

**Attempts at Educational Reform in Ethiopia: A Top-Down
or a Bottom-Up Reform? Seyoum Tefera,
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ABSTRACT: *The major purpose of this Paper is to further depict and convey the right picture and message of the new and operational "Education and Training Policy" to general readers. This Paper also attempts, through all possible means, to respond to some of the not well-thought-out statements reflected on the ETHIOPIAN JOURNAL OF EDUCATION (December, 1996) under the title "Attempts at Educational Reform in Ethiopia: A Top-down or a Bottom-up Reform?" authored by Dr. Seyoum Tefera, an Associate Professor, at the Department of Educational Administration, Addis Ababa University. This Paper shall not, under any circumstances, attempt to foolhardily engage in re-incriminations. It reflects on the existing educational reality. On the basis of the evolutionary development of the Ethiopian educational system, the Paper also attempts to historically trace the tortuous path that the Ethiopian education system has traversed through in the dark past. Finally, in drawing a conclusion, the Paper views the steps taken by the Ministry of Education of the FDRE to bring about a bottom-up democratic education reform, as opposed to top-down.*

INTRODUCTION

“Attempts at Educational Reform in Ethiopia: A Top-down or a Bottom-up Reform?” is the contentious subject of departure of this Paper.

First and foremost, the Ministry appreciates the attempts made by Dr. Seyoum to criticize the Policy, though late and not constructively. Nevertheless, thanks to academic freedom and free press, Dr. Seyoum has managed to speak his mind to the public. As a professional and self-initiated critic, he is very much welcomed to do so. But some of his opinions are highly frowned and thus call for further clarifications to re-direct readers from misinformation.

According to Robert (1956:605):

“Academic freedom is undoubtedly the most important, as well as the most controversial and misunderstood, aspect of professional autonomy of teachers. In its simplest terms, academic freedom means right of the scholar to publish and teach the truth... Academic freedom implies discipline as well as freedom. However, it is not the right of the teacher to say whatever he pleases.

Moreover, academic freedom is not primarily a privilege claimed by teachers for their own benefit... At rock bottom, the claim for academic freedom is grounded in the need for a democratic society for an intelligent, informed citizenship and in the right of the individual to have free access to all opinions and all of the facts in making up his own mind.”

In a similar vein, the Proclamation (No. 34,1992:30) for the "Freedom of the Press" of The Transitional Government of Ethiopia goes as follows:

".... free press, not only provides a forum for citizens to freely express their opinions, but also plays a prominent role in the protection of individual and peoples' rights and the development of democratic culture as well as in affording citizens the opportunity to form balanced views on various topical issues and to forward their opinions on the directions and operations of government."

The foregoing statements underscore the fact that academic freedom and free press are important aspects and parts of civic rights in a democracy or democratic-oriented society.

While it is heartening to see academic freedom flourish, it is, on the contrary, equally disturbing to see it misused and wielded unconstructively by individuals.

It is quite natural that personal opinions, studied or unstudied or half-baked, emerge and may make or mar a given constructive progress. True and positive opinions need to be encouraged, and on the contrary, unbalanced views and inhospitable attitudes have to be corrected or clarified. Accordingly and as stated earlier, the purpose of this Paper is to scintillate with the objective reality of the evolutionary process of formulation of the operational new "Education and Training Policy".

A SHORT LOOK AT THE DEVELOPMENT OF ETHIOPIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

Retrogression or progression of the development of Ethiopian educational system was and is intertwined with the nature of the governance of the alternating Ethiopian ruling circles; the evolutionary development of the socio-economic structure as well as with the external interaction and influence the Country had or underwent in the long dark past.

Basically, the development of Ethiopian educational system was deeply rooted in religious education of which the two mainstreams were Christianity and Islam. However, the external contact of the Country in the different domains has a direct bearing upon the traditional education offered in churches and mosques.

However, the arrival of the Jesuit missionaries in the first half of the 16th century and the advent of others in the 19th c. influenced the long existing conservative Ethiopian educational system. This cumulative effect wended its way through the court house of Emperor Minilik the Second, who in 1908-09 introduced modern education into Ethiopia. Modern education crept into the Country and was designed and wilded to serve the interests of the ruling class of that time. Because of the non-democratic nature of governance, education then was not responsive to the objective demands of the peoples of the Country, who helplessly had been in the clutches of illiteracy, poverty, backwardness and other retrogressive practices for tens of centuries. Nor were the vain alternating ruling circles interested in formulating a democratic educational policy responsive to the demands of the Country and its peoples.

As inferred above, modern education in Ethiopia started broadly with the shadow of European colonial powers specially in the Horn during the "Scramble for Africa" which was officiated by the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885. In the process of consolidating the Ethiopian state in its centre (Addis Ababa) under Menelik II, the rulers realized the need for modern education to man the new bureaucracy and to craftily deal with the colonial powers. The colonial powers, were using missionaries underhandedly, among other methods, to penetrate into the country and spread their influence and competing interests in the development of modern education in Ethiopia.

The first school opened by Menelik was in fact a language school for English, French, Italian, Arabic, Geez and Amharic, reflecting the power influence both local and international. Locally, it reflected the balance of forces between the church, the monarchy, the regional lords and the internationally competing various colonial powers. Hence, there was a problem of sorting a comprehensive education system.

It was after the Second World War that a system of modern education began to develop in this country under the leadership of Emperor Haile Selassie First. The main concentration in the first phase (1940s-1950s) of development was on the production of teachers and various personnel for the state machinery. This was craftily done mainly with British assistance, during which English became the medium of instruction. The curriculum, the structure and the text books used were that of East African British colonies and students were prepared for the London General Certificate Examination, G.C.E. (1947-1958) The ESLCE was invoked in 1959 which remained operational up to the present.

The second phase of development began with American assistance. The primary, junior and senior secondary structure was adopted in 1962 and Amharic replaced English as medium of instruction upto grade six. Attempts to produce national curriculum and to expand primary education were relatively made. Secondary Schools were opened in provincial capitals and some "Awrajas". A national university (Addis Ababa University) was opened for the first time in 1957 and a higher education system began to develop, thereafter.

After the 1974 take-over by the military regime, the education system was in confusion and suffered a setback because of the long-drawn-out war and undemocratic governance of the junta. An attempt was made to establish a socialist education system; curriculum was developed and textbooks prepared to this effect. Various proposals were made to change the structure of the education system, but to no avail. Most of the regular budget (ca.56.8%) was allocated to the military (*Ketmihirt Alem, 1994:48*) and other related activities at the expense of education and other social development issues and endeavors. Teachers' and students' attention was directed to political and propaganda activities. Teachers were directly or indirectly forced to spend their time in "kebele" and other activities rather than teaching. Similarly, students were made to spend their time on political related activities rather than their studies. Schools' premises were used for political propaganda, military and related activities. Quality of education deteriorated.

Even the literacy campaign, which was inefficiently launched in fifteen nationality languages and which was very much capitalized on by the Dergue regime, had many setbacks due to lack of genuine commitment by the military Government and its undemocratic nature of planning and implementation. Professional development stagnated and as a whole, the system was infested with mediocrity, populism, doubts,

fears and servitude. In a nutshell, the historical development of the Ethiopian educational system can be shown as follows:

- ca. 340 AD - 1908 - dominant traditional (religious) education
- 1909-1935 - Egyptian and French influence (beginning of secular education)
- 1935-1941 - Fascist intrusion
- 1941-1952 - British influence
- 1952-1974 - Canadian and American influence
- 1974-1991 - Ex-Soviet influence.

However, starting from the May 1991 Revolution onwards, education is undergoing a new change through the formulation of a democratic-oriented policy.

Reflections of the New Education System:

After the defeat of the military regime in 1991 by the EPRDF forces, Ethiopia entered a new chapter in its history. The rights of nations, nationalities and peoples to self-determination, to the extent of secession, (Negarit Gazeta, July 1991 No.1:Art.II) has been recognized. With the promulgation of the new Constitution, Ethiopia has now become a Federal Democratic Republic.

Accordingly, a new democratic "Education and Training Policy" has been formulated to disseminate a new education system rooted in the overall economic, social and political development of the Country to address the long overdue needs of the society. To this effect, various steps have been taken by both the Transitional and Federal Governments as foundation and building blocks of the new system.

Among these are, establishing a decentralized democratic system, using nationality languages in the respective regions, zones and "weredas" as state working languages and media of instruction and issuing a "Comprehensive Education and Training Policy". The use of nationality languages as media of instruction, is of particular significance as an expression of democratic right for cultural development and improvement of the teaching-learning process.

The Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia is organized into federal, regions, zones and "weredas" where the people run their own affairs through elected peoples' representatives at various levels. The management of education has also been reorganized accordingly. Hence, the responsibility of the central level is mainly overall policy and strategy formulation, standard setting, evaluation professional input and eliciting and coordinating foreign assistance. Managing the system including curriculum development for primary education (1-8) and teacher training for this level and running secondary schools and vocational education has become the responsibility of the respective regional states.

As it is stipulated in the New Education and Training Policy, the system shall be democratic, decentralized, professional, coordinated, efficient, and effective in its input and output processes.

In the hierarchy of the system, the school is the focus of activity whereby the teaching-learning process, including the curricular and co-curricula, should be conducted with professional competence in a democratic atmosphere with the coordinated effort of the community it serves. "Wereda" and school boards are also organized to democratically manage education at the local level; higher education

institutions under the supervision of the MOE, are to run on autonomous basis.

The Policy encompasses overall and specific objectives, implementation strategies, including formal and non formal education, from kindergarten to higher education. The Policy focuses on quality, equity, accessibility and relevance. It emphasizes the development of problem-solving capacity and culture in the content of education, curriculum, structure and approach focusing on the acquisition of scientific knowledge and practicum.

Along with this, it directs that there be appropriate nexus between education, training, research and development through coordinated participation among the relevant organizations.

The Policy incorporates the structure of education in relation to the development of student profile, educational measurement and evaluation, media of instruction and language teaching at various levels; the recruitment, training, organization and career development of teachers.

Due attention is also given to the provision and appropriate usage of educational facilities, technology, organization and management so as to strengthen the teaching-learning process and the expansion of education.

It is also stated that the financing of education shall be diversified, through cost-sharing to promote equity and quality of education, over and above the need to make education a social responsibility.

The new educational structure shall constitute of basic, general, higher and specialized on a formal and non formal basis.

The components will be (since 1995):

- a) a kindergarten system for children aged 4-6 years
- b) a primary education from grades 1-8 subdivided into two cycles of basic (1-4) and general (5-8) education
- c) a general secondary education from 9-10
- d) a preparatory senior secondary education of two years (11-12)
- e) Higher education of 2-3 years for diploma and 4-5 years for undergraduate and an additional 1-3 years of post-graduate
- f) a system of vocational and technical training in parallel with the academic education is coordinated and interlinked with it
- g) a special education system and distance learning in collaboration and coordination with the rest of the education system.

The strategy for the realization of the new Policy focuses primarily on the development of a new curriculum, restructuring of teacher training and designing career-structure for teachers and reorganizing educational management. Accordingly, the teacher training programme is reorganized in such a way that teachers for the first cycle of primary education will be trained at certificate level in an integrated approach and those for the second cycle of primary education will be trained at diploma level to teach two to three subjects in linear approach. Teachers for the secondary education will be trained at degree level according to the curriculum of secondary education.

Concerning professional development of teachers, a new career-structure, based on the principle of continuous professional development and on the job upgrading, has been designed.

According to the new structure, teachers are classified into *beginner, junior, full-fledged, senior, associate lead teacher and lead teacher.*

After the necessary pre-service training and certification, for instance, a teacher of the 1st cycle is assigned as beginner. Thereafter, he has to work under the supervision of and coaching by mentors for two years to be promoted to a junior teacher status and again after working for another three years at this level the teacher can be promoted to full-fledged teacher if found competent. From then on, the teacher who has the ability to fulfill mentor responsibilities is prompted to senior, associate lead and lead teacher every three or four years. At these levels, the teacher is required to play the role of mentor to beginner and junior teachers and supervision of full-fledged teachers. The following tabular explanation is worth looking at:

Career-Structure	Qualification	Required Initial Years of Service	Next Promotion
Beginner	Certificate	0	Junior
Junior	Certificate	0+2	Full-fledged
Full-fledged	Certificate	2+3	Senior
Senior	Certificate	5+3	Associate Lead Teacher
Associate Lead Teacher	Certificate	8+4	Lead Teacher
Lead Teacher	Certificate	12+4	---

Note should be taken that the-promotion cannot be automatic unless the teacher is found competent upon evaluation.

The organization and management of education and training has also been decentralized so as to make it efficient and address the educational needs of the people at the local level. Primary and secondary schools, including vocational training centers, are run by the regional states; while teacher training and higher education institutions are run on autonomous basis under the supervision of the respective regions and

MOE respectively. To implement the Policy in general and the above task in particular, a reliable strategy has been drawn-out.

GENERAL COMMENTS ON Dr. SEYOUM'S PAPER

Dr. Seyoum felt it right from the inception that his hindsight ed-Paper would stimulate and generate a sustained debate. And it did so. There are many issues which call for comments and further clarifications in his contentious Paper, which picked a bone with the Ministry.

Dr. Seyoum's 33-page Paper published in "The Ethiopian Journal of Education: Vol.XVI, number 1 (Dec.1996) touches, among other things, upon the question of public participation in the process of the formulation of the Education and Training Policy; the use and question of realization of mother-tongues as media of instruction; inappropriateness of cost-sharing and decentralization of the management of education.

It is to be noted that education policy formation is by necessity a series of overlapping activities in which a variety of people and organizations with diversified perspectives are directly or indirectly involved. Policy-formation processes are country-specific even time-bound and highly dependent on socio-economic and political conditions and interactions. It is incumbent upon policy-makers to capture the intricacies of the process and to gauge the evolving dynamics of the system within the framework of broad societal needs and vision. The essence and development of the New Education and Training Policy was seen in this light.

As is well-known, the Policy was developed and formulated within the context of the overall democratization and socio-economic

restructuring process going in the Country. Its formulation began in August 1992 and passed through various phases until it was ratified in April 1994. It took almost two years of preparation and wide ranging open discussion at the central, regional and local levels, by the public, professionals of various fields, teachers, and various organizations, as acknowledged by Dr. Seyoum Tefera himself. The participation of parents and students was not so negligent. It is obvious that all these activities had to be coordinated and articulated by a competent working body to be presented to the appropriate government institution for decision. It was an interactive process rather than top-down. It was not an either-or issue. It was a multifaceted participatory process with the various roles of competence.

With regards to the use of national and nationality languages as media of instruction, the implementation strategy is such that beginning from grade 1 and grade 5, the curriculum is introduced grade by grade through pilot-testing, evaluation and final adoption and is followed by a continuous and regular upgrading as need be. As far as deciding on any language to be used as medium of instruction is concerned, it is the prerogative of the nations and nationalities themselves. This is their democratic right which nobody can infringe upon. Its pedagogic advantage is also undebatable.

The adoption of a mother tongue, rather than a second language, as a medium of instruction has many scientific and universal merits from the pedagogical point of view. The reasons are many & varied.

It is true that the task of education is to transmit knowledge, values, norms and other elements of culture to which the individuals belong. And education, be it formal or non-formal, should maintain a dynamic interaction with culture. Indeed, language is a prime vehicle of culture

and it is an instrument of communication for an exchange of ideas in the day to day practical life.

It is known that the school is a harmonious extension of the home where a mother tongue is spoken. At home, the child, the *tabula rasa*, to employ John Lock's phrase, knows and loves his mother tongue. The use of a language other than his mother tongue will slow down the thinking and the learning process as it suppresses his spontaneous responses during learning activities. This happens because the child gets immersed in his own culture which is expressed in his mother tongue. He is therefore, encouraged to appreciate, cultivate, develop and preserve his cultural heritage at home or among his peers at school.

On the other hand, teaching the same subject content in a language other than his mother tongue will overload the child. This is because the child is exposed on one hand to the learning of that language and on the other to the subject matter using the second language as a medium of instruction. At this level, the child finds himself in an awkward situation and psychologically feels that his mother tongue is not important or as important as the other imposed second language is. Moreover, he feels uncomfortable and inferior to learn that language, *incognito*.

To save the child from such mental crisis, there is a general consensus among educators and pedagogues to use the mother tongue, at least, at the primary level. This is because, the learner starts with what he knows and will go on consolidating his knowledge and competence in his own language. His receptivity, *ceteris paribus*, becomes high for the simple logic that the learner expresses his thoughts more clearly and easily by the use of his mother tongue. Therefore, the acquisition of basic

knowledge and skills, attitudes and values can be successful by the use of the mother tongue.

On top of its educational value, the use of mother tongue plays an important role in the social, political and economic life of people, particularly in creating awareness of its cultural identity. Here, the Ministry believes that telling the importance of nationality languages, as media of instruction, to an educator certainly amounts to "teaching one's grandmother to suck eggs."

Understanding and taking this into account, the Transitional Government of Ethiopia, no sooner had it assumed power than it formulated a policy on the use of nationality languages as media of instruction to be implemented according to the objective situation existing intra-languages.

Despite this fact and with a hidden tone of "linguistic patriotism", Dr. Seyoum on the one hand appreciates the introduction of the Amharic Language (in 1963) as a medium of instruction (EJE:5) as a "notable step" and on the other hand mildly questions and raises the doubt on the realization of the right of nations and nationalities (EJE:23) to learn in their languages.

In this regard, it should be clear that the Ministry has not bitten more than it could chew. Starting from 1992 up to the present, about nineteen languages, (including Amharic) out of about 80, have been used as media of instruction gradually. True, the adoption and implementation of bi-lingualism is not and cannot be plain-sailing. But what has been done is unprecedented in the history of the Ethiopian education system.

Moreover, Dr. Seyoum has strongly recommended that the use of mother-tongues as media of instruction be pilot-tested or pre-tested on small scale before full scale implementation. That is exactly what the Ministry of Education did and is doing, too. In return, the Ministry would like to remind Dr. Seyoum to peruse the Policy and to keep abreast of the times.

The other issue raised in Dr. Seyoum's Paper is cost-sharing. The reality is that the primary school enrollment rate in Ethiopia which is currently 34.6 percent (MOE, 1997) is one of the lowest in the world and the quality of education at all levels is low due to, among other things, resource limitation and management. In order to universalize primary education and expand education and training opportunities at various levels and improve the quality of education, it is understandable that a lot of resources are required. Hence, there is the need for diversified financing of education. Government alone cannot do it and this is the case in almost all-over the world let alone in Ethiopia, a country where a lot of infrastructural buildings are required because very little had been done in the past.

In connection with this grave issue, a four-day workshop on Comprehensive Education and Training Policy, was conducted from June 10-13/1993 at Debre-Zeit. In this workshop, records show that about seventy two-well qualified and experienced educators and authorities, of whom Dr. Seyoum Tefera was presumably one, participated and discussed the issue thoroughly in consonance with the consolidated public opinion obtained earlier from all directions of the Country, as time and capacity allowed.

Cost-sharing by users is one aspect of diversified financing along with the privatization process going on in the Country. However, in

implementing the Policy, the Government is taking all the necessary caution to see to it that nobody will be barred from any level of education because of cost-sharing, with particular concern for the disadvantaged ones. To this end, it has been well stipulated in the Policy that "Mechanisms will be created for students to cover their educational expenses through service or payment after graduation" (1994:31). From this view point, the Policy is comprehensive and the issue is not one of rural-urban dichotomy.

It is also to be remembered that education at primary and secondary levels was not completely free in the past. There was already cost-sharing in various forms, such as, registration fees, school building and maintenance contributions. It is also to be recalled that most of the schools in the rural areas were built through contributions by the public. It was only in higher education that the total cost, including tuition, food and accommodation was paid by the Government, and how many of the poor, either urban or rural, benefited from this is a question to be studied and answered by fair-minded people in the future.

Hence, Dr. Seyoum's claim that-- "It is going to hurt the same people that it was supposed to help." (P.26) -- is groundless.

"... at a time when most school-leavers, particularly at primary and secondary levels, constitute a significant portion of the army of the educated-unemployed, the wisdom of introducing cost-sharing happens to be quite intriguing" is another point stated in Dr. Seyoum's Paper (EJE.26).

In the first place, the Policy does not suggest cost-sharing at primary and general secondary levels. According to the new Policy, education

in government primary and general secondary schools is free. Anyway, in trying to denounce the introduction of cost-sharing, Dr. Seyoum predicates his argument upon a certain old man's opinion by quoting authorities and entertains an unnecessary fear by raising doubt on the readiness of parents to pay their shares owing to the disillusionment or disenchantment they had with the merits of education before the formulation of the Policy. There is nothing wrong with the opinion of the old man as quoted by Dr. Seyoum (EJE, 25-26).

Here, the most important point to raise should have been not the issue of cost-sharing but the reflection of attitude parents had towards the old educational system which was not responsive to societal demands due to irrelevance and ill-consideration. If the same old man were asked about his convictions on education some years after the implementation of the current Policy, which is designed to enable citizens to support themselves by being equipped with the necessary technical know-how, there is no doubt that his answer would be quite different. In this regard, Dr. Seyoum needs to see and re-read the Policy in a better or different light.

In fact, according to the comprehensive five-year development programme and as the absorbing capacity of the economy grows, there will be a need for more trained manpower. This would require more training facilities and more expenditure which in turn shall increase the need for and the ability of the users and the private sectors to share the cost of education and training.

Along with this, the commitment of the Government to improve the quality of education including professional development of teachers, requires a lot of resources. It is to be recalled that very little attention was paid by the previous vain regimes in this respect. One of the most

significant and concrete steps taken by the incumbent Government is the introduction of the new career-structure for teachers which again needs more finance. However expensive it may be, it is being implemented, thanks to the genuine concern of the Government for the improvement of the teaching-learning process.

With regards to decentralization, much can be said about its merits. The following can be quoted among others:

- It creates a favorable ground for regions to govern themselves and manage their affairs for their own destiny.
- It encourages effective management through regional accountability
- It creates a conducive mechanism for fair share of national resources
- It is instrumental for balanced national development

Accordingly, the management of education has been decentralized. Hence, the running of primary and secondary schools and training has become the responsibility of the regional governments, while higher educational institutions are to be run autonomously under the overall responsibility of the Ministry of Education.

If “decentralized management.... is to succeed.” Dr. Seyoum has stated the obvious that certain conditions have to be fulfilled of which to have cadre of managerial experts at the regional levels of the education system is important. Very true. This is one of the gritty problems which the Ministry of Education has been beset. And cognizant of this fact, the Ministry is trying, more than ever before, to upgrade and raise the higher educational institutions by locating and decentralizing them to regions. Accordingly, new colleges have been opened since 1991.

Dr. Seyoum should take note that the recently established "Civil Service College" was born out of this sheer necessity. Moreover, the Ethiopian Government has been very much concerned to arrange long and short term professional courses and overseas scholarships to mature students and other nationals. The hard fact is that the Country has very limited resources to train all its professionals. All the same, decentralization cannot and should not be procrastinated due to such teething troubles.

Dr. Seyoum goes on to say "Unfortunately, however, no serious effort has been made to date to critically examine these attempts at educational reform (EJE 1996:2)." Prior to Dr. Seyoum, several educators have attempted to look at the endeavors made in educational reform. And it is an undeniable fact that these views and opinions, among others, have tremendously contributed to the current development of the "Education and Training Policy."

With an overtone of appreciation, (EJE:8) Dr. Seyoum attempts to tell us by quoting authorities that the coercively-launched Ethiopian National Literacy Campaign (ENLC) of the former Dergue-WPE regime (July 1979) had brought down the illiteracy rate from 93% to 24.7% in eleven years time. Here, a clear-sighted national, who may be a living witness, may pause and pose the question "How reliable were the figures?" In light of this, it is unbecoming for Dr. Seyoum, as a critic, to overlook such an overstated report and take it at face value.

In page 23 of the same Paper, Dr. Seyoum is of the opinion that equality, liberty, justice, truth and respect for human rights are values of western democracy enshrined in the education Policy is vogue. However, it is high time for the critic to stand to be corrected that the above-quoted values are nobody's values but basic rights of humanity

irrespective of race, sex, age, geographical locations, cultural differences and what not. So the values have been reflected therein not to please or displease somebody but to express the democratic nature and governance of the incumbent Government.

Dr. Seyoum also attempted to critically tell us about the pluses and minuses of the Education Sector Review (ESR) of 1971 and about the Evaluative Research on the General Education System of Ethiopia (ERGESE) (1983), "attempts whose obituaries were declared before their deaths." The writer dwelt on these subjects and attempted to tell us that even the current education reform like its predecessors has hardly little or no input from the general public and has not taken the overall socio-economic transformation into account. This phrase is far from truth. For one thing, taking the issue into consideration, the sitting Government has issued clear guidelines and policies on the Country's social and economic directions which through participatory approach shall lead to new portals of social and economic development. For the other thing, it is an incontrovertible fact that education is the engine for social, economic and cultural transformation. So focus on education means laying the base for socio-economic development indirectly.

Dr. Seyoum has reviewed the participatory process and democratic formulation of the current Policy with a tone of pessimism. All his major comments amount to a strong sense of ill-representation of teachers and parents in particular and the rest of the public in general. He attempted to comparatively tell us of the size of the three different core groups who were entrusted to the accomplishment of the Education Sector Review (ESR in 1971); Evaluative Research on the General Education System of Ethiopia (ERGESE in 1983); and the new and operational "Education and Training Policy" (ETP in 1994).

Admittedly enough, Dr. Seyoum has explained that the members of the study group of the new Policy were drawn from the Ministry of Education, Addis Ababa University, Ministry of Culture, Agriculture, Industry, Health, Science and Technology Commission, Institute of Agricultural Research and included representatives of about 22 government organizations. Moreover, Dr. Seyoum tells us that the drafted Policy was circulated for discussion to teachers in Addis Ababa and seven other regions. By dwelling more on the issue and surprisingly enough, Dr. Seyoum tells us that "there were neither novel suggestions nor constructive critical comments." He went on to say " ... they appear to be an endorsement of the Policy." Here comes a big gap of difference of opinion! Is it a must for a democratically digested draft policy to gather and experience waves of serious opposition for opposition's sake? Or does Dr. Seyoum think that the commentators and participants were members of various pack-committees? What is more, the critic raises doubt as to the involvement of the rest of the public and attempts to lard his criticism with a quotation which lacks courtesy, from a local private magazine. It goes as follows:

Just because you made some passers-by participate, it doesn't necessarily mean that the people have been involved. An educational document in which teachers have not been directly and broadly involved will not be of much use (EJE:24).

Here, what does the originator of the idea mean by "passers-by"? And as an apologist for such an idea, what does it mean for Dr. Seyoum when somebody says so? Does it mean that those who participated in the drafting of the Policy were those who happened to be there by accident or otherwise? Even if so, does Dr. Seyoum mean that any nationals, irrespective of educational background, could not be

contributors to the drafting of the Policy? As an educator, it was incumbent upon Dr. Seyoum to straighten-up such unbalanced views instead of quoting!

By the way, should a critic spend his golden time on looking for such truculent ideas? And does Dr. Seyoum expect the whole population of Ethiopia (except those under seven) to participate in the formulation of the Policy through direct democracy? Would this also be practical and plausible? This is to be left to the conscience of the general readers.

For the knowledge of Dr. Seyoum, the Ministry of Education left no stone unturned to create a conducive democratic ground whereby any national could be involved in the discussion of the draft Policy as was notified through the various media (radio, newspapers, television, etc.). As stated earlier, series of discussion panels and debates were encouraged at the Federal Ministry of Education, respective regions, zones and weredas as well. Quite a large number of teachers, students, parents, representatives from professional associations, agencies, religious and civic societies of diverse views and political orientations participated and contributed positively to the formulation of the Policy. Who knows, Dr. Seyoum might have been one of these as his Paper reeks of.

It is a fresh memory that the issue of Education Policy gripped the general public. Fair-minded nationals discussed the issue PRO and CON. There was NO principle of "Wait & See" nor was any Tower of Babel. The role of the Ministry for the co-ordination, articulation, and process of ratification of the Policy was a Herculean task performed aggressively and studiously. Therefore, Dr. Seyoum's criticism which was deliberately engineered against such reality is only skin-deep. The Ministry would like to express its deepest concern that the Policy is not

a shot in the dark nor is it filled with empty promises and impressive cries but scintillates with new innovations and diffusion of technologies to enable the Country to part with the age-old backwardness and retrogressive practices, instead. Now, no doubt, the Policy has commenced a serious landing to bring a fresh breath of life to the long-lived suffocating educational system of the Country.

Contradictorily enough, when talking about the one-time study-ERGESE-concerning the role to be played by parents and the community (EJE:22) in the creation of all-rounded socialist citizens, Dr. Seyoum says, "To expect the public at large to play such a role in a country where the overwhelming majority were peasants whose level of political consciousness was very low, would not only have been unrealistic but cynical". Why? On the Part of the Ministry, the participation of peasants however low their consciousness may be contributes to progresses and moves. If Dr. Seyoum remains adamant to his idea, how about expecting every an unlettered peasant father/mother to voice out his/her opinions on the draft Policy?

Dr. Seyoum said that successive regimes had addressed the issue of the low socio-economic status of the teachers and went on to say that it was not implemented due to dearth of financial resources. But, though the issue may not have been fully addressed and resolved yet, to a fair-minded citizen no Ethiopian Government prior to 1991 has succeeded in bringing about new salary scales and career-structure innovations, as the incumbent one did. In the old days, teaching profession was an *omnium gatherum*. To fail to draw differences between the successive regimes on this issue is to fail to give one's own witness as a conscious-bound citizen.

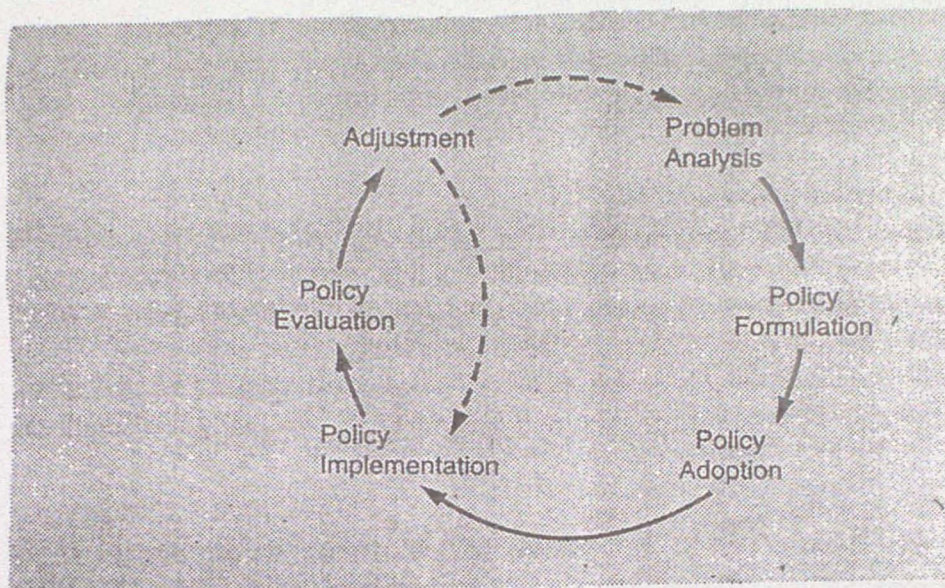
In his concluding remarks, Dr. Seyoum soberly reminds us and says, "It is high time that the Country stop tinkering with foreign models of education and start recasting its own education system in its own image instead". This is not a fair comment at all! The Policy was initiated, articulated, ratified and is being implemented by Ethiopians for Ethiopians. If, for Dr. Seyoum, exchange of relevant experiences with foreign professionals and agencies; and external assistance obtained in the form of financial and logistical support for the implementation of the policy are meant "foreign models" then the critic is telling us outright that irrespective of its hosts of problems, the Country has to reject everything and manage itself. But this is practically impossible; and as things stand now, the world is getting smaller thanks to the development of science and technology which drive us to globalization-unity in diversity. On top of that, the Country is picking up the pieces to re-build itself from the ashes of a long drawn-out fratricidal civil war.

CONCLUSIONS

Field-based researches and case studies illustrate that education policy formation takes discrete steps and stages. According to DAE-Development of African Education (1995:2-3) descriptions of policy formation contain the following version of a policy-cycle:

- Identification of policy problems (setting the policy agenda)
- Formulation and assessment of policy options
- Adoption of particular policy options
- Implementation of policies
- Evaluation of policy impact
- Adjustment and beginning of new policy cycle

In a schematic diagram, it is put (DAE, 1995:4) as follows:



Here in Ethiopia too, the Policy has passed through similar steps and stages. And upon its adoption, the Policy has officially been declared and is being implemented. Structures and mechanisms have been put into place to implement it. The Education Sector Development Program (ESDP), which is the bulwark of the Policy, has been introduced. The Program has timelines and phases. The "Five Year" sector strategy (1997-2001) is its first step in a longer range plan. As per the plan, universal primary education, among others, is expected to be achieved by the year 2015. To this end, a Steering Committee has been established. The Committee is comprised of responsible authorities drawn from top government offices and donor-communities. This Committee is entrusted with the implementation of the Policy through unreserved involvement and co-ordination of resources. This

information might shake off the fears and doubts which Dr. Seyoum entertained.

In Ethiopia, education policy formation as a social responsibility has attracted a wide popular interest. Its change involved the society. Its making was not an untouchable ground nor was it a hot potato. As Torres (1994:7) says, "Educational change involves the society at large - government and technicians, parents' and students, teachers and administrators, the doctors and the illiterates, elites and common folk."

In Ethiopia, too, right from inception, the Ministry of Education realized that the process of policy formulation itself can have profound impact on the direction, viability and success of the new reform.

In cognizance of this glare fact, the Ministry, as a coordinating and competent government body, created a conducive atmosphere in the early 1990s, whereby concerned and clear-sighted nationals of different orientations, educational backgrounds and experiences and others could come together for the first time in the history of the Ethiopian educational system to freely and fairly discuss and formulate the operational democratic-oriented education Policy.

The role of intellectuals, as think-tank of the society, in the continuous process of the Policy was of bed-rock foundation. Their constructive critiques were well heard and taken-up.

The Ministry quite well understands and accepts the messiness and fluidity of policy making. It was for this and other cogent reasons that the current education Policy stayed at discussional level for almost two solid years. The Ministry comparatively, believes that ample time was

given for the necessary steps and stages of consolidation before implementation.

Therefore, the Ministry would like to exhort Dr. Seyoum to clearly understand that the Policy was not formulated readily and effortlessly; nor did its actors play fast and lose.

In conclusion, understanding that the Policy is the baby of and a prescription by the peoples to the war ravaged ailing Country, many intellectuals, inter alia, as torchbearers and main actors, are doing their best for its realization. The ministry wishes Dr. Seyoum were one of them.

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**Rethinking Education in Ethiopia. Tekeste Negash,
Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Uppsala, 1996, 118 pages
Reviewed by Amare Asgedom, Associate Prof., AAU**

Rethinking Education in Ethiopia, one of the recent books of Dr. Tekeste Negash, the author of *The Crisis of Ethiopian Education*....., is now in circulation.

The book appears to be as highly readable as it is sensational, although laden with certain conceptual fallacies (such as, *dependent*, instead of, *independent*, on page 11). Of course, it might be tantalizing to have as many readers as possible to satisfy whatever *wants* the author has (economic, political or social aspirations).

The author argued that the *Ethiopian Education and Training Policy* has been flawed in many ways and concluded that "it is morally wrong and economically unjustifiable to invest scarce resources on the formal education system whose contribution to the development of the society is at best tenuous and at worst irrelevant." He finally made a recommendation with a catchy statement, "Let the formal education sector defend itself; invest in the non-formal education sector". The author has also made the following four assumptions:

- (a) formal education is irrelevant to development
- (b) that the majority of rural people are hostile to formal education
- (c) that the educational policy must address the developmental issues of the country, "*production of food*"
- (d) that non-formal education is an appropriate strategy to addressing development issues