Ethiopian Journal of Education Vol.XI No.1, Sept. 1989

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# INTRODUCTION

In the last decade and a half, the Ethiopian educational system has been expanding at a rate unprecedented in its history. When compared to what it was in 1973/74 (2754), the number of primary schools in 1986/87 (8260) has grown by 299.9%. Enrollment at this level has also more than trippled and the participation rate had reached 34.1% in the same year.

Expansion, however, is not a sufficient condition for equalizing educational opportunities. How even were the growth rates and how have they affected the regional disparities in educational participation? What measures are essential to redress the imbalances? Answering these questions forms the major theme of this paper.

To set a background against which the Ethiopian case would be viewed, the problem of regional disparities in education in general is briefly examined first, followed by a summary of the development of education in Ethiopia. Then the data pertaining to growth rates and participation rates are presented and discussed in order to diagnose the current trends.

## The Problem of Regional Disparities in Education

Regional disparities in educational provision are universal problems.[1] They are found in the developed as well as developing countries along with other forms of inequalities. Of all the in-equalities that exist however, "there is no in-equality more

intolerable than the in-equality of educational opportunity."[2] Indeed, increasing equity in education has been the concern of most countries, especially of those in the third world over the last two decades.[3]

Aside from the definition of education as a "human right,"[4] which, if followed, leads to the democratization of education,[5] usually two basic reasons - economic and political - are identified as deriving forces behind the emphasis for the solution of the problem of regional disparities in education. The economic justification for the concern of regional disparities is linked to the role education plays in development. The regional disparities in education usually coincide with the disparities in the socio-economic development of the regions. In view of this, there is an assumption that rectifying the disparities in educational provision will help remedy the whole range of social and economic inequalities. The consequence of such a belief is larger investement in education in the lagging regions so that it would eventually pay off in economic terms by speeding up development.

Whereas the relationship between the disparity in education and economic development cannot be denied, the sort of their relationship needs exploration. Many studies have indicated the relationship between education and economic growth. Harbison's and Myer's[6] study of 75 countries, for example, reveals the fact that increase in expenditure on education leads to an increase in GNP, thereby indicating the positive effect of education on the economy. On the otherhand, other studies show that not every type of education is economically important everywhere.

Curle argues that "some forms of education may

have only the most peripheral impact on the economy"[7] that if educational parity is aimed at contributing towards solving economic problems, the quality of education offered should be of appropriate type while Hoselitz points out that economic benefits from investments in education are significant only in situations where developed modern economic sector, diversified occupational structure, efficient labour market and communication system exist.[8] Thus, expansion of education to remedy disparities may not be economically beneficial, causing doubt to the validity of the economic justification for measures to be taken towards the reduction of regional disparities in education.

Foster reverses the whole issue and argues that disparity in education is a result of in-equality of the regions in socio-economic development. He concurs with the commonly held view of the close relationship between regional disparities in education and regional disparities in economic development, but goes on to state that "educational disparity is not the result of chance: it is (rather) a response to a series of factors that lie primarily out of the educational system itself."[19]

The factors that affect the need for education in each region are economic according to Foster[10] and that to bring about educational parity these economic disparities have to be resolved. Thus, the reduction of educational disparity should not be taken as an objective in isolation from the policy with regard to socio-economic disparities in general. From this point of view, the concern for regional disparities in education, shown by many governments has very little economic rationale and seems to rest heavily on political reasons alone.

The political reasons for the elimination of regional disparities in education derive their strength in Africa from the cultural diversity of the countries. Most of the countries consist of a wide range of ethnic groups "within artifical and fortutiously determined frontiers."[11] The administrative divisions into regions usually reflect the differences that emanate from the cultural diversity. The emphasis on elimination of regional disparities has two purposes in this respect-using the integrative potential of the school on one hand, and avoiding the threat to nationhood that could be posed by the different treatment of the regions and consequently may be the ethnic groups.

Integration of the different ethnic groups is considered important for maintaining unity of the culturally diverse countries. In the developed countries, this does not seem a problem since socialization outside the school tends to be national. In the developing countries on the otherhand, it focusses more on family or the tribe rather than for roles in the broader societal framework.[12] Hence, schools in developing countries are expected to carry a much more responsibility in socialization.[13] Thus, it is argued that in order to politically socialize the youth from every part of a country and thereby enhance 'national integrity', every child should be given equal opportunity.

The most important reason that induces most governments to pay attention to regional disparities in educational provision is the threat posed by the existence of the difference itself. Besides its intrinsic value, education is a means by which positions and status in a society are allocated. As Glennerster states it "has come to be seen as a way of selecting those who could most effectively perform the higher-status, higher skill and leadership roles."[14]

Schools in all societies are used for upward social mobility. In developing countries more so, they are the most important channels since the dominant employer is the government and the chances of getting employed are heavily dependent on educational qualifications. Hence, distributing educational opportunites is the same as allocating the future status in the society. As a result, access to schooling becomes a "Focus for individual and group conflict."[15] Ignoring this problem could lead to political vulnerability of the leaders or even threaten the nation-hood of the given country, especially when the set up of regions coincides with the ethnic divisions. This makes regional disparities crucial issues that preoccupy the minds of the concerned authorities.

Ethiopia is, like many other countries in Africa, a country with many languages and ethnic groups. relations, however, have been perhaps unpleasant because of the past feudal system that reduced some sectors of the population to the status of vassals.[16] Hence, any issue of equity becomes important in this country. Equity in education is, however, of a particular importance to Ethiopia today, because "a socialist society is not possible without a democratic education system."[17]

## The Development of Modern Education in Ethiopia: Background to Regional Disparities

The history of education in Ethiopia dates as far back as the introduction of Christianity itself in 330 A.D.[18] The church which was founded in the 4th century was able to provide a sophisticated and peculiar type of education that takes as many as 30

years to complete,[19] and this remained as the main institution of education until recently.

In its long history of existence, church education has served as the main source of civil servants such as "judges, governors, scribes, treasurers and general administrators"[20] and as a means of passing over "great cultural values."[21] Yet, ironically, this long literary heritage, which could have been used as"... a basis on which to build an educational sphere unparalleled in Africa..."[22] has played a debilitating role in the development of the society in general and the introduction of modern education in particular.

Like church education in other parts of christendom, the primary purpose of the Ethiopian church education was to prepare young men for the service of the church as deacons and priests. But unlike many others, its access was limited to only a few people and the country basically remained "the land of the thumb print."[23] Besides, this limited church education was not evenly distributed. The 15,000 churches[24] claimed were mostly distributed in the northern regions of Gondar, Tigrai, Gojam, Eritrea and Wollo. Consequently, church education flourished only"... in the north and north-eastern parts of Ethiopia. Very little of this kind of education... penetrated the western and southern sections of the country."[25]

Like the Church, the Mosques in Moslem areas had a parallel function in running Koranic schools starting from the 7th century. But unlike the church schools, the Koranic schools were "maintained by the local committees themselves and received no state assistance of any kind,"[26] which limited the operation

of such schools only to the centres of Islamic faith where community support was available.

The first attempt to open schools of a European type was made by the Jesuits in the 16th century.[27] It however collapsed when they were expelled after Emperor Susinyos was deposed. The next trial made was in the 1820s which was met by a tremendous opposition from the Ethiopian church circle who feared the attempt made to convert the country to Catholicism in the 16th century.[28] Attempts repeatedly made after that too were of no avial. The Emperors who most of the time were preoccupied with warfare, were "content with the traditional schools of the church."[29] Generally, until the end of the 19th century, education was totally left in the hands of the church.

Towards the end of the 19th century however, several things accentuated the need for modern education. The establishment of a central state authority and permanent urban seat of power,[30] the development of modern sector economy,[31] the arrival of foreign embassies because of the recognition gained after the battle of Adwa,[32] etc. are among these factors. Thus, modern education had to be started at the beginning of the 20th century and it officially commenced in 1908 with the opening of Menelik II School in Addis Ababa, marking a significant step in the history of education in Ethiopia. Soon after, Menelik himself opened three more schools one each in Harar, Dessie and Ankober.[33] Following his example, the regional governors also opened schools in Yirgalem, Gore and Harar.[34] Mainly because of the opposition of the clergy, progress was very slow. By 1935 when the facists struck, there were only 21 government schools and a couple of other mission schools with a total enrollment of 4200 students.[35] Of

the 21 government schools 9 (42.9%) were in Addis Ababa,[36] showing that Addis Ababa, as the centre of the activities of the Government, has the lion's share from the very start.

The infant educational system was stamped out during the Italian occupation and the few pre-war educated youngsters were "purposely and systematically massacred"[37] and the educational system had to start from a scratch when the country was liberated in 1941. The main emphasis at this stage was the creation of an educational system that could provide for small corps of clerical, technical and administrative personnel to run the government machinery.[38]

To meet this need, reconstruction began with the re-establishment of the Ministry of Education in 1942. To enhance expansion, a Board of Education was established in each region and an educational tax was also introduced to partly finance education. To supplement government efforts, private and voluntary organizations were encouraged to open schools. With decree No. 3 of 1944, made to regulate their activities, the missionaries were also, for the first time, officially invited to participate in providing educational services. Whereas a committee consisting of the Ministers of Education, Interior and Foreign Affairs or their duly designated representatives[39] was established to define the "open areas" in which missions may operate, and "the Ethiopian church areas" from which the Missions were debarred, the committee was to be guided by the following pronouncements:

a) Ethiopian church areas consist of those areas in which the inhabitants adhere predominantly to the Ethiopian church faith.

b) Open areas consist of those areas of Ethiopia in which the inhabitants are predominantly non-christians.

c) Where the nature of the population makes it desirable to do so, the committee may establish Ethiopian church areas within open areas and open areas within Ethiopian church areas.[40]

Accordingly, the committee classified Addis Ababa, Wollega, Illubabor, Keffa, Arssi, Sidamo, Gamo-Gofa, Hararghe and southern Shoa as "open areas" whilst it deemed Tigray, Gojjam, Gondar, Wollo and northern shoa as the Ethiopian church exclusive areas[41] The Ethiopian church, however, after using its influence to impose restrictions on missionary activities, did not actively engage itself in the provision of modern education.

By the end of the decade in 1950, there were 540 schools of all types.[42] This was not however an "education system for the masses" since it was "highly urbanized."[43] With the signing of the Point Four Programme in June, 1951, a series of 5 year plan which aimed at "controlled expansion" were adopted.[44] However, since emphasis was on producing educated personnel to meet the manpower needs of the country, only little was achieved in offering wider educational opportunity. By 1961, which was the end of the first five year plan, only 6.6%[45] of the eligible children were attending school.

After the shock the Ministry of Education officials underwent by the facts brought to light at the UNESCO conference of African States for the

Development of Education held in Addis Ababa in May, 1961; many suggestions and plans were presented [46] to increase enrollment. Disregarding the various recommendations, the Government chose instead to continue on its series of five-year national development plans. Hence, the educational system remained an obelisk, small at the top and small at the bottom. By 1974, when the revolution erupted, only 15.3% of the age cohort were attending primary schools. In the mid 1970s Kenya and Tanzania had reached a stage of universal primary education. The other neighbouring countries, Somalia, the Sudan, Zimbabwe and Zambia had 50%, 51%, 72% and 95%, respectively, of their primary school aged children enrolled at school.[47] Thus, the participation rate in Ethiopia then was very low even by African standards.

However low the participation rate was anyway, it was not evenly distributed among the regions. The range of the participation rate in 1973/74 extended from only 9% in Gondar and Hararghe to 69.4% in Addis Ababa. The regions with a participation rate higher than the national average 15.3, were Illubabor (27.7%), Eritrea (27.2%), Wollega (25.8%) and Arssi (15.9%). The regions with a relatively average participation rate were Shoa (14.4%), Tigray (13.0%), Bale (12.3%) and Gamo Gofa (11.24%) while those least advantaged after Gondar and Hararghe were Gojjam, Sidamo and Wollo with a participation rate of 9.2%, 9.6% and 10.9% respectively.[48]

Following after the traditional political pattern, some writers assumed that educational provision favoured the northern regions. Based on the percentage of national distribution of schools, but without considering the proportion of the school

aged children accommodated in schools, Desta, for instance presents Bale, Gamo Gofa and Illubabor as the least advantaged regions.[49] Abir, further goes and generalizes that "the government educational system, and the opportunities it opens, particularly favours the traditional christian provinces of the Amara and Tigreans."[50] Despite this commonly held view however, as the preceeding figures indicate, the disparities then had no specific spacial pattern.

## Current Trends

With the demand for more and better education constituting one of the major roots of the revolution, the Provisional Military Administrative Council had to take immediate steps as soon as it came to power in 1974. In its policy guidelines issued on December 20th, 1974 it declared that "under the banner of education for all, citizens shall have th right to free fundamental education."[51] On the basis of the Government's Policy guidelines, the Ministry of Education readjusted its priorities and set its immediate goals, among other things, at promoting "universal primary education within the shortest period of time commensurate with available resources."[52] Aggregate increase in the number of schools and enrollments of students since then has been remarkable.

With an average annual rate of growth of 8.82%, primary schools have increased in 1986/87 by 299.9% from what they were in 1973/74. The number of students has also more than trippled (317.41%). Indeed, a large quantitative progress has been made.

This quantitative growth however, is not the same for all regions. Table I depicts the average annual rate of growth for schools between 1973/74 and 1986/87. The highest rates of growth are registered by Sidamo, Kaffa, Gojjam and Wollo. A re-

## TABLE I

## AVERAGE ANNUAL RATE OF GROWTH FOR PRIMARY SCHOOLS

| Regions | No. of Schools[1] in 1973/74 | No. of Schools[2] in 1986/87 | Average Annual Rate of Growth |
|---|---|---|---|
| Addis Ababa | 221 | 191 | -1.12 |
| Arsi | 119 | 348 | 8.60 |
| Bale | 72 | 330 | 12.42 |
| Eritrea | 392 | 261* | -3.08 |
| Gamo Gofa | 71 | 328 | 12.49 |
| Gojjam | 116 | 697 | 14.79 |
| Gondar | 129 | 604 | 12.61 |
| Hararge | 167 | 720 | 11.90 |
| Illubabor | 96 | 441 | 12.44 |
| Keffa | 82 | 522 | 15.30 |
| Shewa | 484 | 1475 | 8.95 |
| Sidamo | 125 | 829 | 15.67 |
| Tigrai | 154 | 87 | -4.30 |
| Wollega | 396 | 696 | 4.43 |
| Wollo | 131 | 731 | 14.14 |
| Ethiopia | 2754 | 8260 | 8.82 |

Source: Calculated from

[1] Ministry of Education, Educational Statistics for School-year 1976 E.C., Addis Ababa, MOE, 1985 p.18.

[2] Ministry of Education, Education in Ethiopia: Basic Facts, Addis Ababa, MOE, 1979 E.C., p. 22

* Includes figures of Assab Administration to permit comparison.

latively lower rate of growth is observed in Shoa, Arssi and Wollega. In Addis Ababa, Eritrea and Tigray the number of schools has actually decreased from what it was in 1973/74. The decrease in the number of primary schools in Addis Ababa has its explanation in the merger of some private schools after these schools were transferred to public ownership by proclamation No. 54 of 1975. The most plausible reason for the decline of the number of schools in Eritrea and Tigray however seems the closure of some rural schools because of the problems created there by insurgents and dissidents.

Table II presents the annual growth rate for students in each region from 1973/74 to 1986/87. The enrollment growth rates vary from only 2.86% in Eritrea to 14.86% in Keffa. The regions which have a relatively higher growth rate are Bale, Sidamo, Arssi, Gojjam and Gamo Gofa. The regions with an enrollment growth rate below the national average are Eritrea, Tigray, Addis Ababa, Gondar and Wollega. With the exception of Gondar, these same regions had also the lower annual growth rates for schools. What would be the effect of such a growth pattern on the disparities in general and the participation rate of the different regions in particular?

## TABLE II

## AVERAGE ANNUAL RATE OF GROWTH FOR STUDENTS

| Regions | No. of students in 1973/74[1] | No. of students in 1986/87[2] | Average Annual Rate of Growth |
|---|---|---|---|
| Addis Ababa | 122,116 | 233,037 | 5.10 |
| Arssi | 37,705 | 168,361 | 12.20 |
| Bale | 17,400 | 92,191 | 13.69 |
| Eritrea | 96,924 | 139,829* | 2.86 |
| Gamo Gofa | 18,782 | 78,145 | 11.59 |
| Gojjam | 40,799 | 177,749 | 11.97 |
| Gondar | 36,745 | 82,842 | 6.45 |
| Hararge | 49,383 | 187,702 | 10.82 |
| Illubabor | 30,125 | 120,397 | 11.25 |
| Keffa | 29,938 | 181,625 | 14.86 |
| Shewa | 151,606 | 563,997 | 10.63 |
| Sidamo | 54,893 | 246,647 | 12.25 |
| Tigrai | 41,547 | 63,965 | 3.38 |
| Wollega | 88,111 | 221,736 | 7.36 |
| Wollo | 43,757 | 170,984 | 11.05 |
| | 859,831 | 2,729,207 | 9.29 |

Soruce: Calculated from

[1]Ministry of Education, Educational Statistics for School-year 1976 E.C., Addis ababa, MOE, 1985,p.17.

[2]Ministry of Education, Education in Ethiopia: Basic Facts, Addis ababa, MOE, 1979 E.C., p. 11.

*Includes figures of Assab Administration to permit comparision.

Table III reveals an important characteristic of the Educational system. It takes stock of the

mean participation rate, the range and the standard deviation for the academic years 1973/74 and 1986/87 to check whether the disparities have subsided as a result of the expansion that took place in the last decade and half.

## TABLE III

## MEAN, RANGE AND STANDARD DEVIATION OF PARTICIPATION RATES IN 1973/74 AND 1986/87

| Data | N | 1973/74 | 1986/87 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mean | 14* | 14.55 | 35.44 |
| Range | 14* | 18.2 | 63.9 |
| SD | 14* | 6.78 | 15.83 |

Source: Calculated from Ministry of Education, Education in Ethiopia: Basic Facts, Addis Ababa, MOE, 1979, E.C., p. 9

*Addis Ababa not included to avoid inflation of variability.

The mean participation has increased from 14.55% in 1973/74 to 35.44% in 1986/87 which reflects the overall growth in primary education provision. However, the range of the participation rates as well as the standard deviation (SD) in 1986/87 are greater than they were in 1973/74. Hence, despite the increased educational opportunities provided disparities have actually widened rather than narrowing.

Table IV compares the regional participation rates in 1973/74 to that of the 1986/87. The table

discloses the drastic change in the relative position of the regions in the rank order of their participation rate (see arrows on the table). Spearheaded by Addis Ababa, the leading regions are Illubabor, Arssi, Bale and Wollega followed by Keffa, Shewa, Gamo Gofa and Sidamo in that order. Falling far below the national average participation rate, 34.1%, the regions at the unfavourable side are Tigray, Gondar, Hararghe, Eritrea, Wollo and Gojjam. Here seems to lie another important trend in the disparities.

The regions which have the highest participation rates, represent the geographically distinct regional profile conventionally denoted as the "South". The regions that are lagging behind are all, except Hararghe, in the north. Hence, disparities have not only widened, but widened in a zonal nature heading towards a north-south dichotomy. Why did it take this trend?

## TABLE IV
## PARTICIPATION RATES IN 1973/74 AND 1986/87

| 1973/74 (in Rank Order) | | 1986/87 (in Rank Order) | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Region | Participation Rate | Region | Participation Rate |
| Addis Ababa | 69.4 | Addis Ababa | 90.2 |
| Illubabor | 27.7 | Illubabor | 78.1 |
| Eritrea | 27.2 | Arssi | 49.9 |
| Wollega | 25.8 | Bale | 46.0 |
| Arssi | 15.9 | Wollega | 45.7 |
| Shewa | 14.4 | Keffa | 39.5 |
| Tigray | 13.0 | Shewa | 37.8 |
| Bale | 12.3 | Gamo Gofa | 33.3 |
| Gamo Gofa | 11.4 | Sidamo | 30.3 |
| Wollo | 10.0 | Gojjam | 28.3 |
| Sidamo | 9.6 | Wollo | 27.4 |
| Gojjam | 9.2 | Eritrea | 27.1 |
| Keffa | 9.2 | Hararghe | 24.1 |
| Gondar | 9.0 | Gondar | 14.4 |
| Hararghe | 9.0 | Tigray | 14.2 |
| Ethiopia | 15.3 | Ethiopia | 34.1 |

Source: Ministry of Education, Education in Ethiopia: Basic Facts, Addis Ababa, MOE, 1979, E.C.,p.9.

Why is it that the relatively advanced regions are so geographically distinct? It is difficult to be precise. However, it is clear that the disparities cannot be the "result of chance",[53] but rather responses to a series of social, economic and political factors. Among other things, three factors seem at the root of the problem of disparities.

One of the reasons has its sources in the operation of the missionaries with regard to education. Of the 174 mission primary schools that were operating in the country in 1986/87 only 7(4.02%) were located in the regions defined earlier as the church "exclusive areas"[54] which are now lagging behind. With the highly increasing number of government schools, the direct impact of mission schools in the disparities is definitely loosing weight. Yet the popularization of and the demand for modern education[55] it has created in the "open areas", cannot be undermined.

The other basic factor that has to be observed here is the economic difference between the regions. Most of the southern regions are coffee growing areas, which comprises the most important export commodity of the country. Hence, the regions differ in their relative ability to expand education through local initiative. Current policies, however, encourage the involvement of the people in each community in self-help programmes to support government expenditures on education.[56] On the otherhand, community participation in education although a sure way of expanding education in general, tends to perpetuate the regional imbalances because of the variation in the economic power to raise funds.[57] Thus, the upper hand gained by the southern regions seems, at least partly, a result of a policy that did not pay much

heed to unrestricted expansion in a situation where equality of resources does not exist.

The third factor that had contributed to the disparities is the lack of stability in some of the northern regions. The war waged there by the reactionaries has not only retarded the construction of new educational organizations but has also devastated many institutions of learning which has resulted in the decline of the number of schools than they were in 1973/74 (See Table I). The relatively low participation rates in these regions, therefore, has to be weighed both from the point of view of resources allocated as well as the damage consistently incurred on the input the system supplies.

## Conclusion

Disparities are common problems in many countries. Nor are they new to Ethiopia. However small-sized primary education provision in Ethiopia was prior to the revolution, it was not evenly distributed. What makes the current trends very unusual and critical is its zonal nature-marred of course, with the ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious differences. Such a trend is only likely to worsen the thorny problems that the country has been facing.

The natural solution to regional disparities at the primary level is the introduction of universal education, which is a stated policy of the country. Education, however, is an expensive endeavour. It can take a sizeable amount of the gross national product, if given a free hand. On the otherhand, it should be noted that money spent on education is money

not spent on other social services like agriculture, health etc., which are as much important as education, if not more.[58] Thus, with the fast rate of population growth (2.9%), the need for more investment in other sectors and above all, with the problem of maintaining national integrity still persisting, universal primary education cannot be a reality of the near future.

Besides, even if universal primary education is achieved, disparities will tend to shift to the higher levels of education unless the basic causes are resolved. The experiences of other African countries like Kenya, Tanzania and Nigeria have proved such a trend.[59] The lasting solution, therefore, rests in the treatment of the general socio-economic in-equalities. At the moment, however, it seems there is no alternative than identification of and giving priority to the relatively deprived areas in the allocation of national resources available to education. Expansion of education, without such consideration, will benefit more the already relatively advantaged regions thereby exacerbating the problem.

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