefera, Dekemhare, Akordat, Barentu, Tessenei, Assab and Tio. The 2,468 residential houses are of different type including villas, rooming houses as well as one and two story apartments. They blend with the surrounding area and are affordable to people of different income. The houses have different quarters such as recreation center, open green areas, parking lots, kindergarten, post office, schools and other facilities. However, the problem has not been solved and a lot has to be done in this sector. There is a need to develop the low class housing for the low paid workers/employees in the country.

During the period 2002-2004, different housing projects were completed. Some of them were taken up by foreign companies such Keagnam, German company etc., and others by domestic ones.¹³ However, the demand for housing has been increased rapidly due to the population growth (deportation from Ethiopia and refugees from Sudan) taking into account the present stage of development in the country many housing complexes are required to meet the growing population in the country. To minimise the housing problem, recently, the government has started nation wide housing development in many zobas(region/province) and sub-zobas(district) of the country. It is reported that in Asmara (capital city) alone, more than 4 residential complex sites are on the pipeline. These projects would be constructed by foreign companies in the coming few years.

Another associated and pressing challenge is supply of water to the newly constructed houses both in towns and villages. Some efforts are exerted under *Warsai-Yikeaalo* Development campaign to alleviate the problem. In line with this, dams are constructed, wells drilled and water pipes renovated and/or fitted to provide water to the population. But, since the gap between the need and the provision of water in Eritrea is very big, much more work has to be done in this regard.

Health Development:

Health services in Eritrea have been improved considerably after independence particularly after 2000. Since community based health services are important for the population, all efforts within the field of health have been focused on this particular target. Thus, after independence measures were taken to construct referral hospitals, maternal and paediatric health centres, and other health facilities at the regional level. Establishment of Orotta Medical School in 2004 is one of the landmark developments in the health sector of Eritrea. In Barentu, Mendefera, Ghindea and Assab¹⁴ referral hospitals are constructed. In other areas, including Orotta Hospital in Asmara, completed and services are available to the public. Besides, the number and quality of health attendants, nurses, senior lab technicians and other staff has been increased. However, it is found that there is a huge gap. Even now the doctor- patient ratio is 1: 22,000.

Educational Development:

In order to guarantee the development of the country, it is equally imperative to develop its human resource capacity. Even though every citizen will reap the benefits that accrue from the *Warsai-Yikeaalo* Development Campaign, it is equally important to note that the youth who are the engine of the Campaign are acquiring valuable vocational skills that will help them to eventually integrate themselves in the mainstream economic transformation goals of the country in the future.¹⁵ It is reported by shaebia website that many members of the Eritrean Defence Force have obtained various on-the-job training skills. Specifically those who had little or no access to any vocational or technological background have gained various skills. They acquired various professional skills that will guarantee their future life once they are demobilized.

There is a need to develop human resources in order to enable them to be efficient planners, managers, producers, performers and inventors is also one of the top agenda items.¹⁶ The educational curriculum is revised in the year 2003 and reforms are introduced in this sector. It is observed that number of teachers graduated every year. The number of elementary, junior and secondary schools increased. The higher education, with special emphasis on science and technology, and different new disciplines, and other educational fields are launched. In line with this, the training colleges in various fields such as Eritrea Institute of Technology – Mainefhi, College of Nursing and Health Technology- Asmara, Orotto Medical School-Asmara are established in 2004. Whereas, College of Marine Sciences, Massawa, College of Agriculture – Hamalmalo, College of Economics and Business- Halhale, and College of Arts and Social Sciences –Adi Keyh are also started their programs.¹⁷ However, University of Asmara remain closed since September 2006 but it is assumed that it will restart in the future with research and Masters' programs.

It is to be noted that the infrastructure, facilities are developed in this domain are found to be within the *Warsai-Yikeaalo* Development campaign. In the academic year 2005, more than 8,000 students are pursued their grade -XII, and took part in the (Matriculation) Eritrean School Leaving Certificate Examination at *Warsai-Yikeaalo* Secondary School, Sawa. It is reported that over 500 teachers are working in Sawa to teach the grade- XII students. Besides, different institutions of higher learning have been in operational, for example, Hagaz agricultural school, Hamalmalo Agriculture School, Wina Technical School, Dekemhare (Dan Basco) Technical School etc.

4. CONCLUSION

The developments that took place in different domains are few examples of the reconstruction and developmental activities of the *Warsai-Yikeaalo* Program. If the work were done through payment, it would have cost Eritrea substantially. The study reveals that with the WYP infrastructure development, the economic condition of the people has been relatively improved. Infrastructure like: roads, railways, airports, ports, housing complexes, and schools etc., eased out the problems of the countrymen. In addition to the military personnel, even the village residents themselves were involved in implementation of many works, so they felt happy with the quality of the infrastructure and development of

their respective areas. Evidently, with the advent of the *Warsay-Yekaalo* Development Program, Eritrea has been showing tremendous progress particularly in the infrastructure development. The people of Eritrea could foresee a brighter future ahead of them for which they devote themselves in the economic reconstruction and development of the country.

Besides, Eritrean people are found to be with optimism, with commitment, and with willingness to work hard as they did during the struggle for independence. People have a strong belief and confidence that 'we can do it and we will do it'.¹⁸ However, there is a need to motivate people towards the dream that Eritrea has, thus, the people have to be guided by the visionary principles: like an enthusiasm to work single-mindedly towards the attainment of the national development goals. President Isaias Afwerki, in his speech on the eve of martyr's day on 20th June 2005, emphasised that "*government would continue its efforts in various sectors to build a modern and prosperous nation despite all limitations and hostilities on the ground.*" In a nutshell, the *Warsai-Yikeaalo* Development Campaign is a corner stone in the development of Eritrea and made a vital contribution in the reconstruction and development of Eritrean economy.

NOTES

1. Gebrehiwet, 1993 p. 9; See also Rena, 2006 pp. 32-33).
2. Rena, 2006 p. 35
3. James Firebrace and Stuart Holland, 1986 p.17
4. Rena, 2005b p.4.
5. Rena, 2006 p. 41.
6. Rena, 2005a p. 196.
7. Government Document on *Warsay Prorgan*
8. Eritrean railways, built during the Italian colonization, destroyed in the Dergue regime. Many stretches of rail and sleepers were removed to build military trenches.
9. Government of Eritrea, 2004, p.8. and also see Rena, 2004; p.123
10. Rena, 2006 p. 45
11. The Gel'alo star hotel building, which is meant to serve domestic and foreign tourists, is also one of the first projects of the *Warsai-Yikeaalo* Campaign. And more than 550 Km Massawa-Assab road, which is one of the largest projects of the campaign.
12. Eritrea Profile, 2003, p.1 and also the information collected from the Report submitted by the Minister of Public Works, Mr. Abraha Asfaha to the recent cabinet meeting (July –August 2003).
13. Eritrea Profile, 2003, p.8 and also the information collected from the Report submitted by the Minister of Public Works, Mr. Abraha Asfaha to the recent cabinet meeting (July –August 2003).
14. The 200-bed Assab Referral Hospital, which is first of its kind in the area, is moreover built under the *Warsai-Yikeaalo* Campaign. The building covers an area

of 25,000 square meters and is expected to serve as a referral hospital not only for the area residents but also for patients from the Northern Red Sea Zoba.

15. Eritrean Ministry of Education (June 1999), pg.3-4

16. Eritrean Ministry of Education (2001), pg.14

17. Rena, 2004, p.125.

18. Government Document on *Warsay* Program and website - shaebia

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