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## Prospects and Challenges of Achieving the Millennium Development Educational Goals in Ethiopia: Where does Ethiopia Stand on EFA Goals?

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**Abstract:** Ethiopia has committed itself to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) aimed at eradicating extreme poverty and improving the welfare of its peoples. Providing Quality Education to all school age children with the specific target of ensuring by 2015 all children will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling is one of the major Millennium Development Goals (MDG) of Ethiopia. It echoes a commitment made by the international community to achieve universal primary education by the year 2000 in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990. This paper tries to assess whether or not the Millennium Development Educational Goal can be met in Ethiopia. Specifically, it tries to address the questions: Where do we stand today in relation to the MDG target of universal primary completion? How far from or near to the Millennium Development Educational Goal is Ethiopia? And if Ethiopia is far from meeting the goal, what would be required to achieve it, both in terms of education policy reform and domestic and international financing? The focus of this paper is on the opportunities and challenges of achieving Universal Primary Education in Ethiopia. The study is based on an in-depth analysis of data from the Ministry of Education and related international experiences. The study found out that though the changes observed in the past few years are immense, Ethiopia still remains one of the countries where the realization of this agreed development target is questionable. Despite substantial achievements in recent years in raising school enrolment rates (GER above 80% and NER above 70%) in 2005/06, millions of primary school (aged 7-14 years) children in Ethiopian still remain out of the schools system. Moreover, enrollment levels vary substantially by region and gender. Furthermore, while one may appreciate the attempts made to expand access, and improve equity, the progress so far made to improve quality is limited. According to the results of the two National Learning Assessments so far made in Ethiopia, the overall achievement of schools stands below 50% mean. This indicates that increasing access, and at the same time, improving the necessary conditions for improving quality of education is a challenge for the coming years in Ethiopia. This shows that unless concentrated effort is made by all parties, the achievement of MDG will remain beyond reach in some regions and in remote rural areas. Thus, both the Federal Government and the concerned regions need to devise special strategies and mobilize resources for implementing the strategies to achieve the MDG as planned.

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## **Introduction**

Throughout the world, people are looking to education to pave the way for a more just social order on the grounds that education in the young crucial humanitarian values such as equity, tolerance and peace. Progress in education is taken to be essential for sustainable development, environmental protection, improvement in maternal and child health and participation in democratic social and political processes. Education is also currently becoming the most important contributor to national economic growth. Empirical evidence suggests that educational investment has been one of the most important factors contributing to economic growth in both developed and developing countries. Haddad et al. (1990), for example, suggest that expenditure on education contributes positively to lobar productivity, and the economic payoff to spending on education- from both private and public standpoint- is high. They argue that improving access to and the quality of basic education is a priority in almost every low-income and middle-income country. Similarly, Raudenbush & Willms, (1991); and Lockheed & Verspoor, (1991) argue that to increase the pace of economic and social development in developing countries, schools must teach most school-age children the essential skills targeted by the primary school curriculum. These include literacy, numeracy, communication skills and problem solving skills. Access to good quality schooling is, thus, of a central importance to national development.

Primary Education is seen as the first step in laying the foundation for future educational opportunities and life long skills. Through the skills and knowledge imbued, primary education enables people to participate in the social, economic and political activities of their communities to their fullest potential. It is also seen as a basic human right that frees human beings from a state of ignorance and helps to reduce the negative effects of poverty, relating in particular to health and nutrition. In an increasingly competitive global economy of free markets, a well educated high quality workforce is seen as vital to a country's economy in order to attract foreign investments that generate jobs and create wealth. Hence, good quality primary education

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is increasingly recognized as an important foundation for economic growth and is seen as an instrumental in the attainment of other development objectives.

Yet, for all the inherent goodness that primary education offers and the zeal with which it has been pursued by all concerned for some decades, the goal of achieving Universal Primary Education (UPE) remains beyond the reach of many developing countries. This rejuvenation of educational enthusiasm called for more concerted efforts and inspired the 1990 Jomtien Conference on Education For All (EFA), where renewed support for basic education, particularly primary education, was sought from governments (developed and developing) and from major international development agencies.

It became a major outcome of the world conference on Education for All, held in Jomtien in 1990, and was reconfirmed in a series of summits throughout the decade that followed. The World Education Forum (2000) agreed on six EFA goals, which were considered to be essential, attainable and affordable, given that strong commitment are given to them by specific governments and by international communities, the Dakar Framework for Action declared that by 2015 all children of primary-school age would participate in free schooling of acceptable quality and that gender disparities in schooling would be eliminated. Furthermore, it has been declared that levels of adult illiteracy would be halved, early childhood care and education and learning opportunities for youth and adults would be greatly increased, and all aspects of education quality would be improved (UNESCO, 2000).

In the same year, the Millennium Development Goals were agreed, two of which- Universal Primary Education (UPE) and the elimination of gender disparities in primary and secondary education - were defined as critical to the elimination of extreme poverty. At the Dakar Forum, the resolution made it clear that all parties should be accountable for their record in meeting the commitments they had made. National governments agreed to dedicate themselves to securing the goals, while international agencies pledged that

no country thus committed would be prevented from achieving these goals by a lack of resources.

The goals of EFA are of enormous significance to Ethiopia. The Ethiopian Government has long recognized that the realization of basic education is both a necessity and a fundamental human right. Universal Primary Education (UPE) has been a goal for Ethiopia since the all African conference in Addis Ababa in 1961 well before the Declaration of EFA in 1990. Since then, it has been stated and restated in various education and national development plans, and reiterated by political leaders on many occasions. It is a goal enshrined within the preamble of the National Constitutions that acknowledged education as a right of every citizen. This high priority for the current Government of Ethiopia is not just rhetoric but has been reflected in increased budgetary support for the primary education sector every year.

Ethiopia was the signatory of all the regional and global proclamations and approaches to provide basic education for all. It was the signatory of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1948, which asserted that 'everyone has a right to education'. This was re-affirmed by subsequent international conferences and normative texts. Ethiopia took part in all the Regional UNESCO conferences in the early 1960s held at Addis Ababa, Karachi, Santiago and Tripoli. Ethiopia also participated in Udaipur Conference on literacy and its subsequent charter in 1983; the World Summit for Children and the Convention on the Rights of Children in 1989; the 1990 Jomtien Declaration on Education for All; the 1999 Sub-Saharan Conference on Education for African Renaissance and the 2000 Dakar Declaration. All these are the witnesses for the commitments made by the Ethiopian Governments to realize the right to basic education in Ethiopia.

However, the hopes and aspirations to universalize basic primary education in Ethiopia remained a matter of great concern at the dawn of the 21st century. Millions of children in Ethiopia still fail to gain access to schooling,

and even larger numbers among those who do enroll leave prematurely, dropping out before the skills of literacy and numeracy have been properly gained. A majority of such children are girls. As a result, the scourge of illiteracy still affects more than 60% of adults, the majority of whom are women. Although commendable effort has been made to improve the quality, equity and efficiency of the system at all levels, there are indicators that these achievements are below the expected level.

Thus, it is high time to critically analyze how near or far Ethiopia is in achieving MDG in education by raising the following research questions:

- 1) How near or far is Ethiopia from the achievement of EFA goals?
- 2) Is the current education policy framework adequate for achieving EFA goals?
- 3) What are the efforts made by Ethiopia towards the achievement of EFA goals?
- 4) What are the major problems encountered in achieving the goals?
- 5) What policy options can facilitate the achievement of EFA goals?

The primary purpose of this study was, therefore, to critically analyze the extent to which EFA goals are being addressed in Ethiopia and recommend policy options to achieve the goals. The paper summarizes recent progresses and the remaining challenges in the education sector and presents policy options for improvement. The study is largely based on document analysis. It is an in-depth analysis of data from the Ministry of Education and related international experiences.

Among the six EFA goals, emphasis is given to achieving UPE by 2015, eliminating gender discrimination and improving education quality and efficiency until 2015. The remaining EFA goals- (1) halving levels of adult illiteracy; (2) increasing early childhood care and education; and (3) improving learning opportunities for youth and adults- are not included purposefully in the study for they cannot be by any means achieved in the target year (2015), given that the Ethiopian literacy rate is currently below 30% and the GER for pre-school is below 5%.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **Current Status and Strategies for Achieving UPE: Strong Variation among Countries**

Universal Primary Education (UPE) as a concept is a chameleon, taking on expanded meanings as more is understood about the nature of the problem. It is seen, examined and explained by different people from various disciplines using different perspectives for different reasons. The UPE goal continues to shift and change as the concept of UPE is redefined and as one set of strategies leads to new problems. The way UPE has been defined has also influenced the way its status and progress has been measured and the choice of strategies adopted to pursue the goal. From a goal of simply increasing numbers in the 1950s, the targets have since expanded to include enrolment ratios, efficiency measures and, more recently, learning outcomes. The term UPE has also been used interchangeably (and often confused) with other terms such as Basic Education, Schooling for All, and Education for All. This is partly due to the problematic nature of developing suitable indicators for measuring the status and progress of universal primary education as the definition changed.

Furthermore, our understanding of the definitions, the perceived constraints, and the strategies recommended is complicated by the way in which researchers, policy analysts and commentators bring their own disciplinary views to bear on it. Economists tend to perceive constraints in terms of supply and demand factors (Colclough, 1980), sociologists in terms of participation with regard to gender, social class and ethnicity factors (Kelly, 1970) and educators from the perspective of in school and out of school factors (Postlethwaite, 1988). The multiplicity of perspectives on the one hand allows for meaningful insights but on the other hand, it may confuse the untrained policy implementer. The choice of strategies that emerge, and those that get implemented may vary with the receptiveness of those who actually implement them. Universal Primary Education in the literal sense would mean everyone in a population having a full primary school education.

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Some regions of the developing world have already reached GER's of more than 100%, perhaps indicating the achievement of UPE. Despite massive strides in enrolling large numbers of children into schools, these efforts are being defeated by population increases that outstrip the rate and ability of nations to supply places. Even with increasing resources allocated to education, many countries have just not been able to keep pace with the population growth rate.

According to the EFA Monitoring Report of 2005, expansion of schooling is getting into a slow reduction in the number of out-of-school children of primary-school age, from 106.9 million in 1998 to 103.5 million in 2001. The pace of this decline is insufficient to achieve universal primary education by 2015. Girls account for 57% of the total (more than 60% in the Arab States and South and West Asia), as against 59.5% in 1998 (UNESCO, 2005).

According to the same report, in many Sub-Saharan African countries, several Arab States and Pakistan, NERs are below 70%. Education systems in Central and Eastern Europe also stand out, with several NERs between 70% and 90%. The net enrolment ratio (NER) comes close to being an indicator of school quality because it captures the extents to which children that are in the official age group for specific levels of schooling (e.g. primary) are enrolled. NERs do not take into account enrolled children who are outside a given official age group because of early or delayed enrolment or grade repetition.

For most countries, the GER of girls is far lower than for males. In some countries the disparity is far greater than others but for most, the overall GER rates are also very low. According to the EFA monitoring report, out of 175 countries girls' participation in primary education in 17 countries remains substantially lower than boys'. With only three exceptions, all the countries with a gender parity index below 0.90 are in Sub-Saharan Africa (notably West Africa), the Arab States and South and West Asia. Factors including cost and distance from school often lead to late enrolment. In sub-Saharan Africa, children who are two or more years above the official age represent 20 - 40% of grade 1 students.

Furthermore, school systems are sometimes stretched to their limit, notably in countries where gross enrolment ratios (GERs) are below 100%. More than forty countries combine GERs below 100% and NERs below 90%, reflecting a need to increase school system capacity. Completion of primary schooling remains a major issue. In many low-income countries, children are pushed out by costs, unfriendly classroom environments or the need to supplement family income. Although survival rates to grade 5 increased in many countries during the 1990s (and in some cases rose by more than ten percentage points between 1998 and 2001), they fell short of 75% in thirty out of ninety-one countries with available data and were below 66% in half of the sub-Saharan African countries. Substantial declines in many countries reflected deterioration in education quality (UNESCO, 2005).

It is suggested in the international literature that strategies to improve participation need to focus on the adequate provision of school places, to remove barriers that prevent or inhibit children from participating and to improve quality of learning to enhance its appeal. However the evidence on the effect of quality improvement strategies in enhancing the appeal of primary education is not conclusive.

Where the supply of places is adequate, other factors may prevent children from attending schools. Costs (both direct costs as in fees and indirect costs such as foregone labour), the perceived utility of schooling, culture and religious beliefs all influence decisions on participation. Special policies to reduce constraints on participation, such as reduction of fees, locating schools closer to communities, making learning more interesting and the curriculum more relevant have been recommended (Lockheed and Verspoor, 1991; UNESCO, 1993).



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### **The Quality of Education Worldwide**

For education to play its development roles according to Lockheed and Verspoor (1991), it needs to meet minimum quality standard in terms of minimum inputs (facilities, teaching materials, qualified teachers, parent and community support), processes (effective leadership, monitoring and Evaluation, accountability, community participation, effective teaching and learning and student assessment) and outputs (high student learning, societal and individual returns). Achieving universal participation also depends fundamentally upon the quality of education available. Parents make judgments about school quality when investing in their children's education. They expect schooling to help their children develop creative thinking and acquire the skills, values and attitudes necessary for them to lead productive lives and become responsible citizens.

This being the evidence, although the right to education has been reaffirmed on many occasions since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was proclaimed in 1948, not much had been done on the qualitative dimension of learning until recently. It was on the World Declaration on Education for All (1990) and the Dakar Framework for Action (2000) that quality of education was recognized as a prime condition for achieving Education for All. The Dakar Framework affirms that quality is 'at the heart of education'. Goal 2 commits nations to providing primary education 'of good quality'. Goal 6 includes commitments to improving 'all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills (UNESCO, 1990).

Although countries were committed to provide quality education to their citizens since then, the monitoring result of EFA (UNESCO, 2005) indicates that, in many countries, children are not mastering basic skills, and low achievement is widespread. According to the report, national assessments in four Latin American countries show low achievement levels for large proportions of students at the end of primary school. In Nicaragua (2002),

70% of students reached only the 'basic' level in language and more than 80% did the same in mathematics. In Uruguay (1999), the performance of 40% of sixth graders in language was considered 'unsatisfactory' or 'highly unsatisfactory'. In El Salvador (1999) 40% of sixth-graders reached only the 'basic' level in language, mathematics, science and social studies. In Honduras (2002), the performance in language and mathematics was 'low' for 90% of sixth graders.

The report also indicated a similar situation in Africa. A study by the Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (1995-98) measured primary school students' reading literacy against standards established by national reading experts and sixth-grade teachers. In four out of seven countries, fewer than half of sixth-graders achieved minimum competence in reading. Low achievement is also evident in the study conducted in six French-speaking African countries from 1996 to 2001, 14% to 43% of grade 5 pupils had 'low' achievement in either French or mathematics. In Senegal, for example, over 40% of students had difficulty putting in order several numbers with two decimal points (UNESCO, 2005).

Despite the concern of the Ethiopian government for quality of education, current conditions in most schools throughout the country is also both compelling and disturbing. The documents of the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2005- results of the two National Learning Assessments so far made in Ethiopia), the Ethiopian Baseline National Learning Assessments (EBNLA) and the Ethiopian Second National Learning Assessment (ESNLA) conducted in 1999/2000 and 2003/2004, respectively in grades 4 and 8 shows that the overall achievement of schools stands below 50% mean. This shows the level of performance is below average according to Education and Training Policy.

Given that the test items were chosen from a range of key topics in the curriculum for the grades tested as well as that of the previous grades, these scores indicate that a large number of students were not achieving the curriculum objectives. In many parts of the country, an enormous gap

persists between the numbers of students graduating from school and those from among them who master a minimum set of cognitive skills. Furthermore, many of the quality indicators in the form of input (student-teacher ratio, student textbook ratio, facilities) and process (effective management and instructional processes) are some indicators of low quality education in primary schools.

### **Major Achievements and Challenges of Ethiopian Education in Achieving UPE**

#### **Policy Framework**

When the current government came into power, the Ethiopian education system was suffering from multifaceted problems. The main problems were related to the issues of relevance, quality, equity and access. As a result of previous neglect, Ethiopian education sector was characterized at all levels by extremely low overall participation rates (30% at primary, 13% at secondary and less than 1% at tertiary levels (MOE, 1994). Its gross enrolment rate of 30% at primary was one of the lowest in the world. It was even less than half of the average for Sub-Saharan African countries. Girls' participation rates were much lower than that of boys, especially in rural areas. In addition, there were severe regional differences in access to education, ranging from 7% in Afar region to 87% in Addis Ababa City Administrative region. The quality of education was poor. There were inadequately trained and poorly motivated teachers. There were also insufficient instructional materials. The system was inefficient and one third of students drop out of school in the first year. Physical facilities were damaged because of war. There were no preventive maintenance, and the education sector was seriously underfinanced.

In the light of these educational problems, it has become imperative for the current Ethiopian Government to design an appropriate education and training policy that gives insight into the overall educational development and reflect the international declarations on educational issues. The Ethiopian

Federal Democratic Republic constitution has declared that education is one of the fundamental human rights and thus is free of any political and religious ideology. As stated in the sections pertaining to education and human right issues of the constitution, every nation and nationality has the right to learn in its own language, at least at the basic education and general primary level. The constitution has ascertained that no tuition fee of any kind will be charged in the general education system of Grades 1-10.

Responding to the challenges of the education system of the late 1980s and early 1990s, the government designed the Education and Training Policy of 1994, which intends to systematically and gradually alleviate these educational problems. Within the framework stated in the Education and Training Policy and Strategy (ETPS), the government designed the Education Sector Development Program (ESDP) in 1996/97, which is a long range-rolling plan with a focus on the comprehensive development of education over a twenty-year period. The ESDP translates the policy statement into action. The main thrust of ESDP is to improve educational quality and expand access to education with special emphasis on primary education in rural areas, as well as the promotion of girls' education. The program was launched in 1997/98 with the government's funding and support from ongoing donor assistance. The final goal of the ESDP for the primary education is universal primary enrolment by the year 2015 and at the same time improving quality, equity and efficiency of the system at all levels.

Despite this policy stance and after more than 10 years of political commitment and separate waves of programs to improve primary education, the goal, nevertheless, remains beyond reach. If net Enrollment is considered, currently around 30% of the primary school age population (7-12) is still out of school. Whilst it is estimated that more school age population gets a chance to enter grade one, about 20% are now dropping out before completing the final grade. Of those that do complete primary school, more than 50% of those that sit the national final exams do not pass at the required level, indicating poor attainment of the most basic skills of literacy, numeracy and general knowledge.

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### **The Right to Education and Language Policy in Relation to the Achievement of Millennium Goals in Education in Ethiopia**

Human rights are based on the acknowledgement and acceptance of the human person in all of his or her diversity. International human rights such as non-discrimination, freedom of expression and religion and others are all founded on the recognition of the intrinsic value of the human person's dignity and worth. These rights are based on tolerance of human differences, such as linguistic and religious differences, and respect for and recognition of human diversity. To deny minority individuals access to certain benefits, or to disadvantage them because of their religion or language is no longer permissible. That is what could be described as the basic premise of the right to education in a nationality language which can exist in circumstances where refusing to provide public education in a particular language could be unjustified and therefore discriminatory. However, this does not mean that any minority demand for education to be provided in a specific language is automatically a violation of human rights, regardless of the costs or practical difficulties this may raise

Political support for education is gathering momentum internationally. Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989 (and now the most widely ratified instrument internationally), the Convention on the Rights of the Child makes an important rallying point for governments regarding education policies and interventions. Article 28 of the Convention provides for education as a basic right and for free and compulsory primary education as a matter of urgent priority. Nevertheless, the goal of basic education for all children is far from being achieved. Language barrier is one among the various challenges of achieving universal primary education worldwide.

Almost all countries in the world are multiethnic and multilingual. If UNESCO's dreams are to come true, most children will soon attend school. For this to become a reality soon, all the barriers to basic education including the language barrier need to be avoided. The choice of the medium of

instruction in societies with a plurality of languages is fundamental for the learning process.

Although Ethiopia is a multilingual country, only one language had been a medium of instruction through out much of its history. It is only in 1974, when the socialist government took power that the use of nationality languages was considered as an issue for instructional purpose. Why did it take such a long time for nationality languages to become a policy issue in Ethiopia? It is worth noting at this juncture the country's history, and mainly its government system. For several centuries, Ethiopia had been under the feudal monarchy. It was, thus, quite inconceivable for the imperial regime to address nationality issues that are enshrined in democratic values. The governments' assertion to bury nationality languages out of the policy agenda may also correspond with the country's long history of independence. Successive imperial regimes advocated the use of one national language, asserting its impact for the country's integrity. Introducing other languages for instructional purpose had been conceived as courting national disintegration.

The socialist government that assumed leadership in 1974 was clearly influenced by the Marxist theory. Its shift from promoting one language as national unity to encourage the use of other languages in Ethiopia was thus consistent with its political orientations. One notable effort during this time was the policy decision to conduct literacy programs in fifteen nationality languages. The literacy campaign started in 1979 and ended only with the fall of the government in 1991. The other policy decision was transcribing these languages in the Ethiopic script (traditionally used for Semitic languages in the country). All of these languages were in unwritten form until that time. The use of these languages was limited to the informal education only. The government did not push forward to use them as instructional language in the formal system.

When the current government succeeded to power in 1991, a favorable condition was created for nationality languages to reemerge as major policy

issue. Two factors, among others, accentuated the need. The first was the political orientation of the government. Having replaced the socialist regime, the government slanted to introduce democracy and its accompanying values. Liberty, equality, justice, truth, and respects for human rights became the agenda of the government. The second factor was unparalleled premium on nationality based politics in the country's history. The people that were conquered by a former ethnic group were labeled, suppressed nationalities whose language, tradition and culture had been subjugated. The government then stood to redress the alleged inequalities sustained by these nationalities. The use of nationality languages thus got the most fertile ground to reappear as a policy issue. Currently, 22 nationality languages are used as medium of instructions at the primary level, and this has contributions for the improved access in the country.

### **The Practice of Decentralization in Education and the Achievement of Millennium Goals in Education**

Advocates of decentralization repeatedly presented strong arguments to support why decentralized systems are superior to centralized ones, particularly for the provision of public services. Economists, political scientists, and specialists in public management argued that decentralization increases efficiency by subjecting public spending priorities to local demand. In addition, they pointed out that because information on the performance of government institutions like schools and health clinics is more readily available to citizens in decentralized systems, they are in the best position to hold local politicians accountable by rewarding and punishing them at election time. Information on local needs is also more available to decision-makers because they have daily contact with citizens.

Since 1994, the government of Ethiopia has embarked on a decentralization process. Decentralization has opened the way for regional and local governments, and through them, local communities to take greater responsibility, financial and otherwise, for managing their own affairs, including the delivery of social services such as education.

However, studies show that there is tension between decentralization efforts and the need for central control. Decentralization seldom actually occurs, but seems instead to be absorbed the existing centralized or semi-centralized structure of educational governance, particularly at the regional and Woreda levels. Decentralization is believed to be successful when it reaches schools and school personnel including students. Thus, effort should be made to bring decentralization closer to schools.

### **Access at all Levels of Education Improved**

There has been dramatic growth in enrolments throughout the education system in recent years. Aggregate enrolments in Grades 1-12 rose at a steady pace of about 9% a year between 1994/95 and 2003/04, and in grades 1-4, which is the first cycle of primary schooling, it grew even faster at an average of 15% a year. By 2003/04, the number of primary school pupils was 9.5 million.

The growth in enrolments has in turn increased the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), a common indicator for measuring coverage at all levels in the system. The increase in primary enrolment has been particularly remarkable. GER for complete primary level (1-8) is increasing every year. In 2003/04, the primary school-age population of Ethiopia was estimated to be 13,950,688, among which 9,542,638 children were enrolled in both program (regular and evening programs) of primary school. As can be seen from the table below, in the past 10 years GER has been increasing at an alarming rate in both sexes. The GER for the primary schools increased from 37.4% in 1995/196 to 68.4% in 2003/04 and to 79.8% in 2004/05. In 1995/96, among school age children, 62.6% were out of school.

Compared with 2003/04, GER shows an increase of 11.4% in 2004/05 which was 37.4 for both sexes (12.4 for female and 10.6% for male). The GER of the first cycle (Grades 1-4) has increased by 19.7% while the second cycle (Grades 5-8) has increased by 12.7% in 2004/05. GER has increased for girls by 25.3% in the first cycle and by 19.7% in the second cycle in the same year. Overall, the GER for primary (Grades 1-8) has increased by 22.4% for boys and 20.7% for girls.



**Table 1: Gross Enrollment Ratio of Primary Schools by Cycle**

Year	Primary 1 <sup>st</sup> Cycle (1-4)			Primary 2 <sup>nd</sup> Cycle (5-8)			Both cycles (1-8)		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1995/96							44.9	29.4	37.4
1999/00	88.6	61.0	75.0	31.9	19.3	25.7	60.9	40.7	51.0
2000/01	95.3	70.2	83.0	38.3	22.9	30.8	67.3	47.0	57.4
2001/02	96.2	73.3	84.9	45.4	27.4	36.5	71.7	51.2	61.6
2002/03	94.6	73.5	84.2	52.5	31.9	42.4	74.6	53.8	64.4
2003/04	95.2	78.3	86.9	57.0	36.9	47.1	77.4	59.1	68.4
2004/05	109.8	95.5	102.7	62.0	42.6	52.5	88.0	71.5	79.8
2005/06	123.9	111.2	117.6	67.4	49.8	58.8	98.6	83.9	91.3

Source: Education Management Information System (EMIS), Ministry of Education, 2005 and 2006, Addis Ababa.

The increment for females is also encouraging. GER for female students was below 20% 1994/95 and this was raised to 83.9% in 2005/06. There is a significant increase of gross Enrolment for girls at the first cycle primary schools, an increased from below 20% in 1994/95 to 11.2% in 2005/06. As indicated in the table, the last seven years (1999/00-2004/05), the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for the first cycle primary schools (1-4) has increased by 11.9%, while the second cycle ( grades 5-8) has increased by 21.4%. Overall the GER for the whole primary level (1-8) has increased by 17.4 % in 2003/04 and by 22.4% in 2004/05. Although it is clearly observable that the GER for primary education, which was only 30% in 1994/95, is tripled (91.3%) in 2005/06, it is also quite clear that millions of school-age children are still out of school.

**Table 2: Net Enrollment at Primary level (1-8) in Percentage**

Year	Male	Female	Total
1994/95			
1999/00	51.2	36.6	44.0
2000/01	55.7	41.7	48.8
2001/02	59.0	45.2	52.2
2002/03	60.6	47.2	54.0
2003/04	62.9	51.8	57.4
2004/05	73.2	63.6	68.5
2005/06	81.7	73.2	77.5

Source: *Education Management Information System of Education, 2005, and 2006, Addis Ababa*

Although this is an encouraging sign towards the achievement of the universal primary education by the 2015, GER is not a good indicator of primary school coverage for it includes the over- and under-aged children. One of the key criteria for UPE is the achievement of Net Enrollment Ratio (NER) close to 100%. NER is the best way of measuring school coverage and is a refined indicator of access, for it indicates only the eligible school age children. Only countries with high intake levels of official school age will achieve the goal in these terms.

Analysis of NET data in Ethiopia shows that Ethiopia has low a chance of achieving UPE in 2015. According to the EFA Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO 2002), only those countries whose NER is 80% and above in 2005 can achieve UPE in 2015. In this respect, Ethiopia faces a great challenge with 68.5% NER in 2004/05. If the Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) is considered, the number of out of school age children is very high (31.5%). It is even worse for girls. Nearly 36.4% of the school-age girls are out of school in the year 2004/05.

**Table 3: Net Enrollment Ratio of Primary Schools by Region**

Year	2004/05			2005/06		
Regions	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Addis Ababa	91.4	100.7	96.2	94.7	107.7	101.2
Gambella	97.9	73.3	86.0	110.0	77.9	94.5
Harari	80.8	65.8	73.5	92.1	77.1	84.8
Ben-Gumuz	92.2	74.6	83.6	91.7	77.3	84.7
Dire Dawa	68.0	55.7	62.0	64.7	55.6	60.3
Tigray	73.8	78.9	76.3	85.0	88.8	86.8
SNNPR	78.6	59.3	69.0	83.5	66.9	75.2
Oromia	82.8	67.0	68.3	83.7	70.5	77.2
Amhara	68.9	67.7	68.3	77.2	76.4	76.8
Somalia	25.0	17.2	21.4	31.3	22.5	27.2
Afar	13.9	17.2	12.6	16.6	14.5	15.6
<b>National</b>	<b>73.2</b>	<b>63.6</b>	<b>68.5</b>	<b>78.0</b>	<b>69.8</b>	<b>73.9</b>

Source: Education Management Information System (EMIS), Ministry of Education, 2005 and 2006, Addis Ababa

The situation is more disturbing when one looks at the disparity or inequality of educational opportunities across regional states. The regional comparison in table three clearly shows how some regions such as Afar and Somalia are far from the national (Ethiopia) level. Even the GER of these two Regional States (it is below 30%), is disturbing when one thinks about the achievement of universal primary education in 2015. Their NER (Afar 14.5% and Somalia 22.5%) clearly shows the regional disparity of educational provision in Ethiopia. Only Addis Ababa (101.2%), Gambela (94.5.0%), Tigray (86.8%), Harari 84.8%, and Benshangul-Gumuz (84.7%) have NER above 80% in 2005/06.

**Table 4: Gross and Net Enrollment Ratio of Primary Schools by Region**

Regions	Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) 2003/04	Net Enrolment Ratio (NET) 2004/05		
		Male	Female	Total
Addis Ababa	142.6	91.4	100.7	96.2
Gambella	106.6	97.9	73.3	86.0
Harari	100.5	80.8	65.8	73.5
Ben-Gumuz	100.5	92.2	74.6	83.6
Dire Dawa	83.2	68.0	55.7	62.0
Tigray	80.6	73.8	78.9	76.3
SNNPR	74.2	78.6	59.3	69.0
Oromia	72.7	82.8	67.0	68.3
Amhara	61.8	68.9	67.7	68.3
Somalia	15.1	25.0	17.2	21.4
Afar	14.8	13.9	17.2	12.6
<b>National</b>	<b>68.4</b>	<b>73.2</b>	<b>63.6</b>	<b>68.5</b>

*Source: Education Management Information System (EMIS), Ministry of Education, 2005, Addis Ababa*

### **Equity Remains a Challenge**

Equity refers to the state, ideal, or quality of being just, impartial, and fair. In an educational setting, equity can be expanded to indicate a state in which all children-minorities and non-minorities, males and females, successful students and those who have fallen behind, and students who have been denied access in the past-have equal opportunities to learn, to participate in challenging programs, and to have equal access to the services they need in order to benefit from that education. However, this paper tries to address the equity issue in terms of gender disparity (male/female).

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### **Gender Disparity**

Gender equality is a more complex notion that is also more difficult to measure. Full gender equality would imply that girls and boys are offered the same chances to go to school and that they enjoy teaching methods and curricula free of stereotypes and academic orientation and counseling unaffected by gender bias. It also implies equality of outcomes in terms of length of schooling, learning achievement and academic qualifications and, more broadly, equal job opportunities and earnings for similar qualifications and experience (UNESCO, 2004).

Although many countries around the world have made significant progress towards gender parity at primary and secondary levels over the past decade, large gaps remain, particularly in the Arab States, Sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia. Girls accounted for 57% of the out-of-school children of primary school age worldwide in 2001 and for more than 60% in the Arab States and in South and West Asia. Out of 175 countries, girls' participation at primary level in 71 countries is substantially lower than that of boys. Gender disparities become more extreme at secondary level and in higher education. Of eighty-three developing countries with data, half have achieved gender parity at primary level, less than one-fifth at secondary and only four at tertiary. Almost two-thirds of the world's adult illiterates (64%) are women (UNESCO, 2005).

Women's access to education has been recognized as a fundamental right, and increasing their access to education is among the educational goals of Ethiopia. In recent years, women's issues have come into the agenda of the country. Cognizant of the important role women have to play, the government of Ethiopia has put into place a variety of strategies designed to increase female participation rates in education and consequently in the overall development process. There is a consensus that the development targets in the country cannot be achieved with the continued marginalization of women as a group. In the last few years much effort, time and money has

been spent in fully apprehending the big picture of disadvantage of women in the country.

As a result, the female primary school participation rate has grown at the rate of 16.4% over the last 5 years. When this is seen in terms of rural and urban areas, the participation of females in the primary education has increased at the rate of 24.8% in the rural and at a rate of 7.7% in the urban communities indicating that the issue of equity is being well addressed. There is a significant increase of Gross Enrolment Ratio for girls at the first cycle primary schools, which is increased from below 20% in 1994/95 to 78.3% in 2003/04. At the complete primary school GER for female students was below 20% 1994/95, and this was raised to 83.9% in 2005/06 (see Table 1 above).

Despite these achievements, according to the current data, females' participation and academic performance at all levels of education in Ethiopia is lower than that of male. This is because of gender stereotype prevalent in the society which perceives males as dominant and women as subordinate in any public sphere.

The year 2005 is the target for achieving Gender Parity Index of one in primary and secondary education. Parity is a purely numerical concept: reaching gender parity implies that the same proportion of boys and girls - relative to their respective age groups - enter the education system and participate in the full primary and secondary cycles. It is measured by the ratio between the female and male values for any given indicator, with parity being equal to one. This is the Gender Parity Index (GPI).

Despite a significant shift towards greater gender parity, Ethiopia is far from achieving GPI of one in 2005. Girls in Ethiopia continue to face sharp discrimination in access to schooling. The Gender Parity Index at the national level in 2003/04 is 0.81 indicating that girls' participation is by 20% lower than that of boys. This is true for all regions except for Addis Ababa and Tigray whose GPI is one. Somalia, which has a GPI of 0.66, has the largest disparity index between boys and girls.

In 2005/06, 16.1% of the school-age girls are out of school. When the Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) is considered, the number of out of school age girls is very high (26.8%). This indicates that around one third of the school-age girls are out of school in 2005/06. The situation is more disturbing when one looks at the gender disparity across regional, states. The NET of girls in Somalia and Afar Regional States are only 22.5% in 2005/06 (Table 3).

### **Quality: A Big Challenge of Ethiopian Education**

The World Declaration on Education for All (1990) and the Dakar Framework for Action (2000) — the two most recent United Nations conference declarations focusing on education — recognize quality as a prime condition for achieving Education for All. The Dakar Framework affirms that quality is 'at the heart of education'. Goal 2 commits nations to providing primary education 'of good quality'. Goal 6 includes commitments to improving 'all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

While one may appreciate the attempts made to expand access, and improve equity, the progress so far made to improve quality is limited in Ethiopia. Quality in education is relative and not easy to measure. Many educators measure the quality of education in terms of input, process and output. Although process and output are equally important, they are not good measures in very poor countries like Ethiopia where the minimum amount of inputs are not available. Thus, this section tries to assess quality in terms of input which is believed to be strongly determined by the material and human resource.

**Inputs:** This category includes material resources (textbooks, learning materials, classrooms, libraries, school facilities) and human resources (most importantly, teachers). The indicators most widely used to measure these inputs are pupil/teacher ratios, teachers' qualification and salaries, public current expenditure per pupil and proportion of GDP spent on education.

## Teachers

The role of teachers in overhauling the educational system and improving the quality and standard of education is very crucial. The efforts so far made to increase the number of qualified teachers and improve their professional capacity are commendable. Existing teachers of the primary levels have been re-trained using short and long-term approaches such as orientation programs, residential and distance learning programs.

Achieving UPE alone calls for more and better-trained teachers. Available data suggests that large proportions of primary school teachers lack adequate academic qualifications, training and mastery of content. National standards for qualification of primary school teacher ranged from certificate (10+1) for teachers teaching at the first cycle (1-4) and diploma (10+3) for the second cycle (5-8).

**Table 5: Percentage of Certified School Teachers by Cycle and Regions in 2004/05**

Regions	First cycle primary school(1-4)	Second cycle primary (5-8)
Addis Ababa	96.9	85.6
Gambella	90.8	53.6
Harari	83.7	34.6
Ben-Gumuz	99.5	68.5
Dire Dawa	91.8	60.7
Tigray	93.2	50.5
SNNPR	99.4	29.7
Oromia	96.5	20.2
Amhara	97.0	35.6
Somalia	91.8	3.5
Afar	83.6	52.6
<b>National</b>	<b>96.5</b>	<b>32.1</b>

Source: Education Management Information System (EMIS), Ministry of Education, 2005, Addis Ababa



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At the national level in 2004/05, 97.1% of the first cycle primary school (grades 1-4) of the teaching force met the national minimum standard, whereas only 54.8% of teachers teaching at the second cycle (5-8) met the specified standard. As regards teachers' mastery of the curriculum, a recent study found out that some primary school teachers do not possess adequate knowledge on the requirements of the curriculum (Derebssa 2001). The table above shows the proportion of certified teachers of all levels regionally and at the national level. Furthermore, the distribution of teachers is unequal within the regional states, with disadvantaged regions typically receiving unqualified teachers particularly at the second cycle primary schools. While the proportion of qualified teachers in Addis Ababa is more than 80% at the first cycle primary school and the second cycle primary schools, it is below 30% in some regions. For example, the proportion of qualified teachers of the second cycle primary school in Somalia is only 3.5%.

### **Student-Teacher Ratio**

The number of students per teacher is a frequently used quality signal. Though the impact on learning outcomes remains a subject of debate in the developed countries, the very large class size observed in the Ethiopian primary schools (e.g. one teacher for 60 or 70 pupils) is not conducive for adequate learning. In the countries with the highest pupil/teacher ratios, barely one-third of students who start primary school reach grade 5.

**Table 6: Pupil Teacher Ratio at Primary Schools by Level and Region in 2004/05**

<b>Regions</b>	<b>First cycle primary school(1-4)</b>	<b>Second cycle primary (5-8)</b>
Addis Ababa	36	37
Gambella	38	49
Harari	22	22
Ben-Gumuz	47	57
Dire Dawa	42	40
Tigray	50	44
SNNPR	71	59
Oromia	90	58
Amhara	66	66
Somalia	109	30
Afar	34	27
<b>National</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>55</b>

In Ethiopia the standard set for the pupil-teacher ratio is 50 for the primary levels. The primary pupil teacher ratio over the last ten years has shown increasing trend at national level-from 37 in 1995/96 to 56 in 1999/2000 and further increased to 65 (71 for the first cycle and 55 for the second cycle) in 2003/04.

The national data shadows the reality at regional levels. As indicated in Table 6, there are regions with PTR 90 (Oromia) and the situation at school level is worse, PTR reaching 120 in some cases. Teacher numbers, thus, remain a problem in Ethiopia.

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### **Learning Materials**

The quality and availability of learning materials strongly affect what teachers can do. To achieve UPE, unprecedented refurbishing and building of classrooms is needed in many countries. Clean water, sanitation and access for disabled students are vital.

The other quality factor-availability of student textbook in the school- has also been given attention. The result is that the student-book ratio which stood at 1:5 and in some cases 1:7 have been improved achieving a 1:2 and 1:3 student-book ratio. Although this is an encouraging trend at the national level there is an acute lack of textbooks at school level due to an inefficient distribution system and malpractice.

### **Conclusion and Policy Options**

When the current Government came to power, the Ethiopian education system was suffering from multifaceted problems, and this made it imperative for the Government to design an appropriate education and training policy. Remarkable progress has been achieved in all aspects of education (i.e., access, equity, efficiency and quality) since the implementation of the policy. Since 1994, the government of Ethiopia has embarked on a decentralization process. Decentralization has opened the way for regional and local governments. Through decentralization local communities take greater responsibility for managing their own affairs, including the delivery of social services such as education.

More than a decade after launching the 1994 New Education and Training policy, the Government can look back with justifiable pride on the progress so far achieved. The very rapid growth of primary education reflects a genuine commitment to transform the country's historically elitist system into one that serves all Ethiopian children. There is a dramatic growth in enrollment throughout the education system in recent years. Ethiopia has also made a significant progress towards gender parity at primary and

secondary levels over the past decade. Considerable effort has also been made to address the quality and efficiency issues.

However, although considerable efforts have been made to provide basic education to all school-age children, millions of school age children (bout 2 million children in 2005/06) are still out of school. The goal of basic education for all children is far from being achieved in 2015 in some localities, particularly in Afar and Somalia. Although commendable effort has been made to improve the quality, equity and efficiency of the system at all levels, there are still indicators that the situation is not as expected. On top of this, wastage in the form of drop-outs, absence of relevant and adequate educational materials, poor learning environment, shortage of qualified educational personnel, coupled with acute financial constraints have negatively affected the improvement in the overall education system of the country. Thus, in addition to continuing progress in the sector, aggressively seeking and strengthening a vital and viable policy option to address these challenges and meet the Millennium Development Goal need to be a priority. In the light of these constraints, the following policy options are recommended:

### **Re-considering the Restructuring of Primary Schools**

To achieve UPE by the international target year (2015), we are left with only 8 years. But at national level the NIR is at its lower stage (54.9) in 2005/06. The achievement of UPE is the result of what we have in grade 1 at present; because after 8 years we will be taking the grade 8 students who are the present grade 1 children. Thus, to achieve UPE in 2015, all school age children should be admitted to first grade in 2007/08. However, given the current starting point, universalizing eight years of primary schooling is not viable.

Five years of primary schooling is generally considered as a minimum for a person to become permanently literate and numerate. Many countries made the commitment in the United Nations 2000 Declaration on the Millennium

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Development Goals to ensure that all children would be able to complete at least five years of primary schooling by 2015. Ethiopia, therefore, needs to consider the level of primary schooling in order to achieve universal primary education by 2015. In this context, instead of extending primary schooling to eight years of schooling, the Ethiopian Government needs to put the emphasis on universalizing six years of primary education.

### **Different time-bound Goal Setting for Different Areas**

The current conditions differ so widely across regional state. For example, GER at primary school for Afar and Somalia is below 30% in 2005/06 while it is above 80% for all other regions. Setting different time-bound targets for these regions is, therefore, a practical necessity. While the goal of universalizing primary schooling is well within reach in most regions and urban areas by 2015, it is a more demanding goal in some regions and rural areas. This calls for different time setting for the achievement of universal primary schooling in 2015.

### **Giving Due Emphasis to Quality Improvement**

Improving the quality of primary education demands planned and properly designed capacity building programs for teachers, school directors and other officials work in the education system. Moreover, improving school curriculum, school inputs, the examination system and the methodology of teaching should be given due emphasis by all stakeholders and more effort is needed to monitor outcomes (especially student learning). This provides an essential platform for tracking over time whether policies and incentives are truly producing effective services.

### **Bringing Decentralization nearer to Schools**

Decentralization has appeared on the political agenda for almost a decade and has become evident in Ethiopia. Ethiopia is currently undergoing a far-reaching decentralization of Education, where accountability and

responsibility are transferred to lower administrative levels. However, decentralization of education to sub-national governments does not in itself empower schools to be responsible for their actions. Decentralization should reach schools and local communities to empower them further still.

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