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Asayehgn Desta

*School of Business and Leadership, Dominican University of California, asayehgn.desta@dominican.edu*

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# Sustainable Local Development. The Revitalization of the Town of Adwa (Ethiopia) through Community-Based Endogenous Projects

Asayehgn DESTA

Dominican University of California  
School of Business and Leadership

50 Acacia Avenue

San Rafael, CA 94901

California, USA

E-mail: [destaa@prodigy.net](mailto:destaa@prodigy.net)

## ABSTRACT

*Over the years, either self-initiated or by funding from development agencies, a number of developing countries have implemented various programs to tackle poverty. This case study was inspired by the One Village One Product (OVOP) movement initiated in the Oita Prefecture region of Japan. Given the positive aspects of the OVOP, the purpose of the study is to transfer some aspects of the OVOP movement in order to revitalize the town of Adwa, Tigray, Ethiopia. The case study therefore suggests some possible community-based endogenous projects that could revitalize the town of Adwa, Tigray, Ethiopia. As a result of the initiative of local talents, the emancipation of local wisdom, the participation of local people and the rediscovering of indigenous products (services or history, it is expected that local communities in Adwa would be able to create job opportunities and generate income to improve the livelihoods of the poor segments of their population.*

## KEY WORDS

*Sustainable development, revitalization, project, local, government*

## JEL CODES

Q01, N17

## 1. Introduction

Based on existing artifacts and historical relics, the ancient town of Adwa can be defined as the sacred place of common heritage of the black race. In addition, the Battle of Adwa remains depicted as a spiritual victory for all black Africans who suffered under the yoke of enslavement and colonialism. (See for example Ababya, March 27, 2008, Jonas, 2011, and Desta, 2011.) During the colonial period, the Battle of Adwa instilled in the hearts of black people that though European colonizers were well equipped with armaments and destructive gadgets, they were too pompous to recognize that they could not traverse the African continent without confronting major resistance. The black people saw that if they were routed and easily dismantled by the patriotic Ethiopian fighters at the Battle of Adwa, they could be challenged elsewhere. Thus, based on the Ethiopians' achievement at the Battle of Adwa, Adwa still remains a torch of pride and inspiration, worth visiting by millions of Africans residing in Africa and in the Diaspora in order to pay homage to the brave Ethiopian fighters. In reviewing Professor Raymond Jones book, the publishers of the Weekly stated that:

On March 1, 1896, near the town of Adwa (in Ethiopia), an Ethiopian army convincingly struck down the colonizing Italian army in a battle that decisively shaped not only the contours of

Ethiopia but also its future and that of the continent ... As Jonas points out, the African victory at Adwa commenced the crumbling of European dominance of Africa; Ethiopia thus became a source of pride and lineage often indistinguishable from Africa, and writers such as W.E.B. DuBois based their model African states on Ethiopia (Jonas, R. 2011).

To maintain the history of the Battle of Adwa at its climax, the Queen Sheba School of Adwa was established in 1942 by the highly seasoned and well acclaimed teacher, Haleka Twelde-Medhin Gebru (Gorfu, 2007). Thus, the Queen Sheba School has remained over the years as a well-known educational center for giving solid education to its learners. Up to the early part of the 1970s, the Queen Sheba School operated a well-known school in terms of the number of students who passed the Eighth Grade General Examination and the Twelfth Grade School-Leaving Certificate Examination. In retrospect, it can be said that the Queen has produced a number of well-known and influential politicians, medical doctors, philosophers' professors, lawyers, engineers, business people, teachers, poets, authors and entertainers. In addition, the Queen Sheba School is known as one of the places that participated in the creation of the Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front (TPLF) that skillfully emancipated Ethiopia from the rule of the fascist *Derg* from 1974-1991.

Because of the quality of teaching and the learning that resulted, the Queen Sheba School remained as a magnet that attracted students from other parts of Ethiopia, Eritrea, and other areas within the proximity of Adwa. A number of highly qualified teachers and staff members were assigned by the Ministry of Education to work in various schools. As a result, this contributed to a short term gain to the capital assets of the Adwa community. Stated differently, until the 1970s, the Queen Sheba School, being an intellectual center, attracted a significant amount of human capital and significantly contributed to the comparative advantage of the town of Adwa when compared with its neighboring districts. Students who came from neighboring areas were renting rooms, buying stationary, and spending on food, clothing, and other personal services and entertainment. The operations expenses spent on the maintenance of the facility produced beneficial economic effects on the town. The newly built facilities, such as classrooms, offices, and labs played a very important role in stimulating the local economy.

In short, from 1942 until the middle of the 1970s, the Queen Sheba School continued as a pillar of the education industry, offering tangible and intangible benefits as an economic driver of the Adwa community. The economy of the town was thoroughly intertwined with the schools' activities. The few businesses that existed in the town mainly catered their services to the schools. Though the buildings, materials and features still resonate the spirit of past students, faculty and staff members, and events, it is now very distressing to see that the once well-known Queen Sheba School looks like a haunted place with crumbling classrooms and school facilities in a state of disrepair. The school has very few qualified teachers. Few students pass the 12<sup>th</sup> grade exam. If at all trained efficiently, those students who do graduate from the vocational school acquire productive jobs, not in Adwa but elsewhere (see for example, see Desta, 2011). Thus, the once highly esteemed town of Adwa is in economic distress and the vitality of its once competitive school is now left to history. It seems logical that the citizens of Adwa need to look for other local products and services that may bring a resurgence of the competitive advantage of Adwa, nationally and in the global market.

The purpose of this paper is to suggest some possible ideas that could be vital to the reinvigoration of the town of Adwa by proposing the viability of the Japanese concept of "One Town One Product (OVOP)." The crucial question of the study is: Can the town of Adwa create robust and competitive products (services) that could enhance its economic development and add value to locally available resources?

## **2. Literature review**

As described by Khaophuan, S. (December 5, 2011), One Village One Product (OVOP) is a practical manifestation of the expression: "Think globally, act locally." Though development can be achieved as a result of the application of endogenous or exogenous means or a combination of the two (see Cutaran, R. October 8, 2008), the Japanese concept of OVOP that was introduced in 1961 in Oita Prefecture, Japan, through a number of trials and errors, has strived to produce value-added products to every village endowed with unique resources. Though challenging, the OVOP advocates that local talents need to be converted into unique products (i.e., non-capital-intensive products) through value addition, which are then marketed nationally and internationally. In other words, the OVOP has brought prosperity to a region by promoting its indigenous raw materials along with local skills and talents there by substantially improving the livelihoods of the poor people (JICA, 2011). Stated differently, the Japanese concept of OVOP focuses on regional pride, rediscovery of indigenous products, and entrepreneurship. As persuasively stated by Cutaran (2008), the driving forces for the OVOP are visionary leadership, local wisdom, revisiting of history, artifacts, eco-tourism, and the maintenance and conservation of natural resources owned by local people. That is, rediscovering, designing, and reengineering these indigenous products (services) are vital for creating a competitive edge in any locality.

The success of OVOP in Japan has inspired other nations to implement similar programs. To transfer it to other cultures, the Japanese OVOP model has been tailored to suit the unique conditions of various environments that have embraced it (IJAC, 2011). For instance, to enhance its local development, the Philippines modified the Japanese type of OVOP based on local ownership and designed "One Town One Product programs" (OTOP) and managed the OTOPI using a collaboration of a Tri-partite convergence strategy. That is, National Government Agencies, Local Government Units, and the private sector jointly supported and managed the One Town One Product programs (OTOP). The OTOPI movement in the Philippines highlighted regional pride, rediscovered indigenous products and paved the way for increased entrepreneurship. As stated by Cutaran (2008), the OTOPI has played a great role in local development in Mindanao, Philippines. It has helped to create job opportunities and income generation for the town. Also, it has promoted local wisdom, talent, and creativity through recognizing regional pride and the rediscovery of indigenous products (2008).

Though very similar in concept, Thailand's government modified the Japanese bottom-up strategy into a top-down program. That is, the OVOP was totally organized and supervised by the Thai Government. As discussed by Khaophuan (December 5, 2011), before funds (loan) were allocated by the Thai prime minister's office, each group had to submit a proposal. "Once a village had received approval for its product, the District Health Office provided sanitary guidelines for it. The Provincial Trade and Commerce Office helped with marketing and the Bank of Agricultural Cooperatives provided accounting training for the villagers. The community Development Department handled marketing and advertising, and annual exhibitions for the OTOPI products" (Tangpianpant, 2010). As eloquently ascertained by Tangpianpant (2011), as of 2005, of the 38,000 OTOPI's, about 8,000 were awarded three or more stars and were approved for about 1% annual interest on their loans. Also since they efficiently used local materials, their income increased by 14% from the time they joined the OTOPI program.

The Japanese OVOP program was also explored in a number of African countries (i.e., Malawi, Ghana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique, Nigeria, Tanzania, Senegal, South Africa, Zambia and Uganda). But the program was effectively tried to empower the rural communities in Kenya and Malawi. For example, to reduce poverty among Kenyans, the OVOP was started in 2008 with the financial support and technical assistance of JICA. The initiative required

people to take up a product or an industry unique to their region and cultivate it nationally and globally.

Through OVOP community leaders, qualified human resources and networks are created for value-added products through intensive production, followed by promotion of small and micro-scale industries and appropriate marketing strategies. As outlined by JICA (2011) the projects in Kenya were designed with the following specific objectives: 1) to support value addition and the designing of appropriate business plans for the preparation of locally available raw materials to 2) facilitate the transfer of skills and technology, 3) promote the use of locally produced products in Kenya, 4) promote and improve market access for locally produced products in Kenya, and 5) create employment in rural areas. Though the Kenyan OVOP is moving in the right direction to meet the intended objectives, the project “faces impediments that include inadequate funding, weak implementation capacity at the direct level, inadequate staffing, inadequate support for groups and lack of office space designed for the project” (2011).

As a good will grant, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in 1997 proposed OVOP for the Malawi government as a means of alleviating poverty and promoting regional development (Chidumu, 2007). After the Malawi Officials made a visit to the Oita Prefecture, Japan, the Malawi government made OVOP a part of its national development plan

(See for example, Khaophuan, Dec. 5, 2011). Though the Malawi OVOP concurred with the Japanese structure and principles, the Malawi government’s involvement was limited to providing technical assistance for planning and managing but rendered no assistance in the area of marketing. Moreover, the financial support was limited to \$500,000 over a five-year period (Kurokawa, K. et al., April, 2010). As discussed by Kurokawa, K. et al., (April, 2010) of the 47/280 proposals which were approved in 2007, only 16 remained active as of August 2008. Given this solid evidence, it may be said that the OVOP in Malawi is “still in the embryonic stage but there is some evidence that OVOP has relatively increased productivity and has helped in the creation of leadership and entrepreneurship in some instances” (See Kurokawa, K. et al., April, 2010). Actually, Chidmu (October 2007) asserts that OVOP farmers in Malawi were better off than those who were not involved in the program.

The theoretical framework that can be drawn from the case studies reviewed above are, being a stakeholder-driven and a bottom-up decision making process, OVOP is vital for alleviating poverty and can result in successful development in the long run. Though its transferability and practical implementation is subject to cross-cultural dimensions, the OVOP has enhanced visions, entrepreneurship, and the empowerment of local communities to identify products (services). By constantly adding value it plays a role in the achievement of a competitive edge both locally and globally.

### **3. Some Possible OVOP Beneficiaries to the town of Adwa**

As discussed above, the town of Adwa is economically distressed. The energy of the once competitive school system is now gone. Even if overhauled, the Queen Sheba Secondary school cannot be used immediately to rejuvenate the town of Adwa. In the short run, however, the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) may be used as leverage to revitalize the town. That is, if properly equipped with the necessary educational infrastructure and by giving short term intensive training to teachers and administrators, the Queen Sheba TVET School could be made to respond immediately to the different needs of learners from different socio-economic and academic backgrounds, and prepare them for gainful employment and sustainable livelihoods. Therefore, to fulfill the OVOP objectives, the TVET School of Adwa must be tailored to address all aspects of the development and improvement of infrastructure, entrepreneurship, information

and communication technologies, agriculture, building construction, trade, tourism, the promotion of handicrafts and other indigenous technologies, and the good governance that adheres to the maintenance of the rule of law. In short, the TVET School needs to be linked closely to the world of work. (See for example, African Union, January 2007.)

However, to enhance the overall achievement of Adwa's economic development through empowering the community to add value to locally available resources to be marketed locally and globally, the specific objectives of Adwa's OVOP should help local communities to: 1) rediscover Adwa's historical background, 2) identify locally available raw materials and tourist sites using modern technology, skills and branding, 3) design business plans, 4) assist facilitation with financial services, and 5) improve market access for the locally produced and processed materials.

Given that Adwa is endowed with many natural resources that have not been fully utilized for the empowerment of the local community through the creation of employment opportunities, and sustainability and self-reliance, the most likely projects to benefit from the implementation of the OVOP movement in Adwa may include: a) rediscovering the history of the Battle of Adwa, b) developing the tourist sites at Yeha, and c) the growth of environmentally friendly vegetable products from the Enda Shweto water dam project.

**a) Rediscovering the Battle of Adwa:** It's a given that Adwa is an African story, yet it is also a European story and the news of the battle resonated throughout the African Diaspora, particularly in the Caribbean (See Jonas, 2011). In order to understand the significance of the battle of Adwa, it must be understood from uncovering local intangible resources, and mapping out the topographical contours of the land scope of Adwa. For Africans, Adwa can galvanize those who still believe that Adwa is a source of pride for the black race worth knowing and visiting as it has an important place in world history. Thus, Adwa can rediscover itself as a source of African pride by systematically collecting and documenting topographical maps, consulting catalogues, archival and print sources that have been stored in Italy and Britain as well as archival sources and photographs available in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, etc. (See Jonas, 2011)

Though complex, in addition to the proposed Menelik's museum on Mount Soloda, it would be worth preparing guidelines for brochures to describe the battle of Adwa, led by the Italian commander-in-chief Oreste Baratieri on March 1, 1896. The guidelines could include information about 1) Saint George's Church at Soloda, where Emperor Menelik II and his entourage prayed for Saint George's blessings to devastate the invading Italian army, 2) the establishment of a war crimes museum for displaying some of the war remnants at the Kidane Mehret where Brigadier Matteo Alberrtone's army was captured, 3) the erection of war tombs at the Mount Aba Girma area in order to establish where the Italian Brigadier Vittorio Dabormid was totally ransacked and where the remaining Italian brigade was finally wiped out on March 2, 1896. Last but not least, the history of the battle of Adwa will not be complete without erecting a museum at Mount (Emba) Semayata to show visitors the terrain of the area where the patriotic Ethiopian army had their rigorous training before they ambushed and surprised the Italian invaders.

**b) Developing a tourist site at Yeha:** Yeha, which is in close proximity to the town of Adwa, dates back to seven or eight hundred years before the birth of Christ and have the oldest standing building in Ethiopia. According to archeologists and historians, Yeha is supposed to be the prime capital of the pre-Akusmite period. Not yet fully excavated, it is believed that many mysteries remain to be discovered in Yeha. Though not yet developed, Yeha continues to be an archaeologist's and tourist's paradise (Ethiopian Tourist, 2011).

To run effective and value added ecotourism in Yeha, the community in Yeha needs to be designed with visionary objectives requiring adherence to: 1) a genuine effort to improve the welfare of the local people and their economy, 2) caring about the local environment and

maintaining its stability, 3) keeping Yeha's resources intact for future travelers to enjoy the same experience, 5) equipping Yeha's tourist trade with trained guides and travel operators to give environmental awareness education, and 6) training tourist guides to impress upon visitors that they are stakeholders in the environment and therefore to value the local culture (Desta, A. 2010).

It is noteworthy that though tourism in many places is seasonal, ecotourism knows no season. If a prospective tourist site develops recreational and cultural facilities, and improves its infrastructure, tourism can enhance local economic diversification, and inject capital for the improvement of the local community. When products and services are sold to tourists, it generates taxes. The increased capital could then be used to pay for the preservation of archeological sites, historic buildings, and the revival of local traditions and crafts. To the Yeha locality, ecotourism can be the source of financial growth by expanding foreign exchange and local currency, serving as a base for tax revenue, increasing local business, reducing unemployment, and improving infrastructure. The lion's share of tourist income is being taken away or "leaked out" by the Ethiopian Ministry of Culture and Tourism. However, when the local residents gain from tourism, they are more likely to be motivated to protect the area's natural and cultural heritage and support tourism activities. (See for example, Liu, 2003)

Thus, if the local community of Yeha is empowered to administer the operations of Yeha's ecotourism industry through cooperative arrangements, tourism can contribute to local economies and encourage the preservation of an economic base for tourism. Besides learning about the history and culture of a tourist site, present-day tourists are drawn to visit and learn more if their destinations have eco-friendly programs that maintain the ecology as well as historic sites. As a result of the influx of tourists, the local economy can develop entrepreneurial opportunities and create new sources of employment. However, unless properly protected and conscientiously regulated by highly disciplined local people it is worth noting that there could be a loss of cultural values as well as damage to historic sites.

**c) Organic Farming for the Resilience of Adwa:** Hydro-geologists claim that Adwa is endowed with rich ground water resources. For example, designed and constructed in 1993 by the Metaferia Consulting Engineer (MCE) in joint venture with DEVECON of Finland, a water dam was built on a small stream that originates from the village of Mariam Shuito, located near Mount Soloda. Now the dam is having a great and beneficial impact in and around the Adwa community. The water from the dam supplies safe drinking water to small rural towns and communities around Adwa and more recently its services have been extended to the town of Axum. In addition to utilizing the water supply for backyard gardens, a reforestation program was established by the government to enhance biodiversity. If accepted by the OVOP movement, the water from the dam could be used to add value to the agricultural community. For example, if those living near it are helped to form cooperatives and are trained to upgrade their skills and retool their knowledge of pest management and the use of natural fertilizers such as animal manure instead of chemical fertilizers, they could grow and harvest organic vegetables such as tomatoes, spinach, onions, garlic, carrots, lettuce, fruit trees, and flowers. Animal husbandry practices could also increase due to the increased access to animal feed, all of which contribute to the rejuvenation of natural flora and fauna and ecological restoration.

In view of increasing environmental awareness and an increased consumer demand for a wider variety of healthier vegetables and following ethical and environmental standards, the products of the area could be marketed locally and nationally. If it is expected to empower the local farmers according the OVOP principle, in addition to expanding the land resource base, the government needs to provide financial and transportation services to help the cooperatives. It is safe to say that the community also needs to be given water pumps for irrigation, equipment for

water harvesting activities, organic vegetable seeds and fruit tree seedlings that could grow without the utilization of unhealthy artificial fertilizers. Transportation must be provided for delivery of the fresh agricultural commodities on a consistent and timely basis to designated market places. In short, government financial assistance is needed to improve public infrastructure and enhance agricultural expansion in order to take this sector forward and make it an economic engine.

#### **4. Conclusions**

As shown above, except for some informal economic activities sometimes visible in the town, Adwa is suffering from economic depression. The once very competitive school, the Queen Sheba which was once well known as the economic power of the town is totally devastated. To be repaired, it needs visionary leadership. For policy insights and as a means of rejuvenating the town, a modified version of the Japanese bottom-up, One Village One Product (OVOP) would be useful, through rediscovering the history of the Battle of Adwa and the temple of Yeha. These remain quite tantalizing places for eco-tourists who are historically and culturally versed. In addition, in an age of increasing environmental awareness, it is suggested that the endowed water dam resources of Adwa could be used to farm organic products thereby creating productive employment, enhancing income generation and eventually bringing about resilience to the Adwa community.

However, before implementing the “Think Globally, Act Locally” movements of Japan for the town of Adwa, the blue prints depicted for the development of Adwa need to include separately designed strategic plans that deal with capacity building for the training of global-minded and challenging leaders. Then, business plans essential for product or service development, operations, marketing and financial management of the above activities need to be mapped out. Like other African countries, for example in Kenya and Malawi, funding these types of productive projects may not be a problem.

Finally, it is worth noting at this juncture that the activities forwarded for the rejuvenation of Adwa are based on suggestions given by an informal focus group. I am sure that other concerned citizens with very imaginative but superior entrepreneurial skills may have plans to take the town of Adwa out of its economic misery. To these groups of individuals, as a student of developmental economics, please know that I am more than willing to learn from you. Let us share our ideas and design practical projects to bring about the economic success of Adwa, so that Adwa once again truly represents a source of African pride.



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