

# Ethiopia's Educational Leap with a Proactive Leadership

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*(Wubit Demie 05-12-15)*

Two weeks ago, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) released the much anticipated National Human Development Report 2014 for Ethiopia.

It has been over 15 years since the last National Human Development Report for Ethiopia was published and since then much has changed. The Government has been engaged in a major effort to transform Ethiopian society and place the country on a trajectory to become a middle-income economy by the year 2025.

Indeed, over the last several years, Ethiopia's GDP grew by nearly 10 per cent per year, which is one of the fastest growth rates registered in the world. One of the primary movers of this stride is the achievements in the education sector, as significant attention has been given to upgrading economic and social infrastructure and promoting pro-poor spending on education, health, and other services that benefit the poor and marginalized.

The Human Development Report commended the progress dismissed all doubts asserting that: "Definitely more Ethiopians are attending school, especially in rural areas."

According to the latest Human Development Report:

*At the center of the country's strong economic and social performance has been **the Government's proactive and leading role** in shaping socio-economic policy. With its goal of making Ethiopia a middle-income country*

*no later than 2025, the Government, among other things, has been investing heavily in economic and social infrastructure, streamlining public services, revamping the tax collection system, and supporting small and medium enterprises (SMEs).*

Indeed, the long-term trends analyzed by the UNDP and its Human Development Report indicate that impressive progress in educational attainment has been made in the past 20 years.

After all, it is a public knowledge that, throughout much of the twentieth century, Ethiopia was one of the most educationally disadvantaged countries in the world. The majority of the population has had little access to schooling, a legacy that continues to affect the country's human resources.

The situation prior to 1991 was described as:

*Access to education was low: gross enrollment rates were 30 percent at the primary, 13 percent at the secondary, and less than 1 percent at the tertiary level. The primary enrollment rate was, moreover, less than half the average Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) for Sub-Saharan African countries.*

*The quality of education was also poor, with inadequately trained and poorly motivated teachers and an overall lack of instructional materials. The system was both seriously underfinanced and inefficient—one-third of all students dropped out of school in their first year. Physical facilities were dilapidated due to war damage and the absence of preventive maintenance.*

Great strides have been made in education since 1992(1999/2000). Almost all children of primary-school age now in school, while enrollment growth has also been impressive at the secondary level, for which the gross enrollment rate has more than doubled since then.

As publicized in the 2011 Welfare Monitoring Survey (WMS), the levels of literacy and numeracy (among the population over 10 years old) have increased significantly over time. Literacy rates have risen since 2004 from 37.9 per cent to 46.7 per cent in 2011. Literacy rates in Ethiopia are on target for males but lower than expected for females, even when taking into account levels of income. This is occurring despite major improvements in literacy for both sexes since the mid-2000s. Overall, the female literacy rate has increased from 27 to 39 per cent between 2004 and 2011, and male literacy from 49 to 59 percent for persons aged 10 years and older.

The progress in terms of Gross and Net Enrollment Rates had been commended by the Human Development Report. The report noted:

*While the recent expansion of education has taken place at all levels, the Government has made particular efforts towards universal primary education. Gross enrolment rates in primary school are 98.2 per cent for boys and 92.4 per cent for girls, while for secondary schools the gross rates are 40 per cent for boys and 37 per cent for girls.*

*Ethiopia has thus seen an enormous and rapid increase in enrolment in primary education that has contributed to reducing the gender imbalance within education. The Government aims to achieve universal primary education for those aged 7-14 as a GTP target by 2014/15.*

*As part of expanding educational opportunities over the past two decades, net enrolments in primary school have almost tripled since monitoring began in 1994. Currently, 85.7 percent of Ethiopian primary age children are attending primary school.*

Indeed, earlier reports attested these progresses. Primary school completion rates (Grade 8) show ongoing improvement, reaching 52.8 percent in 2012/13, representing a marginal improvement over the previous year (52.1 percent). Male completion rates reached 53.3 percent while females were at 52.2 per cent. The latest data show a lower drop-out rate from primary school for girls (15.4 per cent) than boys (15.9 per cent).

Moreover, as pointed out in the Human Development Report:

*Secondary school enrolment has risen too, but remains at quite low levels, especially in rural areas, and among the poorest groups. Only in the last five years did the gender gap start decreasing at this level of education.*

*Primary school (Grades 1-8) net enrolment rose from 68.5 per cent in 2004/5 to 85.7 percent in 2012/13, but it remained virtually unchanged over the last two years of that period. Lower primary net enrolment rate (Grades 1-4) reached 95.3 per cent, having improved by 3.1 percent -age points from the previous year. While net enrolment for both boys and girls are showing improvement, boys' net enrolment is ahead of girls' by 5.3 percentage points.*

If it was possible to get reliable age specific data, NER (Net Enrollment Rate) is the best way of measuring participation and is a more refined indicator of

coverage in terms of explaining the proportion of pupils enrolled from a specific age group. However, unfortunately, due to various reasons it is very difficult to use this indicator seriously as the age specific data we get from schools has low quality.

Nonetheless, the data on primary net enrolment ratio shows an increasing trend as the GER does. Both the GER and NER of Primary, indicate that access is improved through time. In 2005 E.C. (2012/13) NER has increased by 0.5 percentage points from the previous year and is 2.9 percentage points higher than in 2001 E.C. (2008/09)

The Human Development Report did also recognize the progress made in tertiary education.

The report described:

*Turning to the tertiary level, university education in Ethiopia has a history going back some 63 years. The first higher education institute in Ethiopia was established in 1950 as Addis Ababa University College. When the current Government came into power in 1991, there were only two government universities and 16 colleges.*

*Currently, there are 32 government universities (plus 75 private higher education institutes).*

*The student intake (new enrolments), which was less than 15,000 when the current Government came to power in 1991, has reached about 467,843 currently. The education budget, which was only 16.7 per cent of the total budget in 2004/05, reached 25.2 per cent in 2012/13.*

*A total of 237,877 students were studying in technical and vocational institutions (TVET) in 2012/13. In 2012/13, 79,786 students graduated from government and private higher education institutions.*

Indeed, previous reports had shown that the total enrollment in the higher education institutions in 1992 E.C. was recorded to be 67,682 in all programs, Regular, Evening and Summer programs. Out of this non-Government institutions had 8,376 students, which accounts for 12.4% of the total. The non-government institutions were accredited for diploma programs only. Therefore, the non-government institution share of the diploma programs accounts for 23.45%. In that year, there were 14,647 female students, which is 21.64% of the total enrollment in the higher education institutions. The participation rate for girls at this level had increased from time to time. For example, in 1991 E.C. (1998/1999), at this level, there were 9,769 female students that accounted for only 18.68%.

Statistics show that access to higher education institutions is improving through time for both sexes; and it also confirms that the role of non-Government institutions is significant.

In the year 2005 E.C. (2012/13) the total undergraduate enrolment (government and non-government; regular, evening, summer and distance programs) is 553,848 of which 166,141 are females which accounts for 30% of the total enrolment. In addition, 474,198 (85.6%) of the total undergraduate enrolment is in government institutions.

The postgraduate program is a specialized program offered under the schools of graduate studies to students who already have their bachelor's or first degree.

Completion of this program is certified by awarding either a Masters degree or equivalent, or a PhD.

The significant increase in postgraduate enrolment in the past five years of which 90.3% are from government institutions. In 2005 E.C. (2012/13), the percentage of female postgraduate students is 19.5% which is lower by 0.7 percentage points when compared to the year 2004 E.C. (2011/12).

Quality of education is another key aspect of the progress. The rapid expansion in access to and enrolment in education is a necessary but not a sufficient condition to ensure that Ethiopians have the knowledge and skills that will enable them to create or find more productive employment. There are multiple factors that come into play in this, including quality of education, employment opportunities, and the requisite environment to create or expand productive employment.

The Government is trying to improve the quality of education through the School Improvement Program financed under the General Education Quality Improvement Program (GEQUIP). This program lays the ground -work for improvements in student performance.

Examples include the creation of a conducive school environment, the improvement of school facilities, and the use of cluster resource centers, tutorial classes, student peer networking, and greater participation via student parliaments / councils.

As reaffirmed in several other reports as well, some indicators of education quality have begun to show progress. Examples include the mass hiring of new teachers that has led to the reduction in pupil-teacher ratios from 66:1 in

2004/05 to 49:1 in 2012/13 for primary education, and from 51:1 to 29:1 for secondary education. The national pupil-teacher ratio also improved slightly from 50:1 to 49:1 in the same period.

In the same period, the proportion of qualified primary school teachers increased from 60.6 per cent to 64.7 per cent, with qualified women slightly outpacing men. In addition, some 95 percent of teachers and supervisors currently meet basic professional teaching standards and receive ongoing in-service training. The Government further plans for some 220 educational institutions to complete qualification standard assessments. And teachers' qualifications will be upgraded through professional development arrangements with US and UK educational organizations.

Similarly, efforts are being made to increase the use of tutorial classes for low performing students (mainly girls), purchase additional reading materials, promote improvements in libraries and laboratory facilities, and establish cluster resource centers for multi-purpose educational uses.

According to surveys of school directors, teachers and students, there have been visible changes in teaching methodology. The tendency of shifting from a lecture ("chalk and talk") approach to an active learning approach is becoming more common in schools.

The school environment is thus becoming more favorable for the entire teaching-learning process. In most schools, the availability of facilities such as libraries, laboratories, and pedagogical centers, separate toilets for boys and girls, and playgrounds - is improving. Other important developments include giving students from less developed regions preferential treatment in admission to

tertiary education. Disabled children are being offered special education and appropriate facilities and infrastructure in regular educational institutions.

By and large, however, the main determinants of inequity and exclusion from education lie out -side the classroom: poverty and food insecurity; child labour both at home and commercially; long distances to schools (especially to secondary schools); gender disparities and in particular early marriage; and the lack of continuous access for children from pastoralist families.

Another key area highlighted in the report was the gender equity.

The Human Development Report noted:

*The recent narrowing of the education gap has contributed to the observed narrowing in the gender wage gap. On average, differences in education explain a significant fraction of the variation in productivity, wages and incomes among adults.*

*Moreover, in their roles as mothers, educated women pass on the benefits of higher education to their children. A World Bank study (World Bank, 2012a) states that children born to more educated mothers are less likely to die in infancy and more likely to have higher birth weights and be fully immunized.*

Indeed, there are much more improvements needed. As Ethiopia is starting from law-base, the comprehensive intervention should be sustained in all aspects of the sector.

However, the progresses made in the past two decades are far comprehensive than a mere access to education. Access at all levels of the education system

increased at a rapid rate in line with a sharp increase in the number of teachers, schools and institutions. There were important improvements in the availability of trained teachers and some other inputs which are indispensable for a high quality education system.

The magnitude of political commitment given to education in the past two decades can be best demonstrated in budget allocation.

As one World Bank report put it:

*The strong commitment to educational development since 1994 is reflected in budget allocations to the sector, which increased steadily to reach more than 23 percent of total government expenditures, and 5.3 percent of GDP, in 2009.*

*Both of these percentages are high relative to per capita income by international standards. The share of recurrent education spending at the woreda level was estimated in excess of 40 percent during the period 2006–09 for most regions.*

Moreover, disparities decreased through a more than average improvement of the situation of the disadvantaged and deprived groups and of the emerging regions. Efforts were made to make the content and the organization of education more relevant to the diversified needs of the population, for instance through the introduction of alternative basic education and the development of innovative models such as mobile schools.

In general, it is not always be easy to measure the entire impact of the progress of education, as it has both multi-faceted natures.

However, the aforementioned data as well as the studies of several experts of the sector attest not only the magnitude of the progress made but also its impact on accelerating social transformation.

As the Human Development Report summed it up:

*Universal access to primary education is one of the MDGs. The Government has been attempting to meet this goal by or sooner than 2015.*

*More than 16 million students are now registered at primary level, which brought the gross enrolment rate to 95.3 per cent and net enrolment rate to 85.7 per cent in 2012/13. Participation of girls at this stage is close to 50 per cent for regular programs and slightly higher than 50 per cent for evening programs.*

*Moreover, according to Well-being and Ill-being Dynamics in Ethiopia (WIDE ) data, social-education campaigns contributed to a scaling back of many harmful practices such as early marriage, female genital cutting, uvula cutting, baby teeth pulling, and the mingi - the practice in some parts of Ethiopia of abandoning children believed to be cursed.*

*In a number of places, there has been some progress in reducing discrimination and stigma, a prerequisite for excluded groups to access services more easily. In some areas, HIV treatment and more positive community attitudes have changed the lives of people affected by the virus for the better.*