
Orphan and Vulnerable Children's Schooling in Ethiopia: Issues and Challenges

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Abstract: The right to learn is one of the fundamental considerations of both the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights (UDHR) of the Child. Education is emphasized for the very reason that it plays a pivotal role in achievement of social and economic advancement. Nations around the globe have been working towards attainment of universal access to basic education since 1940s especially following the adoption of UDHR by the UN member states. Some countries have reached at the desired end and some others are lagging far behind from achieving universal enrolment to their eligible group of children. Orphan and Vulnerable Children (OVC) are in the fore front of being disadvantaged in terms of access to basic social services like education. This study has examined into the situation of children in difficult circumstances in Ethiopia with respect to access to basic education. The review results indicate that there are 6 million children who have lost either of their parents or both. Orphans constitute about thirteen percent of the total child population. The total number of street children is estimated at 150,000 out of which 60,000 are dependents of the streets of Addis Ababa for their livelihood. Besides analysis of magnitude of the problem and identification of challenges and issues of concern, the study has also suggested remedies that may enable to keep OVC in schools and improve their academic performance in view to enable them aspire for better future. Data used in this study have been collected through careful identification and examination of relevant literature sources and case studies pertaining to basic education provision and the lives of orphan and vulnerable children. Verification of data accuracy was made through consultation of different sources about same information.

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Background

The future of a nation is highly dependent on the quality of investment on its children. It is what we equip our children with today in turn shapes our days ahead. Good quality education is instrumental to this end. Where children obtain education that progressively maintains their physical, mental and social developments, their likelihood of leading better life as successful adults is highly anticipated. Aggregate of individual level success (of course, not skewed towards a particular dominant group in a certain society or at any point in time), on the other hand, is believed to result in positive impacts on social and economic advancement at national level as well. It is for a simple fact that one of the development indicators is a per capita income or an annual average individual earning of a citizen.

Ethiopia has officially recognized the indispensable role of education in bringing about sustainable development, maintenance of peace and being source of power as back as the dawn of the 20th century. That was why the outstandingly enlightened Emperor Menelik II triumphantly addressed the nation following the great battle of Adwa in 1896 as saying “we need educated people in order to ensure our peace, to reconstruct our country and to enable to exist as a great nation in the face of European powers” (Pankhurst in Ayalew, 2000, p. 8). Beyond His Majestic address, the Emperor had also issued the first education proclamation in 1906 that provides equal chance to all eligible children, irrespective of their difference in gender, to pursue education along with commitment of his government and duties of parents. Part of the historic education act as cited in Ayalew(2000, p. 8) reads as:

In other countries, not only do they learn, even more they make new things. Hence, *as of today all six-year old boys and girls should attend school*. As for parents who would not send their children to school, when the former die, their wealth, instead of passing to their children, will be transferred to the government. My government will prepare the schools and the teachers. [Italics added].

The subsequent governments have also done what they thought good in creating educational opportunity for all, the cumulative worth of which brought us to where we are at present. The 1955 “*Yefidel Serawit*” (literary means Army for the Alphabet) and “Work-Oriented Adult Literacy Program (1968 - 1973) of the Imperial regime; and the popular mass literacy programs during the socialist government under the names “*Edget Behibret Yewuketna Yesira Zemecha*” meaning, “Development through Cooperation: Campaign for Literacy and Work” and “*Biherawi Yemeserete Timhirt Zemecha*” (simply means National Campaign for Basic Literacy) (Mammo, 2006; Gudeta, 1982) are among others to be worth noted in this regard. Despite all the efforts and a kind of seasonal success of some of the initiatives, universal access to good quality basic education in the country persists to be a permanent challenge.

Referring to recent developments in the Ethiopian education system performance, a dramatic increase in enrolment is well underway since the inception of the Education Sector Development Program (ESDP) in 1997. Such an expansion in access evidences that the government is placing its level best endeavor and mobilizing huge resources aiming at attainment of Universal Primary Education (UPE). Statistical reports also affirm that the primary school enrollment has increased from 3.7 million in 1999 to 8.1 million in 2000/01 and further reached to 13.5 million in 2005/06. During the same period, the gross enrolment rate (GER) has shown a significant change from 61.6% to 91.3%, and the net enrolment rate (NER) grew from 52.2% to 77.5% (MoE, 2007).

Contrary to efforts being exerted and corresponding gains in quantity, however, education in Ethiopia is characterized by sharp inter and intra regional disparities in participation and serious problem of quality.

The national average gross enrolment rate for primary education was 100.5 and 90.5 percent for boys and girls respectively during the year 2007/08. Yet, the figure showed the least gross enrolment rates in the two predominantly pastoral regions of “Afar (29% for boys and 22.4% for girls) and Somali (34.9 for boys and 29.6% for girls)” (MoE, 2008, p. 22).

We also experience more depressing figures while paying a glance at intra regional variations. Let us take SNNP regional state in this regard. In 1999 E.C, for instance, the regional average gross enrolment ratio (GER) in primary education was reported to be 97.9 percent and the net enrollment ratio of 84.9 percent (SNNPR, REB, 2008). But this kind of “tyranny of the average” put in the shade some of the grassroots level frustrating realities. To mention some, the NER of primary education in the five predominantly pastoral districts of Male (28.9%), Bena Tsemay (27.3%), Hamer (10.4%), Dasenech (9.1%) and Gngangatom (4.3%) in the year 2007/8 (REB, 2008). This state of affairs evidences the prevalence of soar degree of disparity between the national, regional and district levels especially with regard to exceptionally disadvantaged areas like South Omo zone.

The quality dimension also seems to be more worrisome. The three national learning assessments that have been carried out by the National Organization for Examinations in 2000, 2004, and 2008 have witnessed regressing trend in quality of learning. For example, the 2004 National Learning Assessments in grades four and eight showed a declining trend in learning achievement. When compared to the 2000 baseline, the competency level/achievement score of students in grade four showed only a slight improvement from 47.9% to 48.5% in 2004 while, achievement scores for grade eight has slipped down from 41.1% in 2000 to 39.7% in 2004. A look into the 2008 assessment report was also found to be lower compared to the previous two assessment results. The 2008 assessment reveals that only 13.9 percent of the students have appeared proficient, 24

percent have attained a basic minimum level and the remaining 62.1 percent have fallen below the basic minimum composite score.

In addition to the foregoing, slightly touched upon, inherent setbacks of the country's education system, a relatively new battle front is being roaring around. This is the challenge whether to be able to enroll and retain orphan and vulnerable children in schools. Children who are considered as vulnerable include orphans, the physically challenged, neglected, children from poor households, children living with single parents, children of internally displaced families and the abandoned ones.

The fact that vulnerability is the state of being susceptible to physical or emotional injury or harm, Ethiopia is home for as many as six million children in extremely difficult social, emotional and economic condition for the reason that they lost either of their parents or both. Orphan and vulnerable children, in particular, lack all sorts of support including moral, material, and financial to progress in their education. In effect, the enrolled ones used to leave school earlier and those of who did not begin it at all remain illiterate for life. Many of them may resort to live on the streets, begging or scavenging through trash to survive. Young vulnerable girls usually throw themselves into the shocking practice of child prostitution to generate income for their basic needs where they doomed to "face sexual abuse by adults, rape, unwanted pregnancy and early motherhood" (UNICEF, 2000, p.3).

These children miss healthy growth environments like school settings from where they receive teachers' care, guidance and counseling that are very helpful in the rest of their life. Most of the orphan and vulnerable children drop out of school because they have to support themselves and their families either in supplement to the poor resource base of the breadwinner (if alive) or being a child head of the household (when parents confined to bed or deceased). Multiple problems like competition between the school timetable and the children's prime time of livelihood engagement, inability to buy stationeries and not affording to pay for school uniform, and overall social, emotional and economic insecurity adamantly dictate the Orphan and Vulnerable Children (OVC) either not to enroll or quit their schooling earlier.

The challenge is multi-faceted. On one hand, it is difficult to attain UPE or achieve MDGs in education or deliver for the EFA goals having millions of children in difficult circumstances out of school; for the very reason that they represent a noteworthy proportion of the school age population. More importantly, it is their right for OVC to receive good quality basic education that has favorable impact on their future. On the other hand, the problem cannot be addressed only by employing the conventional rhetoric of “increasing school places”. It rather demands catering for particular needs and dreads of the OVC.

The objectives of this study, therefore, are to:

1. explore the magnitude of the challenge pertaining to orphan and vulnerable children in Ethiopia;
2. identify the major setbacks that interfere with the orphan and vulnerable children’s education; and
3. forward viable strategies that enable to conquer the adverse effects of inequality of opportunity to education which has a life long bearing on social belongingness, economic status, and political participation of the OVC

In view of the above objectives, the study attempts to answer the following basic questions.

1. What is the magnitude of the problem of orphan and vulnerable children in the country?
2. What major impediments limit the chance of orphan and vulnerable children to enroll to school and regularly attend classes?
3. What strategies need to be employed in order to mitigate the problem of orphan and vulnerable children in order to make them enjoy equal opportunity in access to education, retention in schools and completion of at least full course of primary schooling?

Data used in the study have been collected through careful identification and examination of relevant literature sources and case studies pertaining to basic

education provision and the lives of orphan and vulnerable children. International conventions, national legal instruments, official reports and research undertakings related to the issue under study were among the major and widely consulted data sources. Triangulation of information from one source with another one was also made in the attempt to verify the accuracy of data.

Overview of Global and Regional Situation of OVC

The very purpose of the study, as stated above, is to examine into the manifold challenges that orphan and vulnerable children face in their relentless struggle for survival.

Two billion of the world's children live in developing countries where the situation of a large number of children is precarious. More than half of all children living in the developing world (over one billion children) live in severe deprivation, while 674 million exist in absolute poverty. Consequently, over thirty thousand children under the age of 5 years die every day due to preventable diseases. Overall, 30 percent of children under the age of 5 are underweight, nearly 40 percent suffer from stunted growth and over 50 percent are malnourished. Fifty thousand children are infected with AIDS every month before they reach their 15th birthday. Children who live below the poverty line, children from unstable backgrounds who may have suffered sexual or mental abuse, witnessed domestic violence or suffered from severe domestic instability are also at risk of suffering from physical and emotional trauma (Shimelis, 2008b).

The situation of children in Sub-Saharan Africa is much worse with a large number of families unable to meet the basic needs of their children. In fact, the numbers of children seeking access to basic services and food security is increasing enormously due to the demographic explosion. This picture is exasperated by rapid urbanization and breakdown of traditional family support structures and coping mechanisms.

Eight out of every ten children who have lost parents to HIV/AIDS live in sub-Saharan Africa. Between 1990 and 2001, the proportion of orphans whose parents died from HIV/AIDS rose from 3.5 per cent to 32 per cent. There are more than 34 million orphans in the region today, 11 million of them orphaned by HIV/AIDS. Even without HIV/AIDS, the percentage of children who are orphans would be significantly higher in sub-Saharan Africa than in other regions of the world. In Sub-Saharan Africa, 12 per cent of all children are orphans, compared with 6.5 per cent in Asia and 5 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNICEF, 2003).

UNICEF further underscores that of all children in developing countries, 20 percent of those aged 5 to 15 are engaged in child labor in hazardous and harmful conditions. More children today live in poverty than 10 years ago, and more children find themselves in a more violent and unstable environment. Millions were displaced by conflict, or forced to take part as child soldiers." The International Labor Organization (ILO) Global Report on Child Labor revealed the 246 million children - one in every six children aged 5 to 17 - are involved in child labor in 2002 and that Africa has the highest employment of children 5-14 years old in 1999-2004 with 41 percent of the global total. The next highest proportion (21%) was found in Asia followed by Latin America (17 %).

Exploitation of children including, child sexual exploitation, bonded labor, child trafficking and child pornography on the Internet are serious human rights violations that attracted a lot of public attention. According to UNICEF some 1.2 million children are estimated to become victims of trafficking annually (UNICEF, 2005).

Ninety percent of rural children in Sub-Saharan Africa live in absolute poverty. The following statistics present the grim picture existing in the region where there are:

- 39 million orphans, 16 million of whom orphaned by AIDS;
- 7 million double orphans, 5 million of whom because of AIDS;

- 3 million 0-14 year old children live with HIV/AIDS;
- More than 5 million displaced or refugee children;
- 120,000 child soldiers;
- Over 2 million children severely injured or traumatized by conflict;
- 3 million children of the street;
- 600,000 children in "worst forms" of labor;
- Over 2 million children in hazardous work ; and
- Over 10 million disabled children (World Bank, 2004).

It is obvious that child protection requires legal instruments and corresponding enforcement. There are also national and international institutions that strive to working towards realization of the rights of the child in a way to address the best interest of the child. In Ethiopia, for example, the Constitution, the Ethiopian Penal Code, the Revised Family Code, and the Private Employment Agency Proclamation are among the major national legal documents that are cited as instruments of child protection. Furthermore, there are several international conventions ratified by member countries of the UN including Ethiopia. Following is a list of international treaties that exclusively concerned with protection of the rights of the child.

Box 1: Legal Instruments Relevant to the Protection of Children

Legal instruments relevant to the protection of children

- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child
- African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC)
- ILO Convention on Minimum age for Admission to Employment (ILO Convention No.138)
- ILO Convention on the Worst forms of Child Labor (ILO Convention No. 182)
- Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Pornography*
- Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflicts*
- International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*
- The Hague Convention on Inter-Country Adoption*

Source: ACPF, 2008; *treaties with asterisks are not ratified by the Ethiopian government

Nonetheless, millions of children suffer from different types of abuse and exploitation in spite of all these legal instruments mainly attributed to failure in implementation and enforcement. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is one of the most widely accepted international conventions ratified by almost all the countries of the world except the war torn Somalia and the United States of America. However, progress has been quite slow in putting it into practice. In many countries poverty is considered to be a major barrier that prevents the implementation of the Convention. Yet, it seems to be impractical to overcome poverty before the rights of the child, that lay foundation to poverty alleviation, are put in action. After all, it is not poverty that made US, the wealthiest country in the world, made even not to endorse the convention.

Since it is believed that UPE is critical to poverty eradication and education is instrumental for economic and social development, how can a child without good quality basic education conquer poverty? Despite the perceived essential role of primary education in increasing productivity and its high social rate of return (Magnen, 1993), significant number of orphan and vulnerable children around the world are out of school or not able to regularly attend classes which obviously lead them to dropping out or poor academic performance that discourage them to proceed.

Yet, the global consensus about education unveils quite a different desire as far as the issue of schooling is concerned. For instance the UDHR¹ and CRC² underscore the instrumentality of education to the child's all rounded development and that it constitutes one of the basic rights of all children. When children from poor family background lack access to schooling, it

¹ **UDHR** Article 26 (1) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

² **CRC** 28 (1) States parties recognize the right of the child to education and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:

- (a) Make primary education compulsory and available and free to all
- (e) Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of dropout rate

means that they missed their opportunity to economic and social upward mobility among others. Thus, these children lack skills and knowledge that lead them to compete for decent jobs and better earnings. Consequently, they obliged to remain poor as their parents were. It is access to good quality education that breaks such a vicious circle of poverty and redresses some aspects of inequalities between the 'have's and have not's'.

Of course, various child protection measures are being undertaken at global, regional and national levels. The most important of these is the Millennium Development Goals that have set quantitative targets for addressing extreme poverty and hunger, child and maternal mortality and HIV/AIDS and other diseases, advancing universal primary education, ensuring gender equality, and promoting environmental sustainability and a global partnership for development by 2015. However, the last eight years, in many developing countries, have witnessed slow progress in meeting the deadline set for MDGs attainment.

Regardless of worldwide campaigns to make MDGs success and significant gains in some countries, millions of orphan and vulnerable children in Africa are found under difficult conditions. The following box depicts few incidences of worst forms of child labor in three African countries Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Zambia.

Box 2: Orphans and the Worst Forms of Child Labor

Domestic workers

In Ethiopia, the working and living conditions of child domestic laborers in Addis Ababa were studied in 2002 using a rapid-assessment method. More than three quarters of the domestic workers were orphans. Eighty per cent of the child domestics interviewed did not have the right to voluntarily quit their jobs. Most children in the study population (65 per cent) were enrolled either in a literacy class or in formal education while the remainder lacked any schooling opportunities.

A large number could not study or do their homework at home, and were often late or absent from school. They had no time or means for recreation and leisure as they worked on average more than 11 hours per day, seven days a week. Most were not allowed to play with the children of their employers, watch television or listen to the radio, which curtailed their chances of obtaining vital information on topics such as HIV/AIDS.

Quarrying

Working conditions for children in this occupation are even worse than for adults. Children collect, crush, haul and load stones for construction. In some cases, children participate in actual mining, and are often involved in accidents. A rapid assessment in four mining areas in the United Republic of Tanzania found that the children involved in the mines were between 7 and 17 years old. Among children working part-time, 7 per cent were orphans, while 38 per cent of children working full-time were orphans.

Child prostitution

A rapid assessment in Zambia in 2002 found that the average age of children engaged in prostitution was 15. About half of them (47 per cent) were double orphans and 24 per cent single orphans. The need to earn money was the main reason given for entering into prostitution. Their daily earnings ranged from 3,000 to 33,400 kwachas (about \$0.63 to \$7); the majority, especially younger ones, rarely made as much as 10,000 kwachas (\$2.10). On average, the children slept with three to four clients each day.

Source: UNICEF (2003, p. 28), *Africa's Orphaned Generations*.

On account of such sour and distressing experiences like the ones presented above and similar many more others, the CRC's (Art. 32 (1) recognition of "*the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development*") sounds an absolute extravagance so long as the situation of orphan and vulnerable children is

concerned. The fact that a given law fails to avert the situation before its coming into force and reverse the realities that necessitated its promulgation, it remains difficult to count benefits earned out of such an exercise of law making.

Magnitude of the Problem in Ethiopia

Ethiopia, with a total population of 73.9 million (CSA, 2008) is the second largest African nation in terms of population size. Despite being rich in marvelous ethnic and cultural diversity, one of the ancient civilizations, known for safeguarding its independence, recognized for glorious pasts, and being the only country having own alphabet in Sub-Saharan Africa, a large proportion of the country's population lives under extreme poverty and strives to survive in a legacy of high rate of adult illiteracy. That is, Mammo (2006, p. iv) has disclosed that "the illiteracy rate reaches as high as 60%". The country has experienced a number of severe droughts and prolonged internal strife, resulted in the displacement of citizens. Orphans who have lost one or both of their parents constitute 13 percent of the country's total child population (UNICEF, 2006b). Many children have become unaccompanied and flocked to urban centers without any adult care and guidance due to severe poverty, recurring drought, and other socio-political adverse circumstances.

Street life is the easiest possible option for such socially and economically challenged children. Studies unveil that street children in Ethiopia constitute for over 150,000 (60,000 of which are in Addis Ababa, the nation's capital) (UN-IRIN, 2004, citing MoLSA). These children are exposed to economic and sexual exploitation, HIV infection and child trafficking. Resulting from exhaustion of the traditional coping mechanisms, distasteful hardships prevail throughout most parts of the country as far as the issue of vulnerability of children is concerned. Additionally, the rapid population growth that is not accompanied by complementing performance of the country's economy is also a point of concern that may lead to even greater scale of both rural and urban poverty and concomitant increase in child vulnerability (MoLSA, 2004).

Not only by the size of its population but also Ethiopia is a country with the third largest number of people living with HIV. The number of people infected is estimated to reach 4 million by 2014. In 2005, there were a total of 2.4 million maternal, 3 million paternal and more than 600,000 double orphans in Ethiopia making the country home to the fourth largest orphan population in sub-Saharan Africa after Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe. In 2002, it was estimated that there were about 1 million AIDS orphans in Ethiopia (constituting 26% of all orphans across the nation). The number is projected to escalate to 1.8 million by 2010. Most of the orphaned children are driven out of their homes by opportunist adults including their own relatives and neighbors or go out to look for a living on the street (MoLSA, 2004; UNAIDS in Shimelis 2008).

Child labor is pervasive throughout the country particularly in the informal sector. Numerous children living in the urban areas are engaged in various activities including shining shoes, sewing clothes, working as porters, and working on cabs. In the rural areas children start assuming household or farm responsibilities as early as four years of age. Some 15% of the boys and about 20% of the girls start participating in work activities before they celebrate their fifth birthday. In some cases, in areas where there is little or no access to (quality) schooling, parents may consider child work as an opportunity to help their children develop future “career” (Getinet and Belyou, 2007). Ethiopia has the highest incidence of work in the world with a 42% participation of children in full-time productive labor. The average number of hours worked by children ages 5 to 17 was 32.8 hours per week (ILO, 2001 cited in Shimelis, 2008a) which doesn't give any room for education.

In Ethiopia, a significant number of children either do not enroll or dropout their schooling due to desperate need for their labor as coping mechanism for destitution. This leads working children to be more likely to have lowered educational, nutritional, and health status which in turn entrap them into the vicious circle of hard to escape poverty. Furthermore, the disadvantaged children are also more likely to repeating classes, having weak school performance and/or lack regular attendance. Their situation is further

worsened by high exposure to abuse and maltreatment with very high risk of being economically and sexually exploited. On top of all these, the ever increasing number of unaccompanied child headed households opens another battle front that complicates the living condition of the orphaned and vulnerable children. The following two tables present comparison of the prevalence of unaccompanied CHHs between some African countries as well as the magnitude of the problem across regions in Ethiopia.

Table 1: Estimated Number of Unaccompanied CHHs in five African Countries

Country	Number of CHHs	
	2005	2010 (Projected)
Senegal	1000	6000
Rwanda	9,000	16,000
Cote d'Ivoire	15,000	24,000
Zimbabwe	23,000	25,000
Ethiopia	77,000	225,000

Source: *Shimelis (2008b, P.22)

The above Table 1 reveals that the number of unaccompanied child headed households in some selected African nations as of 2005 with subsequent projections into 2010. The case of Ethiopia is found to be over three fold of child headed households in Zimbabwe, a country that stood next to Ethiopia in terms of magnitude of the problem under discussion in initial estimation. Even the worst situation is witnessed with the projected figure for 2010. It is nine times greater than the figure in the next high prevalence country (Zimbabwe). Besides, the continental comparison, the following table presents the magnitude of the problem among regions in Ethiopia.

Table 2: Number of Unaccompanied CHHs by Regions in Ethiopia

Region	Number of CHHs		Regional Population	% of the Regional Total Pop**
	2005*	2010 (Projected)**		
Oromia	27,762	80,703	27,158,471	0.30
SNNPR	23,813	69,223	15,042,531	0.46
Amhara	10,636	30,918	17,214,056	0.18
Addis Ababa	4,385	12,747	2,738,248	0.47
Afar	2,778	8,075	1,411,092	0.57
Tigray	2,520	7,323	4,314,456	0.17
Somali	2,460	7,151	4,439,147	0.16
Ben-Gumuz	1,398	4,063	670,847	0.61
Gambella	1,033	3,002	306,916	0.98
Harari	337	979	183,344	0.53
Dire Dawa	314	912	342,827	0.27
National	77,400	225,000	73,918,505	0.30

Source: *Shimelis (2008b) P.22; Central Statistics Agency (2008): the 2007 Population and Housing Census Results of Ethiopia; ** Computed based on the national projected figure.

As shown the Table 2, the highest number of child headed households both in initial estimation and corresponding projection goes to Oromia, the largest region with larger population size. SNNPR and Amhara regions stood second and third in terms of being home of larger number of child headed households respectively. The neighboring Dire Dawa and Harari, dominantly urban areas, seem to be relatively privileged for having less than a thousand CHHs each in the specified period between 2005 and 2010. But lower numbers do not necessarily mean that lower proportion of the total population. Harari, for instance, is supposed to have only 979 child headed households by the year 2010. This number, however, accounts for 0.533% of the total population of the Harari region.

According to Shimelis and Donovan (2008), the majority of the unaccompanied child-headed households were found to be headed by children between the ages of fourteen and eighteen. A significant number of the households contacted were being headed by a younger sibling even when there was an older sibling in the family. In terms of gender distribution, more girls than boys are heading households. The average child-headed household size was found to be three, but there are a significant number of households containing five or six siblings. Most child-headed households contacted in the study were established following the death of their parents or care givers from HIV/AIDS, while some were established after parental separation or for other reasons, including the inability of their parents to provide for their needs because of poverty, health and age-related frailty.

The burden of life that rests on the shoulders of the unaccompanied child headed families becomes two-fold. Primarily, their resources including household assets and savings get depleted with the treatment and caring for their deceased parents. Secondly, they lack experience in managing family living. Thirdly, feeling of being abandoned and grief of being orphaned may put them in a relatively permanent state of blurred self perception. It is with all these economic, social and psychological pains that child family heads join the struggle for survival. Thus they obliged to work. When they work, they may totally quit their schooling or forced to less frequently attend classes. Working for substantial time on the expense of their schooling, therefore, results in loss of basic education necessary to equip them with fundamental skills (Bequele and Myers, 1995) that shape their success in the future.

OVC and Schooling

School is crucial to the well-being of all children and more crucial to the orphans than anyone else for education helps them to aspire a better tomorrow and to be optimistic about their future. UNICEF (2003) describes education as imperative for children's future and for their psychosocial development. In this case schools are also considered to be important institutions that provide children with a safe, structured environment, the

emotional support and supervision of adults, and the opportunity to learn how to interact with other children and develop social networks. Even in more precise terms UNESCO cited in Hildebrand (1996, p.1) put the right to education as:

The right to learn is not a cultural luxury to be saved for some future date. It is not the next step to be taken once basic needs have been satisfied. The right to learn is an indispensable tool for survival of humanity. If people have to enjoy better health, and are to avoid war, they must learn to live in peace, and learn to understand each other.

Consistent with the UNESCO's view, Levin in Mammo (2006, p. 2) ascertains that there will be "no break through in agriculture and industry, no progress in community health, and indeed, no change in living conditions without the right to learn".

In fact, it is very important to understand the indispensability of education for development. Legislating for access and entitlement in education are also essential grounds for giving legal shape to the delivery of educational services. However, knowledge, enactments and entitlements on their own alone cannot ensure equality in access to educational opportunity for all children. Had not this been the case, it would be worthless to talk about equal opportunity in education at this point in time since dozens of decrees have been issued, series of programs have been launched, memorandums of understanding have been signed, and international and national commitments have been renewed since the 60s to date regarding the case in point.

The problem is that some children are in school and others are out of it. The majority of the out of school children are orphan and vulnerable ones. This happened not only due to absence of legislation. In Ethiopia for instance, article 36, sub-article 5 of the Constitution reads as "The State shall accord special protection to orphans and shall encourage the establishment of institutions which ensure and promote their adoption and advance their

welfare, and education". But the constitutional provision on its own does not guarantee meeting the needs of OVC unless accompanied by specific legal instruments and enforcement mechanisms in order to realize the constitutional provision. In addition, the multi-faceted nature of problems of the OVC also places a significant challenge in the effort to address the issue.

Vulnerability of orphaned children is manifested not only through malnutrition, lack of access to health care, loss of inheritance rights, homelessness, abuse, exploitation, stigmatization and psychological trauma. But they also get deprived of educational opportunity that is sought to be nearly the only means for their social and economic upward mobility. OVC represents the poorest segment of the world's children. They obliged to work for survival instead of going to schools. Even if they manage to enroll, they may not be able to continue attending classes regularly up to the required level of schooling due to inability to afford to pay school fees, hunger, uniform, lack of shelter, absence of health care, and other unfulfilled basic needs. In more practical terms, a study conducted on child headed households in Ethiopia puts the situation of OVC in the country as follows.

Box 3: Child Headed Households and Challenges of Schooling

Children from child-headed households are at a significant educational disadvantage. They lack scholastic materials and come to school on empty stomachs. Most cannot afford to pay for transport, so they have to walk long distances to and from school and arrive late and tired. They usually miss some classes as they need to work for money. In urban areas, children from child-headed households stay out late in the evening to earn a living by selling cigarettes, roasted grain, lottery tickets and similar other items. [Consequently], they do not get enough time to sleep or do their homework.

Teachers reported that children from child-headed households have particularly low scores in Math and English, which are subjects that usually require extra study at home. Their [that of children from child headed household] participation in class is limited as they often fall asleep or day dream in classrooms. Participation in extra-curricular activities is non-existent, and they frequently miss exams. Repeated low scores lead to a sense of failure and coupled with lack of parental consolation, stand catalyst for dropping out of school altogether. The problems facing these children can all be traced to the absence of adult support and guidance.

Source: *Shimelis and Donovan (2008, P. 29)*

It is this kind of condition of the OVC that urges all the concerned to pay greater attention to the matter in order to reverse the life long inequality which awaits them ahead as a result of lack of access to good quality education.

Strategies to Promote OVC Schooling

The fact that the conventional school systems lack responsiveness to educational needs of all children for several reasons, looking for an alternative means becomes a basic consideration to attain universal primary education. UPE, on the other hand, cannot be attained without a kind of schooling that caters for the needs of OVC. Since the lives of OVC are challenged from social, economic and psychological dimensions, searching

out for an innovative and flexible strategy that may not compete with their struggle for survival need to be a priority.

School fees are considered to be one of the major factors that limit the OVC participation and persistence in education. In sub-Saharan Africa, school fees consume nearly a quarter of a poor family's income, paying not only for tuition, but also indirect fees such as Parent-Teacher Association and community contributions, textbook fees, compulsory uniforms and other charges. Fees are keeping school age children; particularly the OVC away from school either being never enrolled or dropped out³.

Countries such as Burundi, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania and Uganda have abolished school fees, which has led to a surge in enrolment. In Ghana, for example, public school enrolment in the most deprived districts and nationwide soared from 4.2 million to 5.4 million between 2004 and 2005. In Kenya, enrolment of primary school children was increased dramatically with 1.2 million extra children in school in 2003 alone. In 2004, the number had raised to 7.2 million, of which 84 percent were of primary school age. Drawing on the experience of African countries that have eliminated school fees, UNICEF, the World Bank, USAID and a range of partners are helping to develop a "How To" guide for countries seeking a breakthrough in UPE by abolishing school fees to develop educational systems that are inclusive, equitable and sustainable⁴.

But ending one type of school fee alone is not a panacea. In fact, waiving school fees can help in eliminating the direct cost that is supposed to be borne by a child's household. But the elimination must take at least two important aspects into account. Indirect costs of schooling and bridging possible schools financing gaps that is to be created as a result of abolition of school fees need to be carefully examined (Jeilu, 2007).

³ <http://www.mdgmonitor.org/story.cfm?goal=2>

⁴ <http://www.mdgmonitor.org/story.cfm?goal=2>

In further analysis, Patrinos and Ariasingam (1997) have noted that the demand for schooling is influenced by a number of factors having economic, political, social and cultural nature. In many cases it is not sufficient merely for a school to exist. Even “free” education may not entice poor families. Households and individuals determine the demand for schooling by an implicit cost-benefit analysis. Parents will not send their children to school if the expected benefits do not exceed the costs (direct and indirect) associated with school attendance. Children in difficult circumstances also obliged to calculate the cost of school attendance against the amount of money to be earned from their livelihood engagement even irrespective of indecency of the job they do and lifelong impact of being uneducated or undereducated.

Thus, the study forwards the following suggestions in pursuit of opening up more opportunities of schooling for the orphan and vulnerable children.

Recommendations

Finally, after having gone through all the challenges that are being faced by the OVC particularly in relation to their education, the following coping mechanisms are forwarded in a view to address the challenge via employing innovative and efficient approaches.

- Strengthening the capacity of extended families and local social network to protect and care for orphans and vulnerable children. Ethiopians have a good tradition of sharing what they have with the needy on the basis of spiritual, moral, or humanitarian motive or otherwise. Therefore, it seems that there could be a possibility of soliciting considerable support from extended families and local communities in tackling the problems of OVC through revitalizing the existing “helping one another” tradition. This can happen all the way through awareness raising on the seriousness of the prevailing problem and capacity enhancement towards systematic and sustainable support schemes. Thus, extended family relationships and local self help groups

like *Idir* and *Mahber* in integration with the local administration unit (*kebele*) can be the most vital sources of material, psychological, and moral support for children in difficult circumstances within their immediate vicinity.

- School communities, fellow students and teaching as well as school support staff, can also play a significant role in alleviating the misery of the OVC. This can take place in multiple complementary forms. First, via organizing school level bi-annual (beginning and end of the academic year) fundraising programs for children in difficult circumstances. Second, providing for income generating activities for exclusive support of OVC like school lounge service, and revenues generated through students' extra-curricular engagements such as sports, drama, music events and sale of home-economics and agriculture club products. Third, voluntary group or individual child sponsorship by school community members to cover all or part of education expenses of a vulnerable child so as to enable a child regularly attend classes. Forth, arranging for coaching, counseling and tutorial classes for such children in particular and others who look for support in general to improve their academic performance. Fifth, liaising with the out of school entities business firms operating in the area and/or better off families who are interested in providing support for vulnerable school children.
- Ensuring equal access to essential services among vulnerable children and their less vulnerable counterparts. Orphans and other vulnerable children need a number of services to ensure their rights and well-being, including education, birth registration, health care and nutrition, psychosocial support, safe water and sanitation, and strong and independent justice systems responsive to child matters and that discourages any infringement of child rights. Government needs to exercise its role to utmost possible level in making and ratifying child friendly laws and ensure their enforcement to guarantee the rights of children in general and that of OVC in particular. This move may include introduction of tax subsidies to privately owned firms in

acknowledgement of their meaningful contribution in rendering support to OVC as is the case with the NGOs, in fact this could take a different version from the law governing the NGO operation.

- Magnitude of the problem of OVC in the country cannot be managed to overcome with the government's effort alone. Government, NGOs, CBOs, the private sector and the society at large need to carry out concerted and mutually reinforcing endeavors aiming at determinedly dealing with the problems of children in difficult circumstance. Hence, the government is required to craft a favorable policy framework that governs the designing, implementing as well as monitoring and evaluation of such an integrated move forward.
- On top of all the plans to be developed and resources to be deployed, recognizing the beneficiary children as part and parcel of the society and listening to their needs, frustrations, and dreams are the vital success factors. Besides, all the supports to be provided to these children should be geared towards promoting the support receiving child's perception of self efficacy, confidence, and capacity to be able to help oneself and others as well in the time to come. This part can be realized not only through financial and material provisions alone. It rather requires substantial non-financial investment. It is, after all, a duty of bringing about change in one's attitude and bridging perception gaps in order to maintain harmony. Both parties, the support provider and the recipient of the support, need to uphold their "usefulness" to each other.

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