Attempts at Educational Reform in Ethiopia: A Top-down or a Bottom-up Reform?

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ABSTRACT: *It has now been close to a century since modern education was introduced in Ethiopia. Ever since then some attempts have been made at educational reform. However, to date there is hardly any effort that has been made to critically examine these attempts. This pape first provides a brief background on the development of education in the country, so as to enable the reader to appreciate the attempts at reform. Next, on the basis of a conceptual framework it tries to assess criticaly the three major attempts at educational reform:* ***the Education Sector Review, the Evaluative Research on the General Education System in Ethiopia and the Transitional Government's Education and Training Policy.*** *Finally, in drawing a conclusion, it views the attempts so far made to have many of the characteristics of a top-down rather than that of a bottom-up reform.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Almost ninety years ago Emperor Menelik II established the first modern government school in1908 in the country. By 1994/95, there were 10730 Primary and Secondary Schools with a total enrollment of about 3.5 million (MOE, 1994:7). In hind sight, this appears to be a quantum leap. Nonetheless, as a close scrutiny of

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the education system shows, it has been plagued by numerous complex problems since its inception. The criticisms that had been levelled at it are legion. It had been indicted on several counts. For one thing, it was charged being elitist, formalistic, rigid and highly bureaucratic. In the face of such criticisms, it was natural for the successive governments to press, from time to time, for educational reform.

Unfortunately, however, no serious effort has been made to date to critically examine these attempts at educational reform. The major thrust of this paper is therefore to look critically into these attempts with a view of drawing some lessons that would make positive contributions to future attempts at educational reform in the country In addition, it is believed that it would make a modest contribution to the history of the development of Ethiopian education, a subject that still cries out in search of an author. Finally, it is expected that it would generate sustained debate on the issue of educational reform in Ethiopia.

II. A GLIMPSE AT ETHIOPIAN EDUCATION

In order to appreciate the attempts at educational reform, it may be appropriate to get a glimpse into the major highlights of Ethiopian education.

In traditional Ethiopia, the Orthodox Church and the mosque were the two major institutions that were responsible for the dissemination of religious education. Even though the role played by these two centers of learning in the cultural development of the nation cannot be underestimated, it is important to note that in traditional Ethiopia there was no popular or public education either

for boys or girls. Instead, the Church as well as the Mosque provided religious education mainly for promoting their respective doctrines. The church enabled the country to develop her own written script which made her the only country in Subsaharan Africa to have a written script of her own. Paradoxically, however, it remained for so long the 'Land of the Thumb Print' (NLCCC, 1984:3).

It was, therefore, against this backdrop that modern education was introduced by the government at the turn of the twentieth century In fact, its introduction was not at all welcomed with enthusiasm by the clergy as well as by the aristocracy. There was a fear that it could serve as a vehicle for the penetration of alien religion as well as for the introduction of sinister ideas to rock the *statusquo*. Consequently, its development was cautious, and gradual, particularly with regard to the education of women. Even though a school for girls was established by Empress Menen in 1931, the number of students was not more than a token.

At the outbreak of the Italo-Ethiopian war, in 1935, the total number of pupils in the entire country did not exceed five thousand, and those sent abroad for further study numbered about two hundred (Pankhurst, 1962:272-72). The modest attempt that was initiated by Emperor Menelik, and embraied by Emperor Haileselassie, to modernize the country through Western education was thus disrupted by the Italian occupation. The occupation was short lived; however, it did a lot of harm. The few existing schools were closed down and the few educated Ethiopians were liquidated. In general, Fascist Italy's educational policy aimed at providing native education that makes Ethiopians merely loyal servants of their Fascist Italian masters. By the time the five-year occupation ended,

the enrollment of Ethiopian pupils dwindled to about 1500 (Teshome, 1979:50).

The liberation of the country in 1942 ushered into a period of reconstruction that lasted to the mid-fifties. The government, during this period, seemed to have painfully and embarrassingly realized that the defeat of the country at the hands of Fascist Italy was partly due to its backwardness. Therefore, it appeard that the government resolved to do every effort to make to promote the development of education. Consequently, schools started mushrooming in some urban centers of the country. The British, as partners in the liberation of the country, started to make their influence felt in the organization of the educational system. In fact, the structure of the educational system had a British touch. It constituted of a three tier system (4+4+4) four years of primary, followed by another four years of intermediate culminating in four years of secondary. It is worth noting here that during all this period, as observed by Tekeste (1990:4), no serious educational issues were addressed by those concerned, despite the fact that almost everything in the school was foreign. An expatriate educator at that time observed that there was nothing Ethiopian in the classroom except the children. It is true that modern education in Ethiopia is imported and alien.

By 1955 the total student enrollment had reached the 95,000 mark (Bjenkan, 1972:169). By this time, the British influence in Ethiopia waned and the Americans started to shape Ethiopian educational policy. At the same time, the government set up what was known as the Long Term Planning Committee. The Committee, interlia, advocated that educational objectives be geared towards the speedy promotion of universal fundamental education, as well as the relevance of the curriculum to the needs of the student. In addition,

in the country's First (1957-62) and Second (1962-67) Five -year Development Plan, emphasis was put on improving the quality of education as well as gearing education to the training of skilled manpower. However, as the assessment of the two Five-year Development Plan reveals, the achievement was far below of what was expected.

At the same time, some piecemeal approaches were made to bring about change in the educational system. For instance, in 1963/64 an attempt to change the grade structure from the two tier System (8+4) to 6+2+4 System was introduced. This combination meant that a student had to go through six years of primary education, and two years of junior high school education and four years of senior high School education. The change was not fundamental as such but was given an American touch. Furthermore, another notable step had been taken in 1963 to make Amharic the medium of instruction at the primary school level. In fact, one scholar, (Tekeste, 1990:8), has characterized it as "the most significant reform of the decade".

Unfortunately, these half - hearted measures did not go far enough to address the root causes of the problems of education in the country. Dissatisfaction with the educational system set in and was criticized on a number of points, outstandingly:

a. It was elitist and as such only a selected few could get the opportunity for higher education.

b. Its curriculum remained highly academic-oriented despite some attempts to orient it towards technical-vocational education. Consequently, it gave rise to the problem of the educated - unemployed. For example, according to Desta's

(1979:71) assessment, by 1974, up to 25 percent of secondary school graduates were unemployed.

c. It was wasteful. For only six percent of pupils who began first grade could enter an institution of higher learning.

d. It did not provide equal access to all. It was urban and male biased. For instance, in 1974, 70 out of 124 Secondary Schools were located in Addis Ababa, Shoa Province, and Asmara (CSO, 1987:107). Besides, the enrollment rate of girls in 1974 at primary and secondary levels, was 32 and 29 percent respectively.

e. There was little that was Ethiopian in the curriculum. This was particularly voiced by conservative elements of the clergy and the aristocracy.

f. Its administration was characterized by a bloated bureaucracy that stifled local initiative and efficiency. According to Aklilu's Study (1967:35-36), the image that elementary school teachers had of the Ministry of Education was quite revealing:

> ....The Ministry is sometimes pictured as a remote island peopled with incompetent and corrupt clerks and administrators, whose sole preoccupation -besides coffee drinking and gossip-- is the devising of ways and means to oppress others. Teachers further allege that the degree of oppression and suppression increases with the distance of the school from Addis Ababa and the provincial capitals.

In addition to the above charges, there was also the embarrassing revelation that resulted from the decision reached in 1961, at the UNESCO sponsored Addis Ababa Conference of African States, to provide universal primary education by 1980. Ethiopia's prospect to achieve this target by 1980 was found to be dismal. Its record by 1961, compared to other African states, was the lowest. Except Niger, Ethiopia had the lowest percentage. It had 3.3 percent of the primary school age population and 0.5 percent of the secondary level school age population (Berjekan, 1972:122). This was indeed a stinging indictment against the Imperial regime.

It was, therefore, in the midst of all this that the government initiated, in October 1971, a comprehensive study of the education sector. This study, which came to be known as the Education Sector Review (ESR), was indeed one of the boldest attempts at educational reform taken by the old regime.

The outbreak of the 1974 revolution was, however, a death blow to the ESR. One of the immediate measures taken by the revolutionary regime was to address the issue of Primary education. Accordingly, in a policy directive issued on December 20th, 1974 it was proclaimed that, "under the banner of education for all, citizens shall have the right to free fundamental education (PMAC, 1974)." On the basis of this declaration, the Ministry of Education took a step to reconcile its educational priorities so as to advance, " universal primary education within the shortest period of time commensurate with available resources" (MOE, 1977:1). This measure, therefore, set down the trend for the prompts an and expansion of primary education during the Derg regime. Furthermore, the educational system was to be overhauled with socialist overtone. The new

regime's educational policy was envisaged in the 1976 program of the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) It was the comprehensive guideline to government action. Referring to the education sector, it states:

> "There will be an educational programme that will provide free education, step by step, to the broad masses. Such a programme will aim at intensifying the struggle against feudalism, imperialism and bureaucratic capitalism. All necessary measures to eliminate illiteracy will be undertaken. All necessary encouragement will be given for the development of science, technology, the arts and literature. All necessary effort will be made to free the diversified cultures of Ethiopia from imperialist cultural domination and from their own reactionary characteristics... (PMAC, 1977:4),"

The above policy statement was later condensed into slogans: education for production; education for scientific inquiry, and education for socialist consciousness. Moreover, new educational proclamations were issued. Proclamation No. 54 of 1975 was issued to provide for the public ownership of private schools. Another proclamation No. 103 of 1976 gave administration and control of schools to the people. Above all, quite a vigorous national campaign was launched in 1979 against illiteracy. By July 1990, which marked the Eleventh Anniversary of the Literacy Campaign, a 75.3 percent national literarcy rate was reported. According to Tilahun (1994:235) "the reduction of the illiteracy rate from 93 percent set forth as the baseline percentage figure at the start of the ENLC (Ethiopian National Literacy Campaign) to 24.7 percent is

certainly an outstanding literacy achievement." At the same time, however, Tekeste (1990:12) reminds us that its impact on national development still needed to be assessed.

> Besides, in terms of expansion, the educational system of the revolutionary period had reached an all time high. The number of primary schools had increased from the 1973/74 figure of 2754 to 8260 by 1986/87. Accordingly, primary level enrollment had more than tripled and the average national participation rate had reached 34.1 percent (Ayalew, 1989:41). Though such linear expansion of the educational system on face value appears to be quite impressive it does not, however, tell the problems that lie behind the figures. In the first place, it was not possible to make education equitably accessible to all regions. In fact, in this respect, a study by Ayalew (1989:41) on regional disparities in primary school participation on Ethiopia is quite revealing:
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> > The regions which have the highest participation rates, represent the geographically distinct regional profile conventionally denoted as the "South". The regions that are lagging behind are all, except Hararghe in the North. Hence, disparities have not only widened, but widened in a zonal nature heading towards a North-South dicthotomy.
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> Secondly, the quality of education has gradually started to deteriorate, due to various factors. For one thing, the meager educational resources had to be thinly spread, because of the uncontrolled expansion of schools. In fact, despite the expansion, the educational budget, as a percentage of the national budget, had

declined from 17.2 percent in 1974 to 9.5 percent (Destefano, 1992:12) in the 1980s. Consequently, per student expenditure, both at primary and secondary levels had drastically dropped. As a result, basic educational materials such as textbooks were in short supply: it is reported that the national student-to-book-ratio was 4:1 (Destefano 1992:22). Above all, there was a dire shortage of qualified teachers, both at primary and secondary levels. In fact, within a ten-year period, a backlog of about 5500 untrained teachers had to be hired, mostly for primary schools. These teachers were known as 'Digoma' teachers, because they had to be provided with basic needs such as housing by the local community. The Ministry of Education only paid them a monthly pittance of about one hundred 'birr'. The curriculum, during this period, was so highly politicized that students were required to take courses in political education. Furthermore, though English has been the language of instruction for quite a long time at secondary level, nonetheless the proficiency of most teachers, and particularly that of students, was widely believed to have been quite poor. In fact, one expatriate expert of English has aptly remarked that the English language has become a language of obstruction rather than of instruction.

It was obvious, therefore, that there was a need for reform. Thus in 1983, the Ministry of Education responded by launching of a project known as the Evaluative Research on the General Education System of Ethiopia (ERGESE). As it will be discussed later in this paper, the ERGESE study was completed by 1986. However, since the government had already launched by 1984 its Ten Year National Perspective Plan (1984-1994), the study was quietly shelved. The Ten Year Plan envisaged, among other things, to promote polytechnic education, as well as respect for work; to make the curriculum relevant; to intensify the eradication of illiteracy; to

strengthen Amharic as the medium of instruction at primary level; to improve teacher education, to upgrade the teaching profession, and to provide education to the physically and mentally handicapped (PMGSE 1985:436-39). Though an attempt had begun to implement some aspects of these objectives, by 1991 with the collapse of the regime, the Ten Year Plan had come to a grinding halt. Immediately after the establishment of the Transitional Government, a new education policy was in the making and by April 1994 it became official.

Thus, after a brief background on the state of education of the country, it may be in order, at this juncture, to examine the attempts made so far at educational reform by examining the Education Sector Review, the Evaluative Research on the General Education System in Ethiopia and the Transitional Government's Education and Training policy.

III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

It would a an over simplification to try to pin down educational reform to single definition. What one could do is to try to attempt to describe what educational reform is all about. Educational reform can be explained as a phenomenon that entails improvement and change in education within the economic, cultural and political contexts.

According to Ginsburg, Wallce and Miller (1988:317-37), the major purpose of educational reform is to bring about change in various aspects of the educational system such as curriculum and instruction, educational structure, educational measurement, teacher education, educational technology, educational management, finance, etc.

In an attempt to explain why educational reform occurs, Gumbert and Paulston (1977:370-95) developed what they call stability and conflict paradigms. According to the stability paradigm educational reform is perceived as a natural phenomenon that is necessary whenever society is convinced that an adjustment in the education system is essential. In contrast, the conflict paradigm underscores "the inherent instability of social systems and the conflict over values, and power that follow as a natural consequence. From a conflict perspective educational reform takes place, through conflict and competition between social class, ethnic, national, religious and gender groups, whose interests are at variance; or when structural contraditions (e.g. in the economy) are unsuccessfully compromised" (Banks, 1987:531-43).

Besides, educational reform could be generated by internal factors within the educational system such as the deterioration of quality of educational due to weaknesses within the education system. Moreover, J.Simmons (1983:3-19) maintains that socio-economic and political factors are more important in shaping educational reforms. According to Inkles (1984:139) educational reform could also result from external sources such as "borrowing" structures from the more developed nations.

It is strongly held that for educational reform to be effective, it is not only necessary but also essential that the target population, which is to be affected directly or indirectly by the reform, be involved in the reform process. This is in line with the idea of participatory decision-making, an essential element in a democratic process. It advocates that such involvement helps to develop in people the sense that they are not mere pawns to be manipulated as objects of reform,

but are rather subjects of reform, who have a voice and a stake in the reform process. This is no doubt contrary to the age-old thinking that government alone knows what is good for the people. As such, it rejects the paternalistic and parochial attitude of those in power towards the people. Thus, it subscribes to a bottom-up approach of reform that strongly advocates participation at grass-root level, a principle that ideas for reform could emanate from the bottom to the top. This is in complete contrast to the top-down approach that maintains a principle that what is good for the people should be handed-down from those in power to the ones below.

IV. DISCUSSION

1. The Education Sector Review

The three attempts at educational reform that have already been alluded to were tried out under three different governments that claim to espouse divergent political philosophies.

The Education Sector Review was the first of its kind in being a comprehensive attempt at educational reform. The objectives that it envisaged were all laudable. They ranged from the provision of basic education to all; to the development of scientific outlook, to equality of access to education; to the creation of an integrated society and to narrowing down the generations gap. But one could question here whether or not a feudal monarchy could have been committed to carrying out such lofty goals that are enshrined in democratic values such as equality. They seem to stand in contradiction to the status quo and unpalatable to it.

It is true that the need for the study of the Education Sector Review was borne out by dissatisfaction with the existing educational system. As it has already been pointed out, the educational system had its critics. In fact, the government itself had admitted that "development of the education system has been marked by a spirit of constructive dissatisfaction and quest for further improvement, rather than contentment with the progress made. Concerns about the course of education were expressed beginning in the early 1950's" (MOE, 1972:1-2). The dissatisfactions emanated both from internal and external sources. At home, both the young as well as the old, particularly the nobility and the clergy had an axe to grind against the educational system. Externally, the country had ended up almost at the tail end of most African states with regard to its record in providing universal primary education. This embarrassing performance had been taken as an affront by those at the helm of the government. Thus, the government had no alternatives but to respond in some way.

It is often said that a revolution does not operate on a time-table, perhaps this is also true to some extent with reform. The Imperial regime initiated the Education Sector Review almost two years prior to the outbreak of the 1974 Revolution. In fact, by the time it was to be implemented, the Revolution was about to erupt, and the Education Sector Review became one of the precursors of the Revolution. It appears in that it came at a time when the country was ripe for a sweeping revolution rather than for a sectorial reform in education. Thus, the time was not auspicious for its successful implementation, and this may particularly explain why it failed the way it did.

One major concern in educational reform, as in any other reform, is the extent to which consensus has been built around the reform. Consensus is regarded most often as the bed-rock on which educational reform has to be built so as to ensure its success. In order to build consensus, those who are to be directly or indirectly affected by the reform process have to participate. In the case of educational reform, teachers, parents, professional associations, and, in short, interest groups need to participate actively and sincerely in the reform process. Nonetheless, the degree of participation of such groups in the Education Sector Review is quite questionable. It is true that the professionals who formed the core group of the study were quite large numbering about 81. The bulk of these professionaly, about fifty, were drawn from Addis Ababa University, and were mostly Ethiopians. In addition, there were international consultants as well as representatives of international organizations such as UNESCO, IBRD, and ILO. All in all, it is believed that about 160 individuals had participated in the study. Their qualifications and experience in the field of education were quite impressive.

The question, that still remains, however, is the degree of involvement of teachers and parents in particular, and that of the rest of the public in general. A close scrutiny of the list of participants of the study groups reveals the names of some secondary school principals and a few representatives of the teachers' association. However, it is very difficult to discern from this whether or not this was a genuine or a token representation. As for the participation of parents and the general public, there is no indication whatsoever in the major document of the study or in the various working papers. The Education Sector Review seems to have subscribed to what Mesfin (1984:180) called a veterinarian type of prescription.

According to such type of prescription, "the veterinarian does not have the advantage (or perhaps the disadvantage) of a patient that can articulate his ailments; it is a lack of articulation on the part of a specific people that makes veterinarian type of prescriptions useless." In the case of the Education Sector Review also, the government seems to have believed that it knew what was good for the people, and ,therefore, chose what it thought to be the best alternative. This is indeed a classic example of a top down approach in educational reform. Either by omission or commission, the government had especially slighted the participation of teachers in the reform process. By so doing, it seems to have forgotten the fact that, even though a government proposes a reform, in the final analysis, however, it is teachers that are called upon to dispose. Thus, it appears that from its very inception, the Education Sector Review's obituary had been written long before its demise, and seems to have carried the seed of its own destruction.

Added to the above was the government's attempt to maintain an atmosphere of secrecy around the Education Sector Review. In fact, the government, in its effort to limit its circulation, had the word "restricted", stamped on copies of the study. Therefore, the confidentiality with which the study was withheld from the general public gave rise to all kinds of rumors. This obviously gave a field day to those who were opposed to the regime to fabricate all sorts of rumors and distortions about the study. Thus an irreparable damage had been done, contributing to the final demise of the study. This happened simply because of a government that vehemently believed that doing things behind closed doors was a virtue.

To think of bringing about educational reform without overall socio-economic structural transformation would be to miss the whole

essence of the educational reform process. The Imperial regime at the time appears to have been concerned with the problem of unemployed school leavers, particularly at secondary level. Therefore, its desire was to put an end to the policy that had made each level of schooling a stepping-stone to the next higher level. Accordingly, beginning in the early fifties, with the launching of a series of five-year development plan, it adopted what was called a "controlled expansion" of education, particularly at the secondary level. It is in line with this thinking that the government approved alternative two of the Education Sector Review's recommendations. The study had come up with three alternatives. The first one was a three tier system, with six years of primary, four years of junior secondary, and four years of senior secondary (6+4+4). The second alternative envisaged four year of primary, four years of junior secondary, and four years of senior secondary (4+4+4). The Third one came up with four years of primary, two years of junior secondary, and four years of senior secondary. The government favored alternative Two, at the same time combining the suggestion for basic education from alternative Three. This choice was thought to enable the government to promote universal primary education, and at the same time to curb expansion at the secondary level which would also be in line with the policy of "controlled expansion."

The idea behind all this was the assumption that, hereafter, the majority of school leavers would live off the land as farmers. For a country like Ethiopia, where agriculture is the mainstay of the economy, the approach seems to be quiet pragmatic and attractive. At the same time, however, the government should have realized, among other things, in a country where most of the arable land was held by absentee landlords it may not work. This called for a sweeping land reform. The government, however, was dragging its

feet on the issue despite the fact that university students had held massive demonstration calling for land to the tiller. Therefore, it is clear that even if the Sector Review had survived this aspect of the reform, it would not have succeeded.

2. Evaluative Research of the General Education System in Ethiopia.

As pointed out earlier, the fact that by the 1980's the education system was in deep crisis had become quite evident. Though public criticism of the educational system was quite subdued, because of the oppressive nature of the regime, the government could not have still remained indifferent. It had to do something and that was why it took the initiative to launch a project in 1983 entitled Evaluative Research of the General Education System in Ethiopia. In fact, just prior to the launching of ERGESE, the government had taken the unprecedented step of allowing a government monthly magazine "Yekatit", to publish an interview conducted with three Ethiopian educators on the status of education in Ethiopia. In this interview the then principal of Menelik Secondary school is quoted to have said:

> In Menelik School alone there are 11,600 regular and extension students. As such teachers could not give individual help to each student. Therefore, both students and teachers seem to be engaged in distance learning. For instance, how would it be possible for a teacher to give homework or class work?... if there are 70 or 80 students in a class, only 30 of them pass, the teacher could not know why the other 40 failed. (Negussie, 6: 1982)

This was therefore, the first signal that the government for the first time officially recognized that there was something wrong with the education system. In fact, prior to this, the government was capitalizing on the achievements gained since the revolution in the literacy campaign as well as in the expansion of the school system.

What distinguishes the ERGESE study from the Education Sector Review is the fact that it was undertaken by a regime that claimed to be socialist. Thus the objectives of the educational system were quite different. As articulated later in 1984 in a report on the formation of the Workers Party of Ethiopia (WPE) it is stated:

> The aim of socialist education is to mould citizens who have an all-rounded personality by inculcating the entire society with socialist ideology thus arming them with the required knowledge for socialist construction (WPE, 1984:10).

The goal no doubt was quite lofty. But it sounded more of a rhetoric than realistic. It is difficult to imagine how such a goal of creating an all-rounded socialist personality could have been realized in a society which had just emerged from centuries of feudalism. Furthermore, it was also incomprehensible how the majority of the children coming from a traditional peasant background could have been indoctrinated with an alien and radical ideology as that of Marxis-Leninism.

The timing for launching the study could be said to have been auspicious because by the 1980's the regime had consolidated its power. In fact, it was a year prior to the establishment of the WPE that the government initiated the ERGESE study. Therefore, it was a

time when the regime had reached its zenith. Thus, it was from a position of strength and confidence that it gave the go ahead for the study. If the regime had wanted, it had the political muscle to implement the recommendations of the study. In other words, unlike the Imperial regime's Education Sector Review, time was on the side of ERGESE. In hindsight, however, it appears that the government from the very outset did not seem to have been keenly interested in the study; it was perphaps merely meant for public consumption.

The ERGESE study had, however, made a modest attempt to involve some sectors of the public. For instance, teachers, students, and to some degree, parents, were made subjects of the study. They were made to fill in some of the questionnaires that were prepared for the study. It is true, however, that in-depth information could not be elicited through a questionnaire. At the same time, the core of the study group was made up of professional educators. They were mainly drawn from Addis Ababa University and to some extent from the Ministry of Education. A total of about 60 individuals were involved in the four task forces namely: Curriculum Development and Teaching-Learning Process, Educational Administration, Structure and Planning, Educational Logistics, Supportive Services and Manpower Training and Educational Research and Evaluation. Perhaps, the most interesting aspect of the members of the task forces was that they were all Ethiopians. This was probably the first time an Ethiopian group was solely charged to study the problem of Ethiopian education. Whether or not the Ethiopian saying 'yagärun särdo bagäru bäre' was justified in this case is better left to the judgement of the reader.

Though teachers, students and parents were said to have been involved in the study, it does not necessarily mean that there was a

national debate on the study. In fact, the whole political environment at the time was far from being conducive for such kind of discussion. Therefore, it would be quite unrealistic to expect an open and free dialogue at a time when the order of the day, if one could help it, was to speak no evil.

Furthermore, the study was shrouded in secrecy. In this respect, it was not different from that of the Education Sector Review. Writing about the secrecy that surrounded the ERGESE study. Tekeste (1990:18) observes, "These documents are, however, classified as secret and, therefore, have been inaccessible to the public. Permission to study the documents is granted on individual basis with the personal authorization of the Minister of Education." To add here a personal note from experience, the writer of this paper, recalls that copies of the final version of the study were not made available by the Ministry of Education even to the members of the four task forces of which he was a member. It appears, therefore, secrecy had become part of the tradition in Ethiopian educational reform. It also seems that no lesson had been learnt from the Education Sector Review.

The ERGESE Study was intended "to provide a picture of the overall status of schooling today by identifying those areas in need of improvement. It was also expected to make realistic recommendations to improve the quality of education in the next decades" (MOE, 1986:6). Accordingly, it made recommendations and in fact went one step further to identify the recommendations, that could be handled by the Ministry of Education, and those that could be carried out by the public at large, as well as those that need the intervention of the government. The recommendations ranged from steps to be taken to improve the teaching profession down to

the setting up of counseling and guidance services for students. Most of the recommendations were quite relevant and timely. However, the question of availability of resources to implement the recommendations does not seem to have been given serious treatment. For instance, the study recommends that the Ministry of Education look for funds from donor agencies to upgrade the teaching profession, as if donor agencies were out there to readily provide the fund. It seems, therefore, the economic reality of the country had eluded the study group.

Moreover, one of the major recommendations of the study was that parents and the community at large should play an active role in the creation of all-rounded socialist citizens. This was a tall order by any stretch of imagination. 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.

3. The Transitional Government's Education and Training Policy

As already alluded elsewhere in this paper, towards the end of the collapse of the socialist regime, the relevance of the curriculum had become questionable. The quality of education had become suspect, and accessibility and equity to educational opportunity left a lot to be desired. Thus, there were the signs of dissatisfaction with the educational system. Therefore, when the Transitional Government assumed the mantle of leadership in 1991, the necessity to bring about reform in the educational system was quite apparent.

The goals of Ethiopian education, as articulated in the Transitional Government's policy, appear to be enshrined in such democratic values as equality, liberty, justice, truth and respect for human rights. These values ring out through out the policy document. This may not be surprising at all considering the fact that the claim to espouse the values of western democracy, after the demise of socialism in the former Soviet Union, has been in vogue, particularly in Third World Countries. Understandably, therefore, the government's stance to embrace democracy is very much in tune with the order of the day. This is no doubt a welcome development for a society that had suffered a lot under a socialist regime. Nevertheless, the question whether or not these cherished values will be able to see the light of day remains to be seen. In addition, the specific objectives of education as stated in the policy, range from the promotion of relevant and appropriate education and training to the recognition of the rights of nations and nationalities to learn in their languages. One would find it hard to quarrel with such laudable aims, even though one would still be obliged to question their realization.

The process of formulating the new education and training policy was entrusted to a group of Ethiopian educators. They were organized into five sub-task forces constituting about 42 members. The overwhelming majority were drawn from the Ministry of Education, and from Addis Ababa University. The rest were from the Ministries of Culture, Agriculture, Industry, and Health, as well as, from the Science and Technology Commission, and the Institute of Agricultural Research. Besides, there were representatives of about 22 government organizations that participated in the study.

In addition, the Ministry of Education had made an effort to hold meetings with teachers in Addis Ababa as well as in seven other

regions in an attempt to explain the draft education and training policy. Accordingly, the Ministry had documented the comments and suggestions (MOE, 1994a: 15) that transpired in these meetings. However, as a close examination of these comments and suggestions reveal, they were within the framework of the draft policy. In other words, there were neither novel suggestions nor constructive critical comments. In fact, they appear to be an endorsement of the policy. At the same time, it is worth noting here that, at this point in time the Ethiopian Teachers Association has split in to two opposing factions. Therefore, it will not be hard to imagine the impact and implications this would have towards the policy. As to the involvement of the rest of the general public in the formulation of the policy, one could not help but raise serious doubt. In fact, it is this absence of national debate that prompted one long time Ethiopian educator to go on record in expressing his view on the policy in one of the monthly issues of a non-government Amharic journal. Asked about the Transitional Government's claim that the people have been involved in the drafting of the policy, he had this to say:

> Just because you made some passers-by participate, it does not necessarily mean that the people have been involved. He goes on to add, an educational document in which teachers have not been directly and broadly involved will not be of much use (Tobia, 1995:11).

In general, the government's claim regarding the involvement of the public remains suspect. As such, the Transitional Government's education and training policy like its predecessors appears to be a result of the top-down reform.

However, unlike the Imperial regime's Education Sector Review, and the Socialist regime's ERGESE, the Transitional Government's education policy was not shrouded in mystery. In fact, copies of the draft policy were circulated freely, and, for anyone interested they were available at the main office of the Ministry of Education. In this respect, the Transitional Government seems to have made a radical departure in raising the veil of secrecy in educational policy making.

It would be trite to state here that the availability of resources is quite indispensable to the effective implementation of educational reform. Therefore, an educational reform that is bent to bring about improvement in an educational system without adequate resources would be nothing but an exercise in futility. It is true though that in most Third World Countries, the educational budget could not keep pace with the ever increasing student enrollment. In fact, in many Least Developed Countries, as enrollment grows by geometric progression, resources increase only by arithmetic progression. Consequently, in these countries governments have increasingly found themselves no longer able to carry the ever-increasing cost of education. Thus, they have been obliged willy-nilly to make the agonizing and painful decision of introducing a policy of cost-sharing that requires parents and or students to share the burden. At the same time, however, it is not hard to imagine how unpopular such a measure could be. Nonetheless, the Transitional government, as stated in article 3.9.1 of the Education and Training Policy, has adopted a cost-sharing measure after the tenth grade (MOE 1994b:31). As noted already, it is understandable why the government was compelled to take such a step. At the same time, it is ironical also that an education policy that claims to be rural-friendly opts for such a measure. It is going to hurt the same people

that it was supposed to help. Anyhow, however necessary and inevitable it would have been to adopt such a policy, it should have dawned on the government that its people constitute one of the poorest of the poor in the world.

Moreover, 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. It has been reported that recently primary school enrollment is on the decline in the rural parts of the country. It appears that parents have become disillusioned by modern education, for among other things, it has failed to provide their children with a hope for wage-earning employment. In this respect, Tilahun (1994:223-4), in his critical examination of the 1979-1991 Ethiopian literacy campaign, provides quite a vivid and revealing testimony by an old man about the disillusionment shared by many like him about education in general. The old man in reply why he refused to enroll in literacy classes had this to say:

> I have seven children, three of whom I have been able to support through high school. They were able to graduate three years ago. It has been a substantial financial burden on the family to support them all those years. We were able to persevere those long years with the great hope that they will one day, be able to help us out of poverty. Instead, they have been unemployed for the past three years which is very frustrating and saddening. Nor, could they contribute to the household by working on our small plot of land, for the school had made them too "civilized" to engage in such manual jobs. Why, for

> God's sake, would I, an old man, bother in learning how to read and write when, in fact, the young and strong are unable to benefit out of an extensive training?

In light of this, introducing cost-sharing at any level of the education system becomes all the more bewildering.

Besides, even though an attempt had been made to develop a strategy to enable the implementation of the policy, the sources of finance were not clearly spelled out (MOE, 1993: 1-55). The underlying assumption is that the bulk of the education cost, particularly for primary and secondary levels, would be covered by the respective regions, with some topping up by the Central Government. In addition, as always, external aid and loan are expected to flow from foreign sources to supplement the educational expenditure. However, considering the shift by major international donors and loan agencies in favor of the emerging democracies in Eastern Europe, the these days chance of Third World Countries, especially those in Africa, obtaining adequate funds appears to be bleaker than it has ever been.

One of the major characteristics of the Transitional Government's educational reform that differentiates it from previous attempts at educational reform is some of the radical measures it took with regard to some of the following issues.

The new educational policy took the unprecedented step to make the mother-tongue a medium of instruction at primary level of schooling. As expressed in article 3.5.1., it reads:

> Cognizant of the pedagogical advantage of the child in learning in mother tongue and the rights of nationalities to promote the use of their languages, primary education will be given in nationality languages. (MOE, 1994b:23)

The fact that Ethiopia is a multilingual is not a debatable issue: Furthermore, empirical evidence substantiates that it is advantageous for a child to learn in its own mother tongue. As such, the measure taken may be an idea whose time has come. Nevertheless, its successful implementation should have also been considered. Pilot testing, or pre-testing a certain policy on a small scale before full scale implementation, would have been a prudent step to follow. To rush things for the sake of political expediency would be courting a disaster whose consequences would be difficult to fathom for generations to come.

The other, new input which the policy came up with is the decentralized management of the educational system. The purpose, as articulated in article 3.8.3. reads as follows:

> Educational management will be decentralized to create the necessary condition to expand, enrich and improve the relevance, quality, accessibility and equity of education and training (MOE,1994b:29).

It has been pointed out in this paper that the management of the educational system was so highly centralized that it had given rise to bloated bureaucracy that inhibited local initiative and flexibility Curriculum design, significant decisions on personnel matters,

purchase and distribution of supplies, budget preparation and allocations were rigidly centralized at the head office of the Ministry of Education. It is true that some attempts were made at decentralization of the management system under the socialist regime. However, to all intents and purposes, the Ministry of Education had remained a monolithic organization. Therefore, the management system badly needed restructuring and streamlining. Besides, the management has to reflect the spirit of the Transitional Government's charter which granted autonomy to the various regions.

Even though decentralized management has its own merits, there are still pre-requisites that have to be fulfilled, if it is to succeed. The most important is to have a cadre of managerial experts at the various levels of the education system. Competent trained, experienced and knowledgeable subordinates who can be trusted to carry out responsibilities, and to make the necessary decisions at the local level are sine qua non for the success of decentralized management (Chandan, 1991: 113). Whether or not the Ministry of Education has an adequate body of such experts remains a moot question. However, to embark upon on decentralized management without having the necessary expertise would lead to irreparable damage to the educational system. The Ministry of Education, therefore, should be extra-cautious so that what is supposed to be a remedy should not be worse than the disease. Moreover, it should exercise caution not to abandon its central responsibility (Chandan, 1991:116). In fact, decentralized management would thrive if the Ministry adopts a principle of governing through rules to governing through the setting of goals. After all, both centralized and decentralized managements are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they complement each other. Besides, in decentralized management,

laws, rules and regulations must be clearly and concisely written in order to avoid ambiguities and misunderstandings between the Ministry and the local units.(Winkler, 1989:25).

Other new inputs in the policy which deserve mention include the concern shown to the relatively low socio-economic status of teachers which has been one of the sad stories in the Ethiopian education system. Every successive regime had addressed the issue. In fact, it was one of the most over studied problems by the Ministry of Education. Nonetheless, none of these studies was implemented. Instead, they were shelved on the ground that financial resources were not available for their implementation. Thus the commitment expressed in articles 3.4.6, and 3.4.7 of the Education Policy to the professional development of teachers is commendable, though long overdue. Furthermore, article 2.2.13 underscores the attention given to education. It emphasizes that it should be geared towards reorienting society's attitudes and values with regard to the role and contribution of women in development. This, no doubt, is an idea that deserves the utmost confirmation. Another aspect of the policy, as enunciated in article 3.9.6, pledges to provide encouragement and support by the government to the establishment of various private educational and training institutions. This should be seen as a welcome development, though, to date, the government's ambiguity and lack of transparency towards privatizing the economy makes its realization suspect.

V. CLOSING REMARKS

The Achilles' heel at attempts made so far at Ethiopian educational reform in Ethiopia appears to be located in its confinment to addressing symptoms rather than the root causes of the problems of

education. For example, the question of how to make the curriculum relevant and responsive to the needs of the society had been a priority issue in the Education Sector Review, as well as in ERGESE, and recently also in the Transitional Government's Education and Training Policy. The effort made, no doubt, was a correct one, though the issue had proved to be slippery and elusive. The reason for this seems to lie in the fact that, without undertaking an overall socio-economic structural change, to expect an effective educational reform, amounts to nothing but wishful thinking. For instance, to try to alleviate the plight of the educated-unemployed by making the curriculum relevant will not, in and of itself, help to create a job-market to absorb school leavers. As it is well known, agriculture is the mainstay of the country's economy thus making agricultural education relevant in schools may not only be necessary but essential. Nonetheless, unless farming as an occupation becomes attractive financially and otherwise, it would be quite unrealistic to expect the unemployed young people to live off the land. Therefore, it should not be lost on those responsible for educational reform that socio-economic transformation is a pre-requisite for educational reform.

Moreover, the attempts so far made at educational reform had clearly shown that not much concern and attention had been paid to enlist the support of the public in order to make the educational reform effective. Whatever attempts were made in this regard were not at all genuine. In fact, they were mere lip-services. Therefore, as long as governments insist on pursuing a top-down approach toward educational reform, all efforts would remain sterile.

Usually, in the process of educational reform, there are these who benefit and others who lose. The Ethiopian case is no exception.

For example, if one takes the Education Sector Review, it meant to provide basic education to enable school-leavers to live off the land, though as noted earlier, such a measure could not have materialized without effective land reform. Under the socialist regime also, education that would benefit the broad masses was to be pursued. However, it proved to be more of a socialist rhetoric than realistic. The Transitional Governement's educational policy, too, has its beneficiaries and losers. The policy seems to have been designed deliberately to benefit the rural rather than the urban people. This may not be surprising at all, considering the government's claim that its political power base lies in the rural rather than in the urban areas. Further scrutiny also reveals that groups like ethnic minorities, women, and at long last even, teachers, the forgotten and unsung heroes, have been singled out to be beneficiaries.

One of the most interesting aspects in the exercise made so far to bring about educational reform had been the positive steps taken to involve as much as possible Ethiopian educators in the process. It would be recalled that in the Education Sector Review, even if the involvement of Ethiopian academics was quite significant, there were still a sizeable expatriate educators. However, in the ERGESE, Ethiopians had assumed the entire responsibility. Recently too, the participation of Ethiopian academics in the formulation of the new Education and Training Policy was total. This has been a step in the right direction, even though the impact of foreign influence on the education system had remained entrenched during all the former regimes. In fact, since its inception, modern education in Ethiopia had suffered from too many advices from various foreign quarters. One cannot cite a better example to illustrate this point than to refer to the change in the usage of the terms "inspection" and "supervision". For instance, back in the 1940's, when the British

were dominant the term inspection was in use. However, with the advent of the Americans, beginning in the mid-fifties until the outbreak of the revolution in 1974, the term inspection was changed into supervision. Under the socialist regime, the term inspection resurrected. Today, though it is not quite clear which is the influential foreign power in the country, the term supervision seems to have resurfaced. Anyhow, the change of the term from supervision to inspection or vice versa does not appear to have made a substantive difference in the subject matter as such. However, it may remind us, the classical case of putting old wine in new bottles. Nonetheless, the moral of this lesson should not be lost. It is high time that the country stop tinkering with foreign models of educational and start, recasting its own education system in its own image instead.

As a final note, the attempts made so far at educational reforms in Ethiopia had been quite prescriptive, with hardly little or no input from the general public. Moreover, the attempts had been undertaken as though an educational reform would succeed in itself without an overall socio-economic transformation. Such attempts at educational reform had proved in the past, and will also prove in the future to be at be either palliative or an exercise in futility.

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