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NATIONAL MILITARY SERVICE AND ITS IMPACT ON THE PEOPLE OF AGAW MEDER (NORTH WEST ETHIOPIA)

Ayenew Mamo Seyoum

Debre Markos University, Ethiopia
Email: ayenewmammoth@gmail.com

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Abstract

The main objective of this study is to reconstruct the history of National Military Service (NMS) and its impact on the people of Agäw Meder. In order to undertake this study document analysis, in-depth interview, archival investigation and focus group discussions were undertaken as instruments of data collection. NMS was executed in Agäw Meder Sub-province thorough five main rounds and two second-calls. Though its emphasize on students of senior secondary schools and 12th grade completes, the recruitment for NMS was also focused on educated and uneducated, rural and town resident youths. NMS has both positive and negative impacts. When we come to the result, its participants and the community at large hated it. Despite the existence of numerous negative impacts, there are also some positive impacts of NMS on the participants, which include the development of multiethnic spirit, love of work, coping with hardship, exposure to military science and opportunity to learn vocation. This research was undertaken based on descriptive research design. This is because, it helps to achieve the objectives of the study and to find answer to the research questions of the study by allowing the researchers to describe the characteristic of the phenomena understudy.

Keywords: Agäw Meder District, National Military Service (NMS), Agaws

1. Introduction

National Military Service (here after NMS) is a system of either compulsory or voluntary government service, usually in the military service (Cohen, 1985). Military service is service by an individual or group in an army or other militia, whether as a chosen job or as a result of an involuntary draft. Conscription is compulsory enrollment for service in a country's armed forces. Conscription also refers to the act of forcing individuals to serve in the military. In addition to a formal military draft, compulsory training and militia service is also a part of conscription history (Anderson, 1976). Mandatory military service, otherwise known as military conscription, is a strategy that is being used by countries to build large and powerful armed forces to be deployed in times of war or when there is the need to protect a state's sovereignty. As history shows, many governments had used this strategy. Even today, this strategy is still observed by some countries (Flynn, 2002).

When we come to Ethiopia, an attempt and idea of introducing the NMS was raised at a meeting held at the palace by palace advisers and the Emperor on July 11, 1962. In this meeting, the major issue was the need to build strong army so as to defend the possible threat

which would come from Somalis, Sudan, and Egypt. However, the scarcity of money was the basic obstacle to build new army. The meeting continued discussing on the same issue up to July 18, 1962. Thus, the idea of introducing the NMS was taken as a solution for building strong army with less cost. Then, selected experts were given the responsibility to recruit individuals for national military service. Finally, NMS was declared officially in 1973 (Ayele, 2014).

Thus, it was the first formal step for the establishment of the NMS in the history of Ethiopia. In the first declaration, it was agreed that the duration of the NMS shall be for 24 months consecutively on active duty, three years on ready reserve duty and reserve duty, until one reached the age of 45 years and those on ready reserve duty should undergo not more than fifteen days refresher training each year during the period specified in the proclamation.

Later, during the *Därg* regime, internal dissensions and insurgency forces in the north and northwest as well as external threat from the irredentist Somalia became challenges to government. Thus, all these challenges had forced the military government to expand the army rapidly. To this end, the *Därg* regime primarily made a national call for military service to attack the Somalis, because the army stationed in the Ogaden was much smaller than the Somali invaders. Thus, the *Därg* raised a huge militia force and all these were trained at *Tateq* training center. However, for the long lasting solution, the *Därg* government considered the NMS as the best means to build its military power and decided for the establishment of the NMS program in Ethiopia. The NMS was formally proclaimed in *Nägarit Gazétta* in May 1981. The National Military Service Proclamation of 1981 was adopted under the authority of the National Defense Minister as vested in Article 32 (NALA, Folder No. 17.1.1/1981).

Despite NMS is largely remembered in Ethiopia for its attribute to the loss of thousands of productive sections of the society and for family separation, it also contributed greatly in fulfilling the manpower needed for the defense of the country from foreign invaders and internal armed opposition groups. Therefore, undertaking a study on the history of NMS of Ethiopia in general, and Agäw Meder in particular, is important to generate information on its success and failures, so as to draw lessons from it.

2. Configurations created and activities undertaken for coordinating and executing NMS

2.1. The Essence of NMS

In the period from the middle of 1880s to 1991, NMS has central place in the political history of Ethiopia According to informants, NMS was a service, which was provided by capable citizen for the protection of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. The aforementioned period was the time when the territorial integrity of the country was threatened by opposition groups working for secession and self-determination? Hence, the main motive that necessitated NMS in Ethiopia was the need to get additional manpower to strengthen the regular army of the country with low cost. In order to understand the nature of NMS in a better way, brief consideration of the essence of the regular army is essential.

Unlike NMS, regular army was the army in which citizens of the country had participation in the protection of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country with modest payment (120 Ethiopia birr per month). This service lasts until the participants are exempted due to damage and old age. The recruitment for NMS was undertaken once per year. It involved individuals who are eligible for NMS. However, its focus was predominately on educated sections of the society, especially students of senior secondary schools and on those who completed secondary education. until the beginning of enrollment of NMS, requirement for regular army was undertaken through notice, an activity which was stopped after the beginning of NMS, due to the role of the latter in preparing the necessary man power for the defense of the country. In order to undertake requirement for NMS, various configurations and different activities were undertaken in the study area at each administrative hierarchy, which are discussed as follows.

2.2. Registration and requirement committee

In the meantime, Agäw Meder Sub-province had three *districts*, namely Ankäša, Banja, and Dangila. In order to execute the NMS, registration and requirement committee was established at *sub-province*, *district* and *qäbälé* levels. At *sub-province* and *district* levels, the main administrators and first secretaries of WPE (Workers Party of Ethiopia, collectors), vice administrations (vice collectors) and representatives of Revolutionary Ethiopian Youth Association (REYA), Revolutionary Ethiopia Women's Association (REWA), Revolutionary Ethiopia Peasants Association (REPA) were members of registration and requirement committee. At *qäbälé* level, *qäbälé* chairmen (collector), vice chairmen (Vice collectors), representatives of REYA, REWA, REPA, school directors and militia were the members of the committee.

Apart from the registration and requirement committee established at each administrative hierarchy, there was also a body called 'Wotadärawi Commiserate' (Military Commiserate) which was established to coordinate NMS at national, provincial and sub-province levels under the leadership of senior military officers. This body was given the major responsibility of implementing the proclamation of NMS. Accordingly, starting from December 9, 1987 three senior military officers, namely *Mäto Aläqa Getu Dessalegn* (commissar), *Mäto Aläqa Melese Atnaf* (staff), and *Mikiti Aser Aläqa Alemayehu Bizuneh* (staff) were assigned to work in the military Commiserate of Agäw Meder Sub-province. In February 8, 1987 Shambel Genanew Fetene, inspector of provincial military commiserates, became the commissar of the Sub-province. The major responsibility of implementing the proclamation of NMS was given to this body. Besides, the process of registration and requirement for NMS was closely supervised by the members of the parliament in each *worädäa*. In the meantime, the youth have the obligation to participate in different configurations. As a result, the youth, having the age of 18 have the obligation to be the members of REYA and REWA in their residential *qäbälés*.

Based on these configurations, the local cadres of WPE used to undertake the task of indoctrinating the youth on the then current issues of the country. In these cadre indoctrinations, the youths were reported to have informed that those who do not involve themselves in the NMS are not recognized as citizens of the country, have no right to live and attend their education in any part of the country. On the contrary, those who involve themselves in the NMS are informed to have priority in higher education and employment opportunity. The propaganda issued by the cadres to the youth was frightful and made them to think that their involvement in NMS was mandatory to make their future life better.

2.3. Quota system

In order to present conscripts of NMS, quota system was employed on the bases of population number and the number of conscripts was specified at provincial, *sub-province*, *district* and *qäbälé* levels. That means, based on the number of conscripts expected from it, at the beginning, the province of Gojjam allocates quota to the *sub-provinces*. Then, the sub-provinces allocate their quota to the *districts* and *qäbälés*. At provincial level, quota was allocated without the involvement of sub-province administrators. As a result unfairness of the quota allocation was reported by the sub-provinces, especially in the 4th round NMS. The registration and conscription committee established at each administrative level has the responsibility to fulfill its quota. To this end, first the youths "who were believed to be eligible for NMS, having the age of 18", were registered in their *qäbälés* and granted NMS card. The youth handling of the NMS card was an indication of candidacy, which in turn makes them to be ready for NMS by imposing psychical pressure. The *qäbälé* chairmen, who did not work hard to fulfill their quota, were punished with imprisonment. For instance, if the *qäbälé* chairmen were youths, they were reported to have taken to NMS by filling the quota already allocated.

2.4. Musical club

Apart from the registration and recruitment committee, there were also musical clubs, known as *Yä Kinät Guad* at provincial, *sub-province* and *qäbälé* levels, which played greater role in facilitating NMS. The youths from both sexes had the obligation to participate in these clubs. Refusal was said to have resulted in punishment with imprisonment. The main objective of these musical clubs was presenting artistic works to the public to brighten governmental and public holidays and events. These clubs were also used to present to the public artistic works aimed at teaching the usefulness and honor of occupational works such as weaving, iron work, tanning. Besides, the musical clubs had the obligation to agitate the youth (in rural & urban areas) for NMS and present artistic works, such as songs, plays, bragging, aimed at enhancing the love of the motherland. One of the informants described the then rule musical club was propagandist cadre. Especially, heroism builder artistic works presented by the musical clubs on market days were said to have forced some of the youth to join NMS voluntarily.

2.5. Accommodation committee

The other body which made contribution to facilitate NMS in Agäw Meder sub province was accommodation committee, which was established by individuals represented by *qäbälé* REYA and REWA. Conscripts of NMS were put under strict control suddenly while sleeping, walking and attending their education. As a result, the recruits may not have anything in their hand. After recruits were put under control, in most cases, parents and relative were not allowed to provide food to them. As a result, until their departure first to *sub-province* center (Dangila) and then to provincial center (Däbrä Markos), the conscripts were supplied in their *district* and *sub-province* centers with food prepared by *injära*, *shiro* and *bärebäré* contributed by the community with the facilitation of this committee.

2.6. Physical and health examination

Physical and health examination of the recruits of NMS was one of the tasks done in the process of registration and recruitment. Conscripts, which came from each *qäbälés* were recruited at *district* level. In the process of recruitment, the age, physical structure, external body parts (such as eyes, teeth, hands, legs, ears, fingers) and genital disease "examination" was undertaken by the *district* health workers. However, unless there was clearly seen physical damage, recruits were said to have sent from *districts* to *sub-province* center (Dangila). The health examination was also undertaken at *sub-province* level and those who passed the examination were sent to the province center (Däbrä Markos) and eventually to military training centers. The same examination was undertaken at the latter levels. According to informants, those who were found unfit were said to have returned to their home by the examination undertaken at military training center level.

2.7. Special security force

Special security force was the other configuration created to coordinate NMS in Agäw Meder Sub-province. It was composed of *qäbälé* and *district militia* and was responsible to strictly control and supervise recruits during their stay at *qäbäle* and *district* centers, as well as during their journey from *qäbälé* to *district*, then to *sub-province* and provincial centers. This body was also responsible to control the possible anarchy of the parents and relatives of the recruits in the areas where they made temporary stay.

3. The implementation of recruitment for NMS and its short comings

3.1. The implementation of requirement for NMS

According to informants, the direction passed to execute recruitment for National Military Service states that "a citizen who reached the age of 18 and having full physical health is

required to provide NMS for his country for two years." After providing the service, the youths were told to have priority in higher education and job employment. In the meantime, youths who were to be eligible for NMS were found in senior secondary schools, namely Dangila Senior Secondary School and Ankäša Senior Secondary School, which were established in 1975 and 1983, respectively. Based on the recommendation coming from *qäbälés*, these schools became main targets of recruitment in various degrees.

In the meantime, there were school dropouts, those who were not enrolled to schools and 12th grade completes in rural and town centers. They were major targets of NMS in Agäw Meder Sub-province. Therefore, educated and uneducated, rural and town resident youths were targets of NMS. However, NMS did not consider females. As it is confirmed by informants, NMS was executed in Agäw Meder Sub-province thorough five main rounds and two recalls. In order to undertake the identification and registration for NMS, a sort of study was undertaken both in rural and town areas on eligible youths for NMS and their whereabouts. With the coming of directions, the youths were captured in their homes at night, while walking along the road, attending their education and going out of the school.

After undertaking health examination, recruits who were brought under control at *qäbälé* level were taken at night to Dangila, sub-province center. The same examination was undertaken at sub-province and provincial center, Däbrä Markos. Then recruits were divided and sent directly to military training centers. In the meantime, there were training centers at Dädesa (Wollega), Tolay (Käfa), Mäslo (Bale) which were known respectively as *Tatäq 1*, *Tatäq 2*, and *Tatäq 3*. After basic military training additional training was given for different military sectors at Hurso (Harär) military training center. After the fourth round, NMS military training was also given at Mäkod (Bahir Dar). If the youths, who were needed for NMS, did not avail themselves, notices were said to have stamped in their homes and told that they will be punished for five years imprisonment if they did not report on stipulated time. The execution of the various rounds of NMS in Agäw Meder is discussed as follows.

3.2. First round NMS

The first round recruitment for NMS was undertaken in Agäw Meder Sub-province in 1984. In this round, one of the main targets of recruitment was Dangila Senior Secondary School, where students were put under control while withdrawing the school compound by completing the final examination of 12th grade E.S.L.C.E (Ethiopian School Leaving Certificate Examination). The main reason that made this school the main target was the existence of large number of youths who came from different *districts* to attend their senior secondary school education. As it is reported by informants, in the recruitment undertaken in this school, the main targets were students who came from Ankäša and Banja *Districts*, those who were new comers and having no relatives in the locality. As a result, at this round the quota of Dangila District was said to have fulfilled predominantly by students who came from other *districts* of the *sub-province*.

The other target of recruitment was Ankäša Senior Secondary School. In the first round recruitment, some of grade 9 and 10 students became targets in this school. Besides, Ayehu State Farm, which was established in 1982 in Ankäša *District*, also becomes the other target of recruitment. According to informants, large number of daily laborers, who were living far from their parents, were said to have recruited from this target area. Apart from the targets already mentioned, grade 12 completes having no job, youths living in rural and town areas were also the focuses of the recruitment. Since it was undertaken without awareness creation on the society, the recruitment of this round was full of gag and tension. In general, in the first round about 1800 recruits were put under strict control in Agäw Meder Sub-province and sent to military training centers.

3.3. Second round NMS

The second round NMS recruitment was undertaken in Agäw Meder Sub-province in 1985. In this round, once again Dangila Senior Secondary School became the main target. However, the

condition of recruitment of the students was different from the first round, which is mentioned by an informant as follows.

I was put under strict control for NMS at the beginning of October 1985 while I was 12th grade student in Dangila Senior Secondary School. While we were entering into the school compound, the surrounding was encircled by the local militia. After the students entered into the classroom, we were told to withdraw. Then the name of the target students was called and put under strict control.

Similar to the first round, the second round recruitment in Dangila *District* was targeted on the students who came from Ankäša and Banja *Districts* for senior secondary education and on those young stars that did not have close relatives in the locality. Those students who were said to have under control from Dangila *District* were reported to have released by using unconvincing reasons.

However, the targeting of students who came from Ankäša and Banja *Districts*, by putting aside the youths indigenous to Dangila *District*, caused opposition in the second round recruits who were kept at Dangila town. In order to cool down this opposition, Ato Dessalegn Berie and Ato Anelegn Gared, main and vice administrators of Agäw Meder *Sub-province*, respectively, were reported to have decided to avail their sons to join the protesting recruits and provide NMS for their country. Though this measure was taken with the pressure of the recruits, the decision taken by the administrators was an indication of the commitment that they have for the defense of the country by contributing recruits from their own family. Similarly, students of Ankäša Senior Secondary School, laborers of Ayehu State Farm, grade 12 completes having no job, and other youths living in rural areas and towns were also targets of this round conscription. Like the first round, the second round was also undertaken without adequate awareness creation on the community. According to informants, in this round about 500 youths were conscripted in Agäw Meder *Sub-province* and sent to military training centers. Since it was the time of the establishment of Ethiopian People's Democratic Republic, insurgents were expected to intensify their attack to obstacle the process. As a result, the Därg was forced to prolong the return of the participants of the second round NMS to their home from July 8 1987 to October 10, 1988.

The promise given by the government to the youths during the proclamation of NMS was implemented for the participants of the first and second round military service, who were provided with prior opportunity to join universities, colleges and institutions with relatively lower E.S.L.C.E. results and in to lower jobs such as guard and security. Accordingly, those having 2.2. and above and from 1.6 -2.1 E.S.L.C.E. results were said to have joined degree and diploma program, respectively. Those having 12th grade E.S.L.C.E. card, whatever the result was, joined Teachers Training Institutes (TTI).

3.4. Third round NMS

The third round NMS was undertaken in Agäw Meder *Sub-province* in 1986. Like the first two rounds, in this round the youths continued to be targets of the recruitment for NMS and above 500 recruiters were said to have conscripted from Agäw Meder *Sub-province*. However, the participants of this round were said to have returned to their home not by providing two years' service like that of the previous two rounds, rather in 1991, after serving for about six years which was resulted from the worsening of the political condition of the country. As a result, the participants of this round did not get the promise of prior higher education and job opportunity due to the downfall of the regime.

3.5. Fourth round NMS

The fourth round NMS was undertaken in Agäw Meder *Sub-province* in 1987. Based on the experiences obtained from the first to the third rounds, directions were passed by the government to prepared adequate preconditions for the execution of the next round. Accordingly, NMS recruitment committee of Agäw Meder *Sub-province* divided the *sub-province* in to four *qätanas* (regions), namely Dangila Town, Banja, Ankäša and Dangila *Districts*. Like

the previous three rounds, this round also targeted the youths and it was undertaken forcefully. However, limited grade 12 complete youths were said to have joined voluntarily, due to higher education opportunity provided by the government for the first and second round NMS participants. In this round, 490 recruits were put under control at *sub-province* level, of which 163 were abandoned due to medical screening and other family related reasons, and only 327 recruits were sent to Däbrä Markos. However, 9 of these recruits were returned to their home by the investigation undertaken at provincial level. Like the third round recruits, the participants of this round were said to have returned to their home in 1991, after the downfall of the *Därg* regime. As a result, they were unable to get the promise given to them by the government and they were forced to lead miserable life for a long period of time.

3.6. Fifth round NMS

The fifth round NMS recruitment was undertaken in Agäw Meder *Sub-province* in 1988. Like the previous ones, this round NMS was said to have targeted the youth who were found in rural area and in the towns. Like that of the fourth round some of the participants of this round were said to have joined NMS voluntarily, seeking the advantage given to the participants of the first and second rounds to join higher education for Degree, Diploma and TTI, based on their E.S.L.C.E. result. In this round, about 1000 youths were said to have recruited for NMS from Agäw Meder *Sub-province*. Participants of this round were said to have returned to their home in 1991, following the downfall of the *Därg* regime. Since the participants of this round did not get compensation for their service and physical damage, they were forced to lead miserable life for longer period.

3.7. Second-call

Due to the intensification of the fight of the insurgents in northern Ethiopia, the military government was forced to issue "second call proclamation". According to informants, the first second call was undertaken at the end of 1988. Following the government's declaration of "All things to the war front" /, which obliged all citizens to stand for the defense of the country. This first second-call was forwarded mainly for the retunes of the first and second round NMS. However, later on, those who joined higher education were exempted and the other first and second round NMS participants were forced to join the second- call and contributed military service for their country for the second time, until 1991.

The second second-call was undertaken in 1990. At this time, the government made a call for all citizens, having military science experience, regardless of age, to contribute for the defense of the country. This call was mainly made for those who returned from regular army due to physical damage and old age, who in turn contributed for the defense of the country until the downfall of the *Därg* regime.

Agäw Meder was one of the *sub-provinces*, which played significant role in forwarding recruits for the defense of the country. According to informants, apart from their involvement in the fight against the enemy, along with the regular army, recruits of Agäw Meder were said to have contributed in various positions, such as in administration, public relations, store keeping, logistics and as political cadres.

4. The shortcomings of recruitment for NMS

4.1. Releasing the conscripts through bribe and nepotism

The proclamation of NMS observes all youths having the age more than 18 years old. Hence, regardless of differences in rural areas and towns, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, those who have full body parts and healthy were expected to participate in NMS. However, the registration and recruitment committee and administrative bodies were reported to have released the sons of the rich and those who have influential relatives through bribe and nepotism and replaced them with sons of the poor and those having no influential relatives, a

problem which was reported to have seen in all administrative hierarchies up to military training centers.

4.2. Targeting of strangers

The recruitment activities, which were undertaken especially in Dangila town were side to have executed focusing on youths who were stranger and having no relatives in the locality, which include the youths who came from different *districts* to attend their secondary education. Beside, strangers who came from different areas and residing in rural areas and in the towns, at the time of recruitment, were said to have put under control for NMS, without any consideration, to fill the quota imposed on the *qäbälés*. Especially, the youths engaged in sharecropping in rural areas were targeted in the recruitment for NMS.

4.3. Recruitment of under-aged youths

The proclamation declares the age 18 to be the minimum age limit for involvement in the NMS. However, in the process of recruitment the main focus of *qäbälé* officials was to fulfill their *quota*. As a matter of fact, significant number of youths, having 15-17 years old, were said to have recruited and forced to involve in NMS, out of the order put in the proclamation. The involvement of under-aged youths in NMS is reported by one of the informants as follows.

I was put under strict control for NMS while I was 10th grade student in Ankäša Senior Secondary School around 6:15 local time in Agäw Gimjabet town. In the meantime, I was 15 years old. During my brief stay in the police station of the town, one of my observers told to *district* officials that this fellow is under-aged for NMS, during which the main administrator of *District* responded saying. He will grow up by eating food in military training center.

Because of problems seen in the recruitment of the youths, several participants of NMS, especially in the 4th and 5th rounds, were found unfit and returned to their homes from military training centers.

4.4. The reaction of the community to NMS

NMS is a national obligation presented to eligible citizens of the country due to the threatening of the territorial integrity of the country by insurgency struggle conducted at different parts of the country, especially in northern Ethiopia. However, NMS was opposed by the community of Agäw Meder in various ways, which is treated as follows.

4.4.1. Hiding their sons

Parents did not want to give their sons for NMS, since they want them badly during their old days. As a result, at times of military recruitment, the parents were reported to have hidden their sons in other areas where relatives and holly water were found. The parents also hide their sons within their houses where the recruiters cannot easily.

4.4.2. Physical damage

Having full physical body part was one of the criteria for recruitment to NMS. As a result, the parents who were highly worried to their sons were reported to have cut their fingers while sleeping, wound their body parts, adding red pepper in their eyes and take out their teeth to inflict minor damages. Sometimes, these physical damages were reported to have undertaken with the will of their sons.

4.4.3. Escaping

The transportation of recruits of NMS was undertaken from one administrative hierarchy to the other and to military training centers by using open loading cars. This created a good

opportunity occasionally for the recruits to escape from the special guards assigned to transport them. Those who were not successful were said to have even faced death. Similarly, the recruits were said to have escaped from their staying places and military training centers at night and at times of latrine and feeding.

4.4.4. Exempting from feeding

Having body weight of 50 kilogram was one of the criteria for requirement to NMS. In order to be under-weight, the youths were reported to have exempted themselves from feeding for about three days.

4.4.5. Deserting

The participants of NMS were said to have given the responsibility to execute different obligations in the war front. They were obliged to undertake heavy military trainings on daily bases, fighting with the enemy, fetching water from distant places, cooking and carrying food. Apart from the burden found in the war front, the strength of the insurgents and the relative weakness of the government military power were said to have made the participants of NMS hopeless on the political condition of the country. As a result, large number of recruits of NMS were said to have betrayed in to TPLF (Tigray Peoples Liberation Front). In general, since NMS was directly associated with the death and hardship of their sons, the community of Agäw Meder did not have support to it.

5. The impact of NMS on the community

5.1. The negative impact of NMS

5.1.1. Social impact

The negative social impact of NMS on the community of Agäw Meder can be seen from the perspective of the participants, parents and the community at large. The negative impact of NMS on the participants was very harsh. The youth who involved in the initial two rounds and two second- calls of the NMS faced physical damage (during military trainings and fighting with the enemy) and loss of life. The first round NMS participants were captured in Dangila town while withdrawing after taking the final examination of 12th grade E.S.L.C.E., which turned the vision of the students into hopelessness. According to informants, among those students who were captured at this time some were said to have brought a good result which could enable them to continue Degree program in higher educations. However, they were said to have lost their life in the war front even without knowing the result they scoured in Ethiopian School Leaving Certificate Examination.

There were 12th grade students in the first two round who were taken to NMS without taking E.S.L.C.E. This was great source of dissatisfaction and hopelessness for the youths who attended inspired several years of lesson with the vision to change their life as well as the ones of their parents through education. Such students were said to have taken 12th grade E.S.L.C.E. in military training centers, a condition which brought negative impact on the result of the students. One of the participants of the second round NMS mentioned the impact of his forceful involvement in NMS by discontinuing 12th grade education as follows.

I was leading students in my class. I was captured for NMS while I was 12th grade student, a condition that prevented me from reaching the highest educational level.

Similarly, there were several students, who were taken to NMS forcefully discontinuing their high school (9-11) education. This condition averted the dream of the students to change their future life through education. Though some of the students attended their education, after their return to home, they were unable to return to their previous academic status, due to the gap created as the result of their involvement in the NMS. As a matter of fact, such students blame NMS for the disordering of their life. In the meantime, there were the youths, out of education, who were leading their life by performance various activities with their parents. The vision of such youths to change their life through work was negatively affected by their forceful

involvement in NMS, even it is reported to have an impact on family formation after their return. With the collapse of the military regime in 1991, the EPRDF (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front) government considered the participants of NMS as remnants of the former military government (*Därg*) and denied them to provide job opportunity. They were not considered as citizens and even denied the right to get compensation for their physical damage.

The negative impact of NMS was strong on the parents, who became hopeless by forceful recruitment of their sons for NMS. They even faced brutal punishment by the time they cried in the police stations where the recruits were confined until their transportation to the next administrative hierarchy. There were large numbers of parents who suffered loneliness by losing two or more of their sons due to NMS. As a matter of facts, they express their grief with the birth of a son stating that "who is going to die tomorrow elsewhere due to NMS." The youths who were taken to NMS were not expected to be returned to home. This is clearly shown by the following poem compiled by the parents.

The vulture of Asmara, the vulture of Asab
Let me ask you a secret.
Did the hero was buried? or eaten by a beast?

The NMS has also a negative impact on the local community who was given the responsibility to supply the recruits during their stay in the local police station, with food, by contributing bread and pepper. Besides, the members of the community, from the farmers to the merchants, were forced to contribute money for the call of the motherland.

5.1.2. Economic impact

The deployment of the youth for NMS, instead of engaging in the developmental activities of their own, their parents and the nation, was a loss. If the youths were not taken to NMS, they were able to contribute for the economic development of themselves, the parents and the country. Above all, parents had higher expectation from their sons during their old days. But parents were unable to get this expectation because of NMS.

5.1.3. Political impact

NMS was based on obligation. It was highly hated by the community and its implementation was targeted on those who were strangers and have no influential relatives in the locality. Participants of NMS, parents and the community suffered a lot, faced inhuman treatments, physical damage and death. As a result, all were waiting for the downfall of the *Därg* regime and the coming of a new government. Large numbers of participants were deserted in to TPLF/EPRDF and worked for the downfall of the military government. With the downfall of the military government in 1991, the parents became extremely happy. This is clearly shown in the poem compiled by the members of the community.

Let me start my greeting with blessing
The *Därg* was hyena while his officials were locust
They retreated in advance with the coming of EPRDF

5.2. The positive impact of NMS

Despite the existence of numerous negative impacts, there are also some positive impacts of NMS on the participants, which include the development of multiethnic spirit, love of work, withstanding hardship, exposure to military science and opportunity to learn vocation. Recruits of NMS having different socio-cultural backgrounds used to execute their responsibilities in military training centers and in the war front regardless of differences in ethnicity, religion and language. This spirit of unity and love is still found and reflected in the mind of the ex-participants of NMS. They are highly worried about the unity of the country. Despite the

existence of prejudice, chase, prohibition of job opportunity by the EPRDF government, using their experience of courage and determination, the ex-participants of NMS are able to sustain themselves and their families by engaging on smaller own businesses.

The military training provided to the participants of NMS enable them to get job opportunities related to guard and security in governmental and non-governmental organization since most of the participants of NMS were high school students and 12th grade completes. During their stay in military training centers and in the war front, they got the opportunity to train themselves in different vocations (such as health, mechanics, driving, etc.). On their return to home, some participants were able to sustain themselves and their families by engaging in these vocations.

6. Strengths and weakness of NMS

NMS was conducted with great emphasis since its declaration in 1984 to the downfall of the *Därg* in 1991. Hence, it is important to consider its major strengths and weaknesses. In terms of strengths, since NMS was declared when the territorial integrity of the country failed in dangerous condition, due to insurgency struggle, it played its own part in strengthening the natural army with manpower 'without payment.' However, this manpower was unable to prevent the downfall of the *Därg* and the realization of the objectives of the insurgents, because of the shift of the balance of power in favor of the latter. However, NMS has several weaknesses it was executed forcefully without getting consensus from the mass. Since its recruitment was undertaken by interrupting the educational engagement of the youth by focusing on the youths who were strangers and having no influential parents and relatives, it was highly hated by the people in general and the recruits in particular. As a result, according to informants, the participants of the 4th and 5th round and the 1988 second-call participants were said to have betrayed to TPLF / EPRDF and contributed for the downfall of the *Därg*. Besides, as compared to the national army, the participants of NMS were reported to have lack of commitment. Since they were recruited forcefully and for two years, their focus was not to contribute meaningful activity rather to cover their obligation years and return to their home.

7. Conclusion

In the period from the middle of 1880s to 1991, NMS has central place in the history of Ethiopia. NMS was a service which was provided by capable citizen for the protection of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. In order to undertake requirement for NMS, various configurations were created and different activities were undertaken in the study area at each administrative hierarchy, which include registration and recruitment committee, quota system, musical club, accommodation committee, physical and health examination, and special security force. Each configuration was composed of members who came from different offices and associations, and were given the responsibility to undertake a specific activity focusing on preparing requites for NMS.

NMS was executed in Agäw Meder Sub-province thorough five main rounds and two second-calls. The first, second, third, fourth and fifth rounds of NMS were undertaken in 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987 and 1988, respectively. The first and second-calls were also undertaken in 1988 and 1990. Apart from their modest involvement in the fight against the enemy, along with the regular army, recruits of Agäw Meder were said to have contributed in various positions, such as in administration, public relations, store keeping, logistics and as political cadres. After their return to home, the promise given by the government to the youths during the proclamation of NMS was implemented for the participants of the 1st and 2nd round military service, who were provided with prior opportunity to join universities, colleges and institutions with relatively lower E.S.L.C.E. results and in to lower jobs such as guard and security. Due to the worsening of the political condition of the country, the participants of the third, fourth and fifth rounds were said to have returned to their home in 1991, after the downfall of the *Därg* regime. As a result, they were unable to get the promise given to them by the government and forced to lead miserable life for a long period of time.

Though NMS was addressed to all youths, various problems were reported to have seen in Agäw Meder in the recruitment for NMS, which include releasing of recruits through bribe and nepotism, targeting of strangers and those having no relatives in the locality, and recruitment of under-aged youths. As a matter of fact, it was opposed by the community of Agäw Meder in various ways, such as hiding their sons, inflicting physical damage, escaping, exempting from feeding and betraying.

NMS has both positive and negative impacts. The negative impact of NMS can be seen socially, economically and politically. The participants faced physical damage; loss of life, discontinuation of education. Parents faced brutal punishment and loss of their sons. The local community was responsible in supplying the recruits with food by contributing (*injära*, *shiro* and *bärebäré*), and contributing money for the call of the motherland. Economically, the deployment of the youth for NMS, instead of engaging in the developmental activities of their own, their parents and the nation, was a loss. Politically, NMS was based on obligation. As a result, it was highly hated by the community and all were waiting for the downfall of the *Därg* regime. Despite the existence of numerous negative impacts, there are also some positive impacts of NMS on the participants, which include the development of multiethnic spirit, love of work, withstanding hardship, exposure to military science and opportunity to learn vocation, all of which became important for the ex-participants of NMS to lead their life today. Thus, military service related activities need to be undertaken by creating adequate awareness on the community, its recruitment should be free from bias and its participants need to be treated properly.

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