

The Social and Development Ministry of the Ethiopian Catholic Church – Apostolic Vicariate of Soddo

The **Apostolic Vicariate of Soddo** is a canonical jurisdiction under the Ethiopian Catholic Church, part of the global Roman Catholic Church. It operates in the **southern region of Ethiopia**, with its ecclesiastical territory extending across the **South Ethiopia Region (SER)** and the **South West Ethiopia Peoples' Region (SWEP)**. Covering an expansive geographical area of approximately **53,010 square kilometers**, the Vicariate serves a population of more than **5.93 million people**, based on the 2014 population census.

Historical Background

The origins of the Vicariate date back to **1940**, when **Pope Pius XII** established the **Apostolic Prefecture of Hosanna** to support Catholic missionary and pastoral activities in southern Ethiopia. In **1982**, the Prefecture was elevated to the status of an Apostolic Vicariate by **Pope St. John Paul II**, under the name **Apostolic Vicariate of Soddo-Hosanna**, in recognition of the growing Catholic community and increasing pastoral needs.

As the Catholic presence and responsibilities in the area continued to expand, the Vicariate underwent an administrative reorganization. In **2010**, it was officially divided into two separate ecclesiastical jurisdictions: the **Apostolic Vicariate of Soddo** and the **Apostolic Vicariate of Hosanna**. This restructuring allowed for more focused and efficient pastoral care, social outreach, and development efforts within the distinct regions.

Geographic and Administrative Structure

The Apostolic Vicariate of Soddo comprises **11 administrative zones**, drawn from two federal regions:

- **From the South Ethiopia Region (9 zones):**
 - *Wolaita*
 - *Gamo*
 - *Gofa*
 - *South Omo*
 - *Konso*
 - *Basketo*
 - *Gedeb (often referred to as Gradual)*
 - *Ale*
 - *Ari*
- **From the South West Ethiopia Peoples' Region (2 zones):**
 - *Dawro*
 - *Konta*

This vast territorial jurisdiction allows the Vicariate to serve a highly diverse population, encompassing a rich mosaic of ethnic communities, cultures, and languages. Through its **Social and Development Ministry**, the Vicariate plays a pivotal role in promoting social justice, education, healthcare, sustainable development, and humanitarian outreach, particularly in marginalized and underserved communities.

The Ministry aligns its efforts with both the spiritual mission of the Church and the broader goals of human dignity and holistic development. By leveraging its extensive network of parishes, missions, schools, health centers, and development programs, the Vicariate of Soddo continues to be a key actor in addressing the socio-economic needs of the region, fostering peace, solidarity, and hope among the people it serves.

Healthcare Activities of the Apostolic Vicariate of Soddo

The Ethiopian Catholic Church – Apostolic Vicariate of Soddo, through its Social and Development Ministry, operates a network of licensed healthcare facilities that play a vital role in delivering essential health services to communities in the Southern Ethiopia Region. These facilities, which range from primary hospitals to clinics and health centers, are strategically located across the Wolaitta and Dawuro zones to serve populations that often face barriers to accessing basic medical care. The health institutions are managed in collaboration with various Catholic religious congregations who contribute both spiritually and professionally to the delivery of compassionate and effective care.

One of the leading health centers is the **Mokonissa St. Anna Health Center**, located in Damot Gale Woreda of the Wolaitta Zone. Managed by the St. Anna Congregation and established in 1978, the facility employs 28 professional and 8 support staff, serving a catchment population of over 15,000 people. Located 36 kilometers from the diocesan headquarters, this center provides outpatient care, maternal and child health services, and community health programs.

The **Buccama St. Francisco Health Center**, established in 1981 and run by the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady (FMOL), is another major facility in Bayira Koyisha/Kenefa area of the Wolaitta Zone. With a staff of 40, including 32 professional workers, the center reaches nearly 14,000 individuals. Its health education and antenatal care services are particularly well-regarded.

In the Humbo Woreda of Wolaitta Zone, the **Humbo Clinic**, managed by the Maids of the Poor and established in 1998, provides crucial health services to a catchment population of nearly 7,000 people. Despite being a small clinic with only 7 staff members, it plays a key role in offering basic medical services and referrals to more specialized institutions.

The flagship health facility under the Vicariate is the **Dubbo St. Mary Primary Catholic Hospital**, located in Bolosso Sore, Wolaitta Zone. Established in 1977 and run by the Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, it serves an extensive population of over 324,000 people. With a total staff of 174, including 92 professionals, the hospital offers a comprehensive range of services including outpatient and inpatient care, diagnostic services, emergency obstetric care, minor surgeries, and health education. Its central location just 31 kilometers from the diocesan seat makes it a key referral hub for other facilities.

In the more remote Dawuro Zone, several smaller clinics are also making significant contributions to community health. The **Dugha Clinic**, located in Gena Bossa and run by the Capuchin Franciscan Province, was established in 2001 and serves a population of over 8,000 people with a team of 11 staff. Despite being 195 kilometers from the diocesan center, it remains an important lifeline for its surrounding communities.

The **St. Joseph Clinic**, situated in Chicho, Gena Bossa Woreda, is operated by the Sisters of Divine Providence. Founded in 2000, the clinic has a small but dedicated team of 5 staff and serves a population of more than 6,700 people. It is focused on primary care services and promoting health awareness at the community level.

Lastly, the **Bacho Clinic** in Loma Woreda's Dainama Bora area, also managed by the Maids of the Poor, was established in 2007. With a staff of 7, it reaches over 5,000 individuals. Despite its modest size and location 156 kilometers from the diocesan headquarters, Bacho Clinic provides valuable outpatient services and disease prevention programs.

In total, the Vicariate's healthcare institutions employ **280 staff members**, including **168 professional and 112 support staff**, and collectively serve a catchment population of

approximately **380,614 people**. These health facilities embody the Church's mission of healing and service, especially among marginalized and underserved populations, reflecting the Catholic Church's deep commitment to the physical and spiritual well-being of the communities they serve.

Educational Activities of the Ethiopian Catholic Church – Apostolic Vicariate of Soddo (2017 EC)

The **Ethiopian Catholic Church – Apostolic Vicariate of Soddo** plays a vital role in the educational development of Southern Ethiopia and the South West Ethiopia Peoples' Region. In the year **2017 EC**, the Vicariate managed **39 educational institutions**, including **kindergartens (KG)**, **primary schools**, and **technical education institutions**. These schools cater to students from both urban and rural areas, offering them not only academic instruction but also moral and spiritual guidance.

Kindergartens (KG)

Kindergarten education forms the foundation of early childhood development in the Vicariate's educational network. Several kindergartens operate under the Church's guidance, serving thousands of young children across the region. For instance, **Sawla Tsion Mariam Catholic KG** in Sawla Town, Gofa Zone, provides a nurturing environment for early learning. Similarly, **Hambecho St. Michael Catholic KG** in the Wolaita Zone, and **Badessa St. Michael Catholic KG** in Damotwoede, are notable institutions focused on preparing young children for future academic endeavors.

In total, the **kindergarten program** across these institutions serves over **3,000 students**, creating a strong foundation for the young learners in the region.

Primary and Secondary Schools

The Vicariate also manages a number of **primary and secondary schools**, catering to the educational needs of children from **Grades 1 to 12**. For example, **Bukama Catholic Primary School** in Sodo Zurea, Wolaita Zone, serves **203 students**, with a staff of **7 people**. Similarly, **Boditti St. Anna Catholic School** offers education for **Grades 1-8** and serves **1,003 students**, including **497 males** and **506 females** in Boditi Town. This school emphasizes both academic excellence and Christian values, contributing to the holistic development of its students.

Dubbo Our Lady Catholic School, which provides education from **Grades 1-12**, serves over **2,500 students**. The school operates under the guidance of the **Capuchin Congregation**, ensuring quality education for children in rural areas. Another significant school is the **Konto Abba Pascal Catholic Girls' School** in Sodo Town, which focuses on empowering young women. This school serves **332 female students**, aiming to provide them with a comprehensive education that prepares them for future leadership roles.

In addition to these schools, institutions like **Don Bosco Catholic Primary School** and **Boditti St. Anna Catholic KG** continue to serve the community, providing both academic instruction and Christian formation. The Vicariate's schools foster an environment where students are taught not only subjects like math, science, and literature but also ethics, morality, and spiritual growth.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Institutions

The **Ethiopian Catholic Church – Apostolic Vicariate of Soddo** also contributes to the region's development by offering **technical and vocational training**. For example, the **Konto Abba Pascal Catholic TVET** in Sodo Town provides vocational education to **210 students**, equipping them with practical skills that are essential for securing employment. Similarly, **Bruh**

Tesfa Catholic Teacher Training Institute (TTI) in Sodo plays a key role in training aspiring educators, who will go on to teach in both Catholic and public schools.

These institutions emphasize the importance of vocational education in improving the livelihood of the region's youth. By providing students with hands-on training, the Vicariate ensures that young people are prepared to contribute to their communities and the larger economy.

Involvement of Religious Congregations

The management of these schools involves various **religious congregations**, each playing a vital role in ensuring the success of the educational system. Congregations such as the **Capuchins, Cabrini Ministry, Divine Providence Sisters, and Don Bosco** work closely with the Vicariate to run the schools. Their contributions go beyond just managing the educational programs; they also provide spiritual and moral guidance to students, helping them grow into responsible and compassionate individuals.

Some schools have been **handed over to the government**, marking a shift in their administration while still maintaining their commitment to providing quality education. For instance, **Bele Filseta Mariam Catholic KG** and **Abela Faracho St. Gabriel KG** are examples of schools that were transitioned to government oversight. This handover ensures that the schools continue to benefit from state resources, which can further enhance the quality of education provided to students.

The **Ethiopian Catholic Church – Apostolic Vicariate of Soddo** continues to have a profound impact on the educational landscape of Southern and South West Ethiopia. With over **3,000 students** enrolled in kindergartens and primary schools, and additional students benefiting from **vocational training** at the TVET institutions, the Vicariate plays a crucial role in shaping the future of Ethiopian youth. By combining academic instruction with Christian values, the Vicariate ensures that students are not only equipped with knowledge but also with the moral compass needed to navigate the challenges of the world.

These educational institutions, supported by religious congregations and the broader Church, are transforming the lives of students across the region, contributing to the spiritual, moral, and intellectual growth of the next generation.

Comprehensive Humanitarian and Emergency Response in Southern Ethiopia

Southern Ethiopia continues to face a multitude of humanitarian challenges driven by a combination of environmental, health, and socio-political crises. The regions most severely impacted include the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's (SNNP) Region, particularly South Omo, Konso, Derashe Special Woredas, Gofa, Wolaita Zones, and the kebeles of Abaya Chawukare and Gurocho. These areas have been plagued by a combination of prolonged drought, landslides, flooding, cholera outbreaks, and food insecurity. The response to these overlapping crises has involved a wide range of interventions designed to address both immediate and long-term needs of the affected communities.

In South Omo, Konso, and Derashe Special Woredas, the humanitarian situation has been especially critical due to persistent drought conditions. The drought has led to severe water shortages, significant crop failure, and widespread livestock deaths, undermining the livelihoods of entire communities. As of March 2023, approximately 208 households in Konso Zone lost their homes and primary sources of income, including staple crops like maize, banana, and sorghum. These losses have severely compromised food security and left many families without the means to recover independently. Furthermore, a cholera outbreak reported on April 27, 2023,

near the border of South Omo Zone and Oromia has exacerbated the crisis, spreading across several districts and resulting in 605 reported cases and 8 deaths by June 2023. The combination of a collapsing agricultural economy and a spreading health emergency has strained the already fragile health and humanitarian infrastructure in the region.

The drought's toll on livestock has been catastrophic. With no access to adequate water or pasture, thousands of animals have perished, and emaciated cattle can be seen wandering in search of food. The loss of livestock has not only impacted food availability but also stripped families of their primary economic assets. The situation is particularly dire in Konso Zone, where communities rely on subsistence farming and livestock. The lack of rainfall and erosion-prone soils have made farming increasingly untenable, pushing these communities further into poverty. Local and regional authorities, alongside organizations such as the Ethiopian Catholic Church – Apostolic Vicariate of Soddo, have been attempting to provide emergency relief. However, logistical challenges due to the region's terrain, the spread of disease, and limited resources have made comprehensive aid delivery difficult.

In Gofa and Wolaita Zones, a humanitarian response project was launched to support communities affected by devastating landslides. These communities, many of whom now reside in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps, were provided with critical services including clean water access, improved sanitation, and mental health support. The project successfully reached over 1,700 households, with 100% of residents in IDP camps receiving at least 15 liters of clean water per day. More than 90% of households reported improved hygiene and sanitation conditions, which significantly reduced the risk of waterborne diseases. Psychosocial support was another cornerstone of the intervention, with over 500 individuals receiving trauma counseling and mental health services to help them recover from the emotional and psychological impacts of the landslides.

In addition to direct service provision, the project focused on building the capacity of local communities and authorities to manage future disasters. Health workers, community leaders, and disaster response teams were trained in hygiene promotion, trauma care, and disaster risk reduction. These initiatives were vital in creating a more resilient and better-prepared local response framework. Furthermore, the project included the development of semi-permanent sanitation infrastructure, hygiene kit distribution, and the establishment of water storage and disinfection systems. These efforts were designed not only to address immediate needs but also to support long-term recovery and resilience.

In the kebeles of Abaya Chawukare and Gurocho, another humanitarian project was implemented with a focus on improving access to clean water, sanitation, and livelihoods, particularly for women and vulnerable households. The expansion of a local borehole now provides sustainable water access for 1,500 individuals, while a rehabilitated 4.7 km water pipeline benefits an additional 4,500 residents. A 9-meter elevated tank with a 15 m³ fiberglass reservoir significantly improved water storage and delivery. Complementary to the physical infrastructure, a hygiene and sanitation awareness campaign reached over 3,000 individuals, increasing public knowledge and practices around personal and environmental hygiene. A local WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) Committee (WASHCO) was established and trained to ensure ongoing maintenance and oversight of the water systems.

The project also introduced livelihood-enhancement initiatives aimed at building community resilience. Ten Self-Help Groups (SHGs) comprising 200 women were formed and trained in financial literacy, savings, and business management, collectively saving CZK 29,005.00. Climate-smart agricultural practices were promoted through the distribution of drought-resistant

fodder and multipurpose seedlings to 300 individuals. Additionally, 1,400 chickens were provided to 200 women to support small-scale poultry farming, thereby boosting both nutrition and income. Gender-based violence (GBV) awareness training was also provided to 40 community leaders to promote gender equality and strengthen community-based protection mechanisms.

Despite these achievements, the projects faced several challenges, including logistical delays during the rainy season, technical failures such as damage to water pumps, and difficulty in changing deep-rooted sanitation behaviors. Ensuring the sustainability of infrastructure and community systems like WASHCO required continuous training and support. Nonetheless, the initiatives laid a strong foundation for long-term development and self-reliance. The combined focus on immediate humanitarian relief and long-term resilience building offers a holistic model for addressing complex emergencies in the region.

In conclusion, the humanitarian and emergency response initiatives across Southern Ethiopia have provided critical support to some of the country's most vulnerable populations. While the challenges are significant and ongoing, the collaborative efforts of government agencies, NGOs, and community members have led to tangible improvements in water access, health outcomes, and livelihood security. Continued support, capacity building, and investment in sustainable infrastructure and local governance are essential to ensure that these communities can recover, rebuild, and prepare for future challenges.