

**Rethinking Education in Ethiopia. Tekeste Negash,
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Tekeste Negash, the author of *The Crises of Ethiopia Education: some implications for nation building* (1990), has recently come out with a book, *Rethinking Education in Ethiopia*. He analyses educational issues and policies in Ethiopia from the historical and contemporary perspectives in relation to the development of the country. He also forwards recommendations some of which are in fact controversial.

In the context of Ethiopia, Tekeste contends, educational programs ought to be intimately tied up with development efforts. Development, according to him, is the physical and mental capabilities of a person to fulfil his/her basic needs of food, shelter and clothing. Thus, Tekeste argues, the strategic foundation for development in Ethiopia is the production and distribution of food. To this effect, Tekeste's concern, in this study, seems to be determining which form of education ought to be the best priority in the Ethiopian development efforts.

According to Tekeste, the assumption of the Ministry of Education that formal education will bring about development is a mistaken and a misplaced priority. His argument is based on his premises: formal education is not worthy of expansion by all measures, a system with little role for development, unless for the proliferation of unemployable citizens. Secondly, formal education has lost respect from the rural population for it has ignored their cultural heritage, thus irrelevant. Thirdly, education is only a single dependent variable which may contribute to the development of the country. Therefore, Tekeste strongly argues that non-formal education should be the best alternative and of high priority to support development programs in Ethiopia. By non-formal education, he is referring to any educational

activity organized outside the established formal system characterised by all sorts of flexibility. By and large, Tekeste concludes his study with bold recommendation: let the formal education defend itself and all efforts and resources should be allocated to the non-formal education.

For non-formal education to promote development, the author underlines, it requires clear objective, i.e., to increase and deepen indigenous and established knowledge system pertaining to food production, health, clothing and shelter. Suggesting the involvement of the Ministries of Agriculture, Health, Environment, and Education in the implementation of the non-formal educational programs, he recommends religious institutions like the Church and Mosque, and market places to be the optional centres for the execution of the programs. As for the target, Tekeste advises, non-formal education ought to address the rural population and the urban poor.

In his summary of the effort made by the bilateral and multilateral donors to the education sector, US and Sweden were considered to be the major ones. Commenting upon BESO, a program launched by USAID; aiming at improving the quality and equity of primary education, Tekeste notes that BESO had a wrong choice of support in excluding non-formal education. On the other hand, appreciating the diversified assistance made by SIDA, the author advises that in the course of change of priorities, non-formal education be SIDAS' choice of support.

While Tekeste seems against what is being promoted by the Ministry of Education throughout his thesis, he considers the following as new inputs and strengths of the

New Training and Education Policy of Ethiopia: the value given to indigenous, culture, democratic values, human right and civics, nations and nationality languages, the teacher, and the idea of cost sharing.

Overall, Tekeste's ideas may contribute to inspire debate and insight in the landscape of the Ethiopian education, even though his opinions and recommendation require critical examination.

In spite of Tekeste's allegation, the development programs currently undertaken in Ethiopia are unusually known for their being rural-centredness which are based on the principles of Agricultural Development Led Industry. The major objective of these programs is the promotion of self-sufficiency in food. Moreover, the programs promoted by the Local Development Associations and NGOs in the areas of Basic Education, Basic Health Services and Vocational Training are important components of non-formal education. Agricultural Extension Programs and the Vocational Training Centres being established in the Regional States are also aspects of the development strategies through non-formal education, but which are being emphatically advised by Tekeste. Thus, Tekeste's argument that the needs of the rural population and non-formal education are ignored is a position which appears to be unjustifiable.

Tekeste, in his controversial conclusion, argues for a complete substitution of formal education by the non-formal one. However, the fact is that both forms of education have a role and a unique contribution in the development processes. Formal and structured educational provision is essential for the growth and development of the child. Non-formal education, on the other hand, is also indispensable which has to be supported and employed in the development schemes, albeit, it hardly replaces formal system of education, particularly at the early years of children. What should have been a fair suggestion, then, is let both forms of

education complement each other, rather than the replacement of one by the other.

Tekeste seems against the expansion of formal education for it is, according to him, irrelevant to the needs of the rural population. Thanks to the decentralization of education in the country that Regions have the right to localize school curriculum to their realities. Thus, curricular materials can be established upon the indigenous and established knowledge system of the rural population. This can promote the relevance of formal education. In fact, this requires much effort, expertise and commitment on the part of the Regional and Local bodies. As a matter of fact, what is important in relation to the issue of relevance is not as such the form of education, but the thoughtful planning and implementation in line with developmental needs. That is, non-formal education, which is being prioritised by Tekeste, may equally be irrelevant unless tailored to the burning needs.

One more fear of Tekeste in the expansion of formal education is the problem of unemployment. Nevertheless, the primary purpose of education may not be necessarily employment, particularly at the lower levels. Of course, the association of education with employment appears to be archaic. One can safely argue that unemployment is not the result of expansion, but an outcome of a defective planning and irrelevant curriculum. Irrelevant educational programs, whether expanded or not, inevitably proliferate the unemployable ones. One possible recommendable strategy to fight unemployment can be incorporating in the school curricula issues, problems, causes and means of overcoming unemployment itself. To sum up, Tekeste's recommendation not to expand formal education, but the non-formal one, can fairly be substituted by: seek the secret of the planning and implementation of a relevant educational programs of both forms, and the contribution of education to development will follow thereafter.