

## INEQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION IN ETHIOPIA: A CHALLENGE TO A PLURAL SOCIETY

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**ABSTRACT:** *Socio-economic and educational disparities exist between various regions and social groups in Ethiopia. The disparities in higher education opportunities between the sexes, regions, and urban/ rural locations in Ethiopia were investigated. Also a brief assessment of the disparities in general education was made. Data for over seven years, show that the most advantaged groups are the males when compared with the females; Addis Ababa, Eritrea, Tigray and Gojjam regions when compared with the rest of the regions; and 10 major cities (Addis Ababa, Asmara, Dire Dawa and Gonder being the top ones) when compared with the rest of the country (rural locations). Their higher education admission ratios were about 87% (males), 55% (4 regions), and 56% (urban) respectively, while their population ratios in Ethiopia are only about 50%, 23% and 6% respectively. It is argued that though having academic excellence and equity together might seem contradictory, there is a need for the development of some measures which accommodate academic and socio-political standards if regionally, ethnically and gender balanced socioeconomic development is expected in Ethiopia.*

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper, attempts to show the large inequalities that exist between geographic (administrative) regions, sexes, urban-rural locations, and center-periphery regions in higher education admissions in Ethiopia. It should be noted that regional disparities (at district levels) to some extent imply ethnic disparities in Ethiopia - except the larger cities like Addis Ababa which tend to be multiethnic. Brief remarks are made concerning higher education in Ethiopia in general, and some options have been forwarded in order to redress the inequality of opportunity. Where appropriate, other issues related to education in general are also discussed.

Since equality of access to primary and secondary education are the determining factors for access to higher education, a brief assessment of the status of general education (concerning disparity) is made.

In this paper "inequality of opportunity", "disparity between social groups", "inequity in higher education" and "inequality of access" are used synonymously. They refer to differences between various social groups in educational opportunities. The provision, distribution and redistribution of proportional (equal) expenditure, facilities, materials, schools, programs, teachers, etc. to all citizens or major social groups (sexes, ethnic groups, regions, etc.) are the major issues often raised in connection with discussions on inequality of opportunity (e.g. Winkler, 1990; Tilak, 1987). The degree of access to higher education by various social groups is the focus of the paper. The major questions (issues) raised are: How much inequality of educational opportunity exists between various social groups? Who are the most and least advantaged social groups? What could be done to reduce the inequality of opportunity to higher education?

Inequality of education opportunity exists in many developed and developing countries. Substantial inequalities continue to exist in public expenditure, in use, in opportunity, in access, and in outcomes (Grand, 1982; Winkler, 1990). In many countries public expenditure favors the urban areas, the upper class and those in power. All governments including Ethiopian Governments state that they will promote equality of opportunity and will redistribute resources accordingly. However, the practice is that the rich and the powerful tend to get the larger share. Studies concerning the USA, UK, France, India, Malaysia, Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Kenya, and most Latin American countries show that the better to do have better opportunities, access, share, use and outcome (e.g. Grand, 1982; Winkler, 1990; Carrelli & Morris, 1979; Tilak, 1987; Premaratne, 1976; Thompson *et al.*, 1977; Decker *et al.*, 1976). For instance Fields (cited in Grand, 1982) concluded that the children of the relatively well to do benefit more from Kenya's education system than the children of poorer families and that this tendency is most pronounced at the higher education level. Also, Meerman (cited in Grand) found that the distribution of public expenditure per person of school age in Malaysia favored the rich more than the poor. Often, these poor groups tend to be certain ethnic groups-like the Blacks in the USA, backward castes in India, the Tamile and Sinhala speakers in Sri Lanka, and the Malay in Malaysia.

Though it is often argued that education is the greatest equalizer of the conditions of man, the inequality tends to persist all over the world. One should keep in mind that some amount of inequality and differences would exist between individuals and social groups due to variations in natural potentials, differences in mental processes of learning, physical state, achievement motivation, and social-contextual factors. Obviously, the privileged tend to have stimulating

home and social background, be highly motivated, delay gratification and enjoy social benefits, while the lower classes and backward groups tend to have dull environment and low aspirations, be concerned with subsistence (survival) issues and to be impulsive and fatalistic. Hence, it is not only education which could change their lot, but the total socioeconomic changes and multidimensional interventions. Since educational experience plays a significant role in one's life, social place, and survival in society, the provision of a fair and common start (chance) for all would perhaps reduce the inequality to a large extent.

With these broad perspectives in mind, we will start with the discussion of the situation in general education.

### **GENERAL EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES**

Education is considered as a means of transforming society and economic development, inculcating vocational skills, developing independent, rational and scientific thinking, and preserving tradition and heritage. All nations attempt and claim to develop an "effective citizen" who has the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and the total personality who will fit in and serve the socio-economic system. But it must be noted that the culture and tradition of the society at large, the ideology of the ruling elite, the democratic practices of the country, the economic development level of the specific country, and the availability of resources are factors that tend to affect or determine the aims, objectives, priorities, and strategies of education and training (Aggarwal, 1987; Habtamu Wondimu, 1992).

Various studies and reports indicate that there is a reciprocal relationship between education and development. That is, countries with higher levels of human resources development tend to experience more rapid rates of economic growth (Tilak, 1989; ADB, 1985). Of course economic development is not affected only by education, but also by such factors as population growth rate, the investment level, the socio-economic environment, and the availability of necessary resources. A recent "Human Development Report" by the UNDP indicates that the minimum requirements for achieving sustainable development include the elimination of poverty, the reduction of population growth, a more equitable distribution of resources, healthier, more educated and better trained people, more participatory government, increased production of goods and services, etc. (UNDP, 1992).

The stated objectives of Ethiopian education in the past several years included providing education to all, making education accessible to all citizens, eradicating illiteracy, producing the needed skilled manpower, and preserving historical and cultural heritage (TYPP, 1984)<sup>2</sup>. The objectives also includes "bringing about equity and equality between men and women, urban and rural residents, settlers and nomadic people of the nation" (TYPP, 1984, P. 138).

Primary education is provided to children aged 7-12 years. It was envisaged (in 1984, TYPP) that primary education would be universalized by 1994. Primary education was the second (literacy campaign being the first) in the priority list of the education sector. Although the number of schools, the students' enrollment, and the

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<sup>2</sup> TYPP = ten years perspective plan.

number of teachers have increased in the past several years, the country is far away from universalization. The urban-rural, male-female, center-periphery, and settler-nomad disparities continue to exist. The first of the pairs (i.e. urban residents, males, center residents and the settlers) are the advantaged groups. In 1990/91 there were about 2.6 million primary level students (ONCCP, 1991). Thirty nine percent of the primary education students were girls. The participation rate for that age group was close to 35%, which was much lower than most low income African countries whose rate of participation is 76 percent. The participation rate for Addis-Ababa was 74%, Bale was 53%, Ogaden was 4% (MOE, 1989). The inequality in participation rate among various regions can easily be observed from those above figures and also the figures in Table 1. Table 1 presents population size and number of schools, teachers, and pupils by region.

Secondary education in Ethiopia consists of junior secondary (7-8) and senior secondary (9-12) levels of education. In the academic year of 1990/91, there were 418,500 students in the junior secondary, and 452,400 students in the senior secondary schools (ONCCP, 1991). Also, in the same year, there were, 10,353 junior secondary and 11, 157 senior secondary school teachers and 1, 115 and 233 schools respectively. Mission, community, and church schools account for about 10% of the students and 10% of the teachers in Ethiopia.

Although some efforts have been made to build at least one high school per awraja (district) and then woreda (subdistrict), over 10%, of the awrajas, mostly in the border (periphery) areas, do not still have a high school. Most (86%) of the high schools are situated in the urban areas. About 40% of the high school students, and only 10% of the high school teachers were women.

**Table 1: Population, School, Teachers and Pupils by Administrative Region, 1989/90.**

N <sup>o</sup>	Region	Population (In '000s)	No. of Schools	No. of Teachers	No. of Pupils
1	Asseb	451.9	43	471	15,871
2	Dire Dawa	476.0	64	691	27,273
3	Eritrea	3,138.6	343	5,096	198,696
4	Ogaden	833.2	66	244	6,186
5	Tigray	2,757.1	86	2,305	88,136
6	Addis Ababa	2,379.5	479	9,648	479,118
7	Arsi	1,984.0	461	4,640	223,597
8	Assossa	525.9	116	874	27,979
9	Bale	977.3	352	2,993	113,650
10	Borena	668.8	167	1,013	29,349
11	Gambella	179.4	77	584	21,530
12	Western Gojjam	2,032.8	389	2,872	138,312
13	Eastern Gojjam	1,563.2	352	3,023	103,941
14	Southern Gonder	1,719.9	344	2,120	54,814
15	Northern Gonder	1,873.0	372	2,565	77,641
16	Western Hararge	1,364.2	282	1,648	72,388
17	Eastern Hararge	2,552.3	490	3,156	125,755
18	Illubabor	2,864.9	711	5,893	233,802
19	Keffa	1,057.9	314	2,333	88,531
20	Metekel	383.3	108	643	32,140
21	Southern Omo	248.0	57	429	9,487
22	Northern Omo	2,806.0	613	5,326	205,721
23	Southern Shewa	2,977.5	526	4,432	247,494
24	Western Shewa	2,702.0	416	3,624	210,087
25	Eastern Shewa	934.5	198	1,934	91,581
26	Northern Shewa	2,364.3	552	3,279	148,052
27	Sidamo	2,741.7	548	5,119	190,343
28	Wellega	2,460.3	642	5,732	236,841
29	Soutern Wollo	2,461.7	505	3,811	163,867
30	Northern Wollo	1,491.7	250	1,418	62,576
	Total	50,973.9	9,954	87,227	3,729,846

Source: MOE (1989), Basic Education Statistics; And CSA (1990)

The enrollment ratio for senior secondary education (for ages 15-18 group) was 15% (CSA, 1991). The ratio for the urban areas was 62.4%, while that for the rural areas was only 4%. As could be observed from Table 2, the gross enrollment ratio for the males was 18.1%, while it was 11.7% for the females. Regarding the regions, Addis Ababa, Asseb, Tigray, and Eritrea were the most advantaged regions (with the largest enrollment ratio, in that order). The disadvantaged regions were Gojjam, Gamo-Goffa, Keffa, and Gonder (in that order).

The main criteria often used to assess the distribution of educational opportunities are students' enrollment by level of education and gender, students' admissions and graduation, number of schools and teachers by level and quality, participation rate of various age groups, educational expenditure, quantity of teaching facilities and materials, number of students passing national examinations (by gender, schools, residence, ethnicity, etc.) and pupil - teacher ratio. Using some of these criteria, the problem of disparity of educational opportunity in Ethiopia has been studied in the past. At least three major studies could be cited. The most comprehensive and oldest was the "Education Sector Review" concerning "educational opportunity" by a group led by Dr. Solomon Inquai (1972). The group stated that a great deal of discrepancy and inequality of access to education existed between regions, sexes, and urban-rural residences.

The next study (on regional disparity) was a masters thesis by Tekle Haimanot H/Selassie (1982). He reported that when the participation rates of urban vs rural, male vs female, christian vs moslem, highlands versus lowlands were compared, the former of each pair was the most advantaged group: The participation rate in general was highest in Addis Ababa, Eritrea and Wollega regions.



**Table 2: Senior Secondary Schools Gross Enrollment Ratios by Region and Sex, 1984.**

No.	Region	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Rank
1	Addis Ababa	93.2	63.0	76.0	1
2	Arsi	16.0	8.2	12.6	7
3	Asseb	88.7	39.0	60.6	2
4	Bale	15.7	10.5	13.4	5
5	Eritrea	71.7	44.5	56.0	4
6	Gamo-Goffa	9.3	4.0	6.6	15
7	Gojjam	8.0	4.4	6.0	16
8	Gonder	9.7	7.2	8.5	13
9	Hararge	11.4	8.1	9.8	11
10	Illubabor	14.2	6.4	10.8	9
11	Keffa	9.8	6.8	8.4	14
12	Shewa	14.7	7.9	11.4	8
13	Sidamo	13.3	5.5	9.7	12
14	Tigray	80.6	41.0	56.7	3
15	Wellega	19.0	6.5	13.0	6
16	Wollo	11.3	7.0	9.3	10
	Total Average	18.1	11.7	14.9	-

Source: CSA (1991), 1984 Population and Housing Census. P. 116-117

The third major study on regional inequality in education was made by Ayalew Shibeshi (1989) and showed that large regional disparities

existed in primary school participation. At about the same time, Teshome Mulat (1989) also reported that wide regional variations (gaps) existed in the distribution of schools and the shares of student enrollment. He recommended the development of a regional educational policy in Ethiopia.

Since the bases for higher education entrance are the primary and secondary education, we have attempted to take a glimpse of the situation. Three major questions normally raised by many authorities (e.g. Carron & Chau, 1971; Carreli & Morris, 1979; Tilak, 1987; and Grand, 1982) concerning inequality of educational opportunity are: (1) How did disparity evolve in the past? (2) What are the current trends of disparity? (3) What can be done to redress the disparity?

So far we have seen that regional disparities have existed in general education for several years and the trend seems to be that it will continue unless some short and long-term and practical measures are taken. Equalization of access to education opportunity involves the existence of quality schools within walking distance from home, provision (existence) of necessary finance to the student, the existence of conducive social climate (nondiscriminating and nondiscouraging), and allocation of proportional budget and teaching facilities.

The issue is that some groups are benefiting more than others in educational services. For the development of the nation, for fairness (moral reason), and for political reasons (the disadvantaged are demanding, though powerless) the nation has to deal with this issue. The imbalance in the distribution of educational opportunities would affect the future socio-economic development, the social and political

integration of the nation and the availability of educated leadership among various nationalities. Since education in general is a conscious means of changing the society, inculcating rational and independent thinking, developing vocational skills and the discipline for hard work and dignity of labor, short and long term efforts need to be made to achieve a regionally and ethnically balanced development of Ethiopia.

In the next section, we will discuss the conditions in higher education opportunities.

### HIGHER EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

The aims and functions of higher education institutions (HEIs) in Ethiopia are similar to the aims and functions of tertiary level education institutions in other countries. Broadly speaking, HEIs teach, do research and provide community services. More specifically, they train middle and high level manpower, seek and cultivate new knowledge, promote scientific out-look and temper, promote the development of science and technology, strive to promote equality and social justice, do relevant research, and provide appropriate services to the community at large. HEIs, particularly the universities are also expected to provide leadership in all walks of life, foster the attitudes and values needed for developing a modern society, act as an objective critic of the society and governments, and promote the development of the total personality of the student (Aggarwal, 1987 ; Thompson, Fogel & Danner, 1977).

In the past 10 years, on the average, about 50,000 regular students completed the senior secondary education each year and sat for the

Ethiopian School Leaving Certificate Examination (ESLCE Office, Reports). But the total higher education admissions have been about 6,500 students per year (HEMD, 1990 ; 1992). For illustration purposes, two years' admissions and the total enrollments of all HEIs in 1989 appear in Table 3.

**Table 3: Admission to Higher Education Institution in 1984/85, 1989/90 & Enrollments in 1989/90\***

No.	Name of the Institution	1984/85	1989/90	1989/90
1	Addis Ababa University**	4,896	3,325	9,731
2	Alemaya University of Agriculture** (AAU)	499	499	1,656
3	Asmara University	740	580	1,450
4	Kotebe College of Teacher Education	799	689	1,004
5	A.A. College of Commerce	686	640	1,166
6	Ambo College of Agriculture	136	117	203
7	Jimma College of Agriculture	281	248	420
8	Bahir Dar Polytechnic Institute	338	135	489
9	Jimma Institute of Health Sciences	147	236	688
10	College of Urban Planning	127	116	227
11	Arba Minch Water Technology Institute	-	195	447
12	Wondo Genet College of Forestry	70	82	132
	Total	8,220	6,862	17,613

\*Source: Higher Education Main Department (HEMD) (1987, 1990, 1992) **Facts and Figures.**

\*\* Admission to Postgraduate Programmes are not included.

The admissions included the regular candidates (those sitting for the ESLCE for the first time), the private applicants (those who took the

ESLCE two or more times), and the so called "Quota" candidates (students from schools with inadequate facilities who scored 0. 2 below the cut-off point).

The cut-off points for admissions for regular students have been GPAs of 2.4 for 1985 and 1986; 2.6 for 1987; 2.8 or 3.0 since 1988. Also, national military service candidates fulfilling the minimum criteria were admitted. The quota admissions amounted to about 10% of the total admissions for the years 1979-1990. The size of the quota depended on the amount of places available after the cut-off points were decided for the regular candidates. The cut-off points for the private candidates have been GPAs of 3. 2, 3.4, or 3.6 for the past several years.

Large disparities exist between regions, sexes, urban-rural residences, and by implication between various nationalities (ethnic groups) in the admission of students to higher education institutions in Ethiopia. As could be observed from Table 4, the most advantaged regions were Addis Ababa, Eritrea, Tigray and Gojjam (in that order). The least advantaged regions in higher education admissions had been Keffa, Illubabor, Gamo-Goffa, and Sidamo. The four advantaged regions had about 55% share of the total admissions, while the four disadvantaged regions had only about 6% of the share of the admissions. But these advantaged regions had only 23% of Ethiopia's population while the disadvantaged had 20% (CSA, 1990).

Urban-rural disparity is also large. Only 11.4% of Ethiopia's population is urban, while 88.6% is rural (CSA, 1990). We can take the four major cities (Addis Ababa, Asmara, Dire Dawa and Gonder) which have a population more than 100, 000 each and Look at the number of admissions in comparison to the rest of the country.

These cities accounted for 4.42% and 4.89% of the total population of Ethiopia in 1984 and 1990, respectively. In 1983 and 1989, higher education admissions for these four cities were about 45% and 46% of the total admissions, respectively.

When we include six other major towns (with populations over 70,000 each) of Dessie, Mekele, Nazareth, Harar, Jimma, and Bahir Dar, then the share of urban admissions would be over 56% while the share of total population of all these ten cities is only about 5.66%. It should be recalled that in rural areas only 4% of the senior secondary age group is enrolled in schools in the first place due to the non-availability of schools and various other reasons. Also the quality of schools, adequacy of facilities and teachers affect the number of "passes" in the ESLCE. Though the issue is not within the scope of this paper, it should be noted that over 75% of the higher education extension programmes are in Addis Ababa and Asmara and the beneficiaries are from these cities.

Inequality of educational opportunities between males and females in Ethiopia has been studied by various researchers (eg. Seyoum Tefera, 1991; Tsehai B. Selassie, 1991; Gennet Zewdie, 1991). These and other studies show that the participation rate of girls is lower than that of boys, and as the level of education increases, the number (proportion) of females decreases. Since women are the most disadvantaged group, their status needs improvement. It seems that the position and status of women and others is determined by the level of education. Only about 23% of the total public service employees are women (MOLSA, 1991).

**Table 4: Regular Students Admissions to HEIs by Region (1983-1989)**

No.	Region	1983-89 Admit. Sum	Average Admit.	Admit. %	Pop %	Index	Rank
1	Addis Ababa	14,296	2042.29	33.89	3.3	10.27	1
2	Arsi	1,306	186.57	3.10	3.9	0.79	7
3	Asseb	96	13.71	0.93	0.3	0.77	8
4	Bale	697	99.57	1.65	2.4	0.69	9
5	Eritrea	3,051	435.85	7.23	6.2	1.17	2
6	Gamo-Goffa	414	59.14	0.98	3.0	0.33	14
7	Gojjam	3,239	462.71	7.68	7.7	1.00	4
8	Gonder	2,413	344.71	5.72	7.1	0.81	5
9	Hararge	2,573	367.57	6.10	9.8	0.62	10
10	Illubabor	310	44.29	0.74	2.3	0.32	15
11	Keffa	567	81.00	1.34	5.8	0.23	16
12	Shewa	6,418	916.86	15.22	19.0	0.80	6
13	Sidamo	1,284	183.43	3.04	8.9	0.34	13
14	Tigray	2,471	353.00	5.86	5.7	1.03	3
15	Wellega	1,501	214.43	3.56	5.8	0.61	11
16	Wollo	1,545	220.71	3.66	8.8	0.42	12
	Total	42,181	6,025.85	100.00	100.0	-	-

Source: CHE and HEMD (1985-1992): **Admissions and Placement Reports**. Also ESLCE office statistics of each year since 1983. In some cases admissions' cut-off points of each year were used to find out the number of admissions from each region. Private and other candidates are not included.

In the past 10 years, the number of women admitted to higher education institutions has been only 13%. Perhaps, the largest

admission of girls was made in 1992 with about 24% share (about 1,300 were admitted). [(It is interesting to note here that female enrollment in Eastern Africa is about 30% and in Argentina & Brazil it is about 50% (Winkler, 1990)]. The largest number of girls get admissions to the diploma (12+2) programs such as Addis Ababa College of Commerce, Kotebe College of Teacher Education, and Nursing Programs in Jimma Institute of Health Sciences and Gonder College of Medical Sciences.

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Education is considered as the main instrument of economic development, social change, psychological modernization, and development of the human resources. It is considered as the greatest equalizer of the conditions of people and also (conversely) the creator of socio-economic gaps between people if it is not equally accessible.

Ethiopia has a large population (about 53 million) and about 80 ethnic groups (languages). According to CSA (1991), estimates, about 96.3% of the population belong to 23 ethnic groups, speaking: Amarigna, Oromigna, Tigrigna, Guragigna (various), Somaligna, Sidamigna, Wolaiytigna, Tigre, Afar, Hadiyigna, Siltigna, Keffigna, Agewigna, Gedeogna, Gamogna, Kembatigna, Amatigna, Goffigna, Kemantigna, Benchigna, Arigna, Sahogna and Bejigna. Speakers of the first eight languages account for 84.6% of the population - Amharic (31.74%) and Oromigna (30.12%) speakers being the overwhelming majority (CSA, 1991). Most of the Amharas live in Gonder, Gojjam, Northern Showa, and in parts of Wollo. Tigre--Tigrigna speakers live in Tigray and Eritrea regions. Oromigna speakers live in Wollega, Arsi, Bale, Illubabor and in parts of



Hararge, Shewa, and Addis Ababa. The major residents of Addis Ababa are Amarigna (49%), Guragigna (18%), Oromigna (17%) and Tigre-Tigregna (9.1%) speakers (CSA, 1991). The major residents of Shewa region are Oromo (41.2%), Amhara (23%), Gurage (18%-includes Siltigna speakers), Hadiya (7.7%), and Kembata (5.1%) (CSA, 1991). Quite a large number of (about 40) Ethnic groups live in the periphery - mainly South, East and South Western Ethiopia. And these are the most disadvantaged minority groups in educational opportunity, particularly opportunity for higher education. Most mission and/or private schools are located in Addis Ababa and other major cities. Since the mission schools have better facilities, more class hours, and are located in urban areas (conducive environment) most of their students tend to pass the ESLCE and get admissions to HEIs.

Government schools are crowded and teach in the shift system (only about 4 hours per day for 5 days a week per shift). The facilities are inadequate, and the quality (pedagogical training, moral) of the teachers is low. Hence, the number of the ESLCE passes tend to be very low in most government schools particularly the rural ones.

Since professional training programmes also require higher ESLCE GPA, students with higher grades are admitted to such institutes to train as: elementary school teachers, nurses, technicians, etc. For the past several years these and other training institutes admitted about 6,000 trainees per year and trained them for one to two years. Ethnic groups residing in the Northern and central part of the country are the most advantaged ones in admissions to these job-oriented training programmes too. Hence, the indications are that the Amhara, Tigre-Tigrawi, Adare, and Gurage nationalities

seem to be the main advantaged groups in higher education, training, and job opportunities.

The problems of inequality of access to higher education was noticed by the relevant authorities and researchers in the 1970s. Solomon Inquai *et al.* (1972) reported that the findings of Haile Wolde-michael, and Teshome Wagaw show that the students from Addis Ababa, Eritrea, Shewa and Hararghe accounted for over 88% of the Haile Selassie I University admissions, while the remaining 10 regions (provinces) accounted for only 12% of the college entries. The advantaged regions accounted for 37% of the population. The Council of Ministers and the Higher Education Commission (CHE), aware of the inadequacy of the facilities of some schools and the shortage of qualified teachers established the so called "quota-system" in 1979 (CHE, 1980) in an attempt to provide a better share of the access to education. Since then, for about 10 years a certain number of admissions (about 10% per year) were made using the quota system. The entries fulfilled the admission criteria and had only 0.2 average grade point less than the regular students' admission cut-off point.

All the senior secondary schools (about 300) were grouped as "Good", "Fair", and "Poor" in terms of their preparation of students for the ESLCE (CHE, 1980). Based on the number of schools falling into one or the other category, each region (eventually each school) received a certain quota. In the allotment of quota, efforts were made to take the number of examinees into consideration. There is no evidence to show that the real beneficiaries were from the rural and backward areas, minority groups, or the poor families.

Entrance to higher education is and has been very competitive and those who are well prepared, but not necessarily with better potentials or intellect, enter it. The differences in educational achievements tend to lie in innate intellectual potentials, individual motivation, socio-economic class of parents, quality of the school (facilities, norms, budget), the competence and commitment of the teachers, composition of the students, and the expectation of the community (Corwin, 1974; Jencks, 1972) reported that inequality in aptitude and achievement test scores would decline by about 10 percent if the quality of the schools are equalized and by 6 percent if the socio-economic status could be equalized.

Since education, especially higher education, tends to promote social integration and cultural synthesis, cultivate scientific and rational outlook, eliminate (reduce) ethnic outlook, special educational intervention might be a necessity for a multiethnic (plural) society like Ethiopia. Perhaps the provision of some assistance to offset the prior disadvantage in opportunity would be needed.

Several countries, like Sri Lanka, Malaysia, India, and Nigeria have attempted to reduce the disparities between various regions and ethnic groups. They have taken historical, demographic, economic, language, and financial aspects of their societies into consideration in their educational policies and plans. We will briefly look at the experiences of two countries - Malaysia and Sri-Lanka. Admission to the University of Malaysia has been based on examination scores and quotas based on the racial proportions of the national population (Thompson, Fogel and Danner, 1977). Also generous scholarships were provided to the disadvantaged Malay students. Out of about 9,000 students at the University, Malays constituted about 47.5%, Chinese about 43% and Indians about 9.6%. If it were not for the

quota system the participation rate of the major ethnic group would have been very small.

Sri Lanka also instituted a quota system in 1975 based on the population size of each district and students were admitted to the University in order of merit from each administrative district. The procedure involved deciding on the minimum admission requirements and then letting each district compete for the share of vacancies in the various programs of higher education institutions. It is reported that the speakers of Tamil, Sinhala and English and the followers of Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity have equitable chances of admissions since the establishment of the quota system (Premaratne, 1976).

Ethiopia has been cognizant of the inequality of educational opportunities among various regional and ethnic groups. An often raised issue has been the problem of maintaining educational standards and provision of equal access to those with lower achievement (ESLCE) scores. Quite a number of studies and reports have shown that the reliability and validity of the ESLCE is very low and that it needs to be supplemented by aptitude tests and high school (grades 9-12) achievement scores (e.g. CHE, 1980; CEC, 1986; IER, 1990). But feasible policies and mechanisms have not been adopted as yet.

Several possibilities seem to exist to improve the mechanisms of admissions in terms of merit and the social composition of the students. Some nominal and dubious attempts (mainly lip service) were made in the past in Ethiopia. The Education Sector Review and the Quota system of admissions to HEIs are good examples. The findings and recommendations of the Education Sector Review and the rationale and the procedure of the quota system were never

discussed in public and the pros and cons were not worked out in detail. A few experts and officials "study", "discuss" and decide behind closed doors. Major issues such as educational policy in general, higher education admissions, etc. need to be debated and the public should be aware of what affects it. Higher education is free of tuition, and also provides free residential accommodation and boarding. Only the Addis Ababa College of Commerce does not provide free room and board to its students. It is estimated that it costs about three thousand Birr per student per year (WB, 1987). Public expenditure per student is about US \$3,500 for Africa (Coombs, 1985).

According to the UNESCO (1988), the share of Ethiopian higher education, out of the total government recurrent expenditure has been about 2.5% and the share of capital expenditure has been about 1.5% for the last two decades. These figures put Ethiopia among the lowest of the 17 low - income African countries in this respect. Out of the age group (18-23 years old), higher education participation rate in Ethiopia is about 0.5% while the rate for developing countries is 7.4% and for Africa is 3.27% (Coombs, 1985). Zimbabwe, Somalia, and the Sudan had more than 2% participation rate. Using any measure, Ethiopia is investing less than the average of most developing (poor) countries on higher education. The participation rate is also one of the lowest. In addition to making larger investment in education, this scarce opportunity needs to be distributed fairly among its various ethnic groups, regions and sexes.

A crude survey made by the Ethiopian Science and Technology commission in 1992 shows that about 83% of the employees with the first degrees and above (out of 6922 employees in 28 government organizations) belonged to Amhara (46.4%), Tigre-Tigrawi (15.7%),

Oromo (14%), Gurage (5.5%) and Adare (1.01%) ethnic groups. Many nationalities had below 1% each, while several others residing in the periphery and the South did not have any employee in these organizations. It should be noted that the above 5 nationalities accounted for about 28.3%, 11.3%, 29.1%, 4.4% and 0.07% of Ethiopian people, respectively (CSA, 1991). Since higher education certificates often determine employment, income, political participation, occupation, government positions, and the social status in Ethiopia, equity of the access to higher education is a critical issue. Though the unbalanced distributions of secondary schools and inadequacy of facilities are the basis for the disparity in higher education admissions, the HEIs, academics, policy decision makers, and concerned citizens have to attempt to come up with alternatives to redress the problem.

Studies and open discussions are needed. Some objective, workable, and fair criteria that accommodate academic and socio-political standards need to be developed for the distribution of the scarce higher education opportunities to the deserving ones.

The easy and "elitist" way out is waiting till high schools are all over the nation and their qualities are equivalent. For some, providing equal opportunity and maintaining academic standards are difficult and contradictory tasks. Could the provision of "adequate" budget, facility, staff, and preparation time for HEIs reduce the concern for quality and bring about a concern for equity? Would the system used by Sri Lanka or other plural societies be applicable to Ethiopia? What about a year long special preparatory program for the disadvantaged groups after the completion of the 12<sup>th</sup> grade and before admissions to HEIs? etc. Otherwise, all indications are that the urban male, with educated and/or well to do parents, will continue

to have the best opportunity for higher education admissions in Ethiopia.

#### A NOTE

In most cases, the data used are of the 7 years (1983-89) period. They refer to the former 16 administrative regions, including Addis Ababa and Assab. However, Ethiopia was divided into 30 administrative regions in 1990 and some of the data are available based on these divisions. Therefore, some information which could not fit into the 16 regions do not appear in the write up. It should be noted that some data and interpretations are not limited to the seven years, but includes up to 1992. Also note that Eritrea was a part of Ethiopia till 1991 and this article was submitted for publication in January, 1993. I thank the Ministry of Education (MOE) , HEMD and the ESLCE Office for the provision of various documents.

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